

The Assembly met at 1:30 p.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRESENTING PETITIONS

Mr. Elhard: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to present a petition on behalf of the good citizens of Lanigan who are concerned with the possible loss of their hospital, and the prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners will ever pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the provincial government to take the necessary steps to ensure the Lanigan and Watrous hospitals remain open.

I so present.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present petitions on behalf of citizens throughout our province who would like to see improved cellular telephone coverage in their area. And the prayer reads as follows, Mr. Speaker:

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

And the signatures on this petition, Mr. Speaker, are from Prud'homme, Vonda, and Saskatoon.

I so present.

Ms. Higgins: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to present a petition requesting that smoking be banned in all public places. The prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to legislate a total ban of smoking in all public places and workplaces in the province of Saskatchewan.

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

These petitions were collected by the youth of Saskatchewan.

I so present.

Mr. Gantefoer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too rise on behalf of citizens of the province concerned about the impending closure of facilities, in particular Lanigan and Watrous hospitals. The prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners will ever pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the provincial government to take the necessary steps to ensure the Lanigan and Watrous hospitals remain open.

Signatures on this petition, Mr. Speaker, as you may expect, are all from the community of Lanigan.

I so present.

Mr. Peters: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition in regards to cellular improvement . . . phone improvement. And the prayer reads as follows:

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

And, Mr. Speaker, the petition is signed by folks from Prud'homme.

I so present.

Ms. Eagles: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I too stand today to present a petition on behalf of Saskatchewan citizens concerned about the future of health care in this province. And the petition . . . the prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners will ever pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the provincial government to take the necessary steps to ensure the Lanigan and Watrous hospitals remain open.

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

And this is signed by citizens of Lanigan, Leroy, and Saskatoon.

I so present. Thank you.

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise on behalf of people interested in improved cellular telephone coverage in the districts of Strasbourg, Duval, Govan, in those districts. And the prayer reads as follows:

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

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

And this is signed by people from Nokomis and Govan.

I so present, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd also like to read a petition concerning hospital closures in Saskatchewan. The prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioners will ever pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the provincial government to take the necessary steps to ensure the Lanigan and Watrous hospitals remain open.

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

Signed by the people from Young and Zelma, Saskatchewan.

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

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

Petitioners are from Regina and the good town of Davidson.

I so present.

Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition of citizens concerned about hospital closures. And the prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioners will ever pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the provincial government to take the necessary steps to ensure that the Lanigan and Watrous hospitals remain open.

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

And the petitioners are from the town of Young.

I so present.

Mr. Hart: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition to present today on behalf of citizens concerned with poor cellular telephone coverage. And the prayer reads as follows:

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

And the signatures to the petition come from the communities of Southey, Duval, Strasbourg, and Earl Grey.

I so present.

Mr. Allchurch: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I rise in the Assembly today to bring forth a petition regarding the closure of hospitals in this province:

Wherefore your petitioners will ever pray that the Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the provincial government to take the necessary steps to ensure Lanigan and Watrous hospitals remain open.

And the signatures on this petition are from Lanigan.

I so present.

Mr. Stewart: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to present a petition signed by citizens concerned with possible enforced amalgamation of municipalities. 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 this petition is signed by individuals from the communities of Courval, Coderre, Mossbank, and Mortlach.

I so present.

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

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

As is duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

This petition is signed by the good citizens of Hudson Bay, Carrot River, and Arborfield, Mr. Speaker.

I so present.

Mr. Prebble: — Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to present a petition requesting that smoking be banned in all public places. The prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to legislate a total ban of smoking in all public places and workplaces in the province of Saskatchewan.

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

These petitions were collected by youth from around the province. And the petitioners, Mr. Speaker, are from Christopher Lake, Prince Albert, and Saskatoon.

I so present, Mr. Speaker.

READING AND RECEIVING PETITIONS

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

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

To not proceed with the amalgamation of municipalities;

To not confiscate municipal reserve accounts;

To ensure the Lanigan and Watrous hospitals remain open;

And to legislate a ban on smoking in public places and workplaces in the province.

NOTICES OF MOTIONS AND QUESTIONS

Mr. Brkich: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I give notice that I

shall on day no. 61 ask the government the following question:

To the Minister of Agriculture: what are the administrative costs incurred by your department to operate Saskatchewan Crop Insurance in the last fiscal year, including salaries, building leases, and supplies?

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I believe I've given notice of this to the Leader of the Opposition and I'd like to introduce to you, sir, and to the members of the House a very important delegation sitting in your Speaker's gallery — the Ambassador of China to Canada with his delegation.

I'd ask each of the members to stand as I introduce them. First of all, His Excellency Mei Ping, who is the Ambassador. And he's accompanied by his wife, Madame Sha Lin. Madame, please.

Also accompanying the Ambassador and his wife are Mr. Shi Weisan, Minister Counsellor for Commercial Affairs; Mr. Li Xiaofu, the Counsellor of Science and Technology; Mr. Meng Jixin, Secretary, Commercial Affairs; and Ms. Yuxin Ai, assistant to the Ambassador.

Mr. Speaker, the Ambassador and his delegation are visiting Saskatchewan for four full days and will be travelling to Saskatoon. During that time they are meeting with the Lieutenant Governor, the Speaker, members of cabinet, the mayor of Regina, president of the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool, the universities of Regina and Saskatchewan, discussing a variety of economic and cultural matters pertaining to the People's Republic of China and to this province in agriculture and other areas.

I had the honour and the privilege of meeting with the Ambassador and his charming wife and delegation yesterday. I must inform the House that the Ambassador and his wife speak very, very good English and it's wonderful to see this. I just wish that we could reciprocate by speaking Cantonese or Mandarin, but nonetheless, the communication flowed very easily with some good exchange of ideas.

Mr. Speaker, I would ask all members to acknowledge the fact that we've had a long-standing, warm relationship with the People's Republic of China here in Saskatchewan and all governments. We continue to look forward with good business opportunities and social relationships and contacts, and wish you a very pleasant and memorable stay. And come back soon for some of that fishing in northern Saskatchewan. Thank you very much.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wakefield: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the official opposition, I too would like to welcome the delegation that was introduced by the Premier. I've had the opportunity to travel to your country several times, and it's a real honour for me to welcome you here as well.

Again, His Excellency the Ambassador Mei Ping, welcome;

and I hope you enjoy your visit here. And of course accompanying the Ambassador, Madame Sha Lin; welcome, madame. Also, Mr. Shi, Mr. Li; welcome. Mr. Meng and of course Ms. Yuxin Ai; welcome.

And I hope you enjoy your visit here in Saskatchewan as much as I enjoyed visiting in China.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Melenchuk: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce someone today who is a former member of this Legislative Assembly and is seated on the floor of the Assembly: Gordon Grant with his wife Helen. They currently reside in Kelowna.

Gordon was first elected to the Legislative Assembly in 1964 and re-elected in '67 and '71. He served our province and the people of Saskatchewan well as an elected member for Regina South.

And he held a number of portfolios in the Thatcher government including minister of Highways and Transportation, ministry of Industry and Commerce, ministry of Public Health, Minister for Sask. Power Corp., Minister of Telephones, as well as being a former alderman and mayor of the city of Regina.

And a number of streets and roads in Regina are named after Gordon Grant, and I would ask all members to join with me in welcoming him to the Assembly today.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, I'd like to briefly add my words of welcome to Mr. Gordon Grant and his wife. It was my pleasure to serve in the Legislative Assembly in 1967 in opposition at the time when Mr. Grant was already serving with distinction in the cabinet, the Ross Thatcher cabinet.

In those days it was quite a House of talented people. Some great orators. Gordon Grant brought integrity, intelligence, and diligence to the work of the Legislative Assembly, and it was a pleasure, sir, to have served with you in the legislature — an honour to have served with you — and I wish you continued good health. Welcome home.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to members of this House, a group of students from Dalmeny, Saskatchewan, from Prairie View Elementary School. There are 50 students in the east gallery. These are grade 6 students.

They are accompanied by their teachers, Mrs. Darlene Thiessen and Mr. Gerry Hawkes, as well as chaperone Mrs. Ethel Quiring.

I met with them just during our lunch time, and explained to them what they would see in question period. I also gave them the questions that would be asked this afternoon, and the answers, so they would be able to give a report card on the government as to the quality of their answers.

Would you welcome them, please?

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Hillson: — Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the west gallery we have this afternoon Jerry Ruehs, the Liberal candidate for Wood River constituency. Jerry won the nomination, hard fought nomination at a large and enthusiastic Liberal nominating meeting in Ponteix last Monday.

He resides in Aneroid, married to his wife, Jean, and they have four children. He's a graduate of the University of Saskatchewan School of Agriculture and has served as reeve of the RM of Auvergne No. 76.

Mr. Speaker, this afternoon we get to welcome him as a visitor and in three weeks we get to welcome him as a colleague.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Peters: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you, a class of children from the Cut Knife Elementary School, 26 grade 6 students from the Cut Knife community. And they are accompanied by teachers Holden, Peterson, and Hampson; and the chauffeurs or the chaperones are Gary, Kelly, and Grant.

Welcome here.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Addley: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to join with the member from Rosthern in welcoming the students from the Dalmeny Elementary School. I lived in Dalmeny for a number of years with my wife and family and it's a very great community. They have fine students there and even better teachers.

So I'd like to, on behalf of the government, welcome the members here. Thank you.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Gantefoer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, through you and to the members of the Assembly, it gives me great pleasure to welcome and recognize 44 students from the Brunswick School in Melfort. They're sitting in your gallery, Mr. Speaker, accompanied by their teachers Mr. Randy Steciuk, Miss Brenda Vickers, chaperone Ms. Pam Dymtrow, and their bus driver Mr. Gerald Miller.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask everyone to welcome these grade 6 students to Regina. It's their annual outing to visit the legislature, and I want to welcome them all here today.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. When you get married a lot of wonderful things happen to you. And when I married my wife Virginia Wilkinson who is married . . . who is seated in your gallery, Mr. Speaker, along with my son Mayson Clark, we welcomed to our family a new uncle who is seated beside her who is here today from Toronto,

David Clark, so you know where my son got his second name from.

So I would ask all members to welcome them to the Assembly today please.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Mr. Speaker, while I'm on my feet as well, I just wanted to say that I've told my uncle-in-law that there's a remote possibility that I might be up on my feet later on today. I also want to say, Mr. Speaker, that when the Premier appoints you to the ministry of Highways, a lot of wonderful things happen as well. You get to meet some very interesting and wonderful people and some of those — or several of those, I should say — are seated in the west gallery.

Joining us today from the roadbuilders association, and I think I'm sure . . . I mean I'm sure I welcomed them on behalf the MLA (Member of the Legislative Assembly) from Qu'Appelle-Lumsden — or I should say Regina Qu'Appelle Valley — Wayne Morsky, and seated with him is Val Jakubowski. I hope that's right, or very close anyway. Please join with me in welcoming them to the Assembly as well.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, through you and to the members of this Assembly I'd like to introduce a group of students who are in the west gallery, grade 5 students. Mr. Speaker, I had the privilege of meeting with the students prior to lunch, and they are accompanied today by their teacher, Mrs. Mona West. And the sub teacher has joined them, Barbara Bruce, and a number of parents.

Mr. Speaker, this group of students have had a lot of interesting questions, and one of the questions they had was regarding tobacco and a petition yesterday. So I think either the teacher was informing them or they followed the news last night.

So, Mr. Speaker, this group of students from Langbank are pleased to be here, I'm pleased to welcome them, and I'm also looking forward to the ceremony on Monday and the sod-turning for a new school that I think they'll all look forward to enjoying over the years. So, Mr. Speaker, join with me in welcoming the students and their parents.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of the legislature, a group of students from SIAST (Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology) who are taking English as a Second Language. And they're in the west gallery. They're accompanied by their teacher, Ms. Ingrid Allesich, who I think should be well known as a constituent of the member from Regina Centre and she's very welcome here as well.

Let's all welcome these students.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Elhard: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to join

with the Minister of Highways and Transportation in welcoming our guests from the Saskatchewan roadbuilders association — the president, Wayne Morsky, and Val Jakubowski, the executive director. I think they're here because they couldn't believe what they had heard or read in the press lately. They want to be here to see and hear for themselves today.

And Mr. Ruehs says, the Liberal candidate in Wood River, has said roads are going to be the number one issue in his riding. I can assure the Minister of Highways that he will be on his feet for Mr. Ruehs's benefit as well as ours today.

Would you please welcome these people once more.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, I want to introduce to all members of the legislature, a group of licensed practical nurses that are attending the legislature this afternoon to witness the continued second reading of their own legislation, The Licensed Practical Nurses Act, 2000. So I want to welcome them to the legislature.

I also want to welcome Jackie Sedley who is the public representative to the licensed practical nurse group as well. And I would ask all of these members attending here from the licensed practical nurses to rise in order that we can acknowledge their presence.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Thomson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to join with the Premier and the Liberal leader in welcoming Mr. Gordon Grant back to this Assembly. As the current representative of Regina South, I can tell you that he is still well-loved and well-thought-of in the Regina South riding.

As a person who actually lives on Grant Road, I certainly think about him often. It is one of the few roads in our riding which is still very well paved. I don't know why the city has not kept better care of say Gordon Road or Grant Drive, which are also of course named after the member. And I will certainly seek some advice from him later on how you get all these great roads named after you in your riding.

But if you would join with me in again welcoming him. Thank you very much.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Leader of the Opposition Promises Challenged

Mr. Adley: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At the credit union where I was president for seven years we know the whereabouts of every penny for which we are responsible. Balancing our budget is an irritating habit we have.

Given this background, you could imagine my difficulty in listening day after day to the Leader of the Opposition as he takes us through the looking glass into his world that doesn't

add up. It's a good thing the Opposition leader lives in this imaginary world because he wouldn't last past his first coffee break as a teller at the credit union.

At this time yesterday, the combination of his spending and tax cut promises this session totalled more than \$1.3 billion in extra expenses to the taxpayers of Saskatchewan. The scary thing, Mr. Speaker, is that he's just getting warmed up.

Last night at the Regina Chamber of Commerce, he added another \$105 million of debt in just one speech. That brings his running total to more than a billion and a half dollars. And the day's still young, Mr. Speaker.

It seems to me he has two choices. One, he can shoot for \$2 billion in promises by the end of June; or two, he could take the refresher course in basic arithmetic. Let me suggest some education material for him. A CD-Rom called, "The Pre-Algebra Math Blaster Mystery — The Great Brain Robbery" or a textbook called, *Problem Solving: What You Do when You Don't Know What to Do*.

I'm glad to be of help, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Saskatchewan Party Nominates Candidate in Wood River

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, last evening in Assiniboia the Saskatchewan Party nomination was held. Yogi Huyghebaert was our successful candidate.

Wood River is a seat that has been held by either the Liberals or the NDP (New Democratic Party) for a long time, up to and including the Deputy Premier who held it during the early days of our province.

It should be an interesting campaign, Mr. Speaker. It was a tremendous nomination with four very, very strong candidates. Wood River now boasts the largest membership in the province of Saskatchewan for the Saskatchewan Party.

A packed hall last night following meetings in Shaunavon and in Glentworth.

We would also want to welcome the Liberal candidate here today and I would urge him not to get too confident. We had more people standing outside on the step than they had at their nomination meeting.

The Saskatchewan Party is now ready to go forward in the by-election proudly with our new candidate, Yogi Huyghebaert. In a constituency that has seen the loss of hospitals, highways crumbling, people even taking highway maintenance into their own hands, it should be an interesting campaign. We look forward to the by-election with great anticipation.

Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Saskatchewan Party and hopefully all members of the Legislative Assembly, I want to congratulate Yogi Huyghebaert on winning the Saskatchewan Party nomination for the Wood River by-election.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Oil Recycling Partnership

Mr. Yates: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. More good news for Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker. In keeping with the spirit and intent of Environment Week, I am pleased to inform the House of a new partnership between Saskatchewan Environment and Resource Management, the Saskatchewan Association of Rehabilitation Centres, and the Saskatchewan Association for Resource Recovery Corporation.

This new partnership will see the expansion of used oil material collection depots, called ecocentres, by 24 centres across Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker. Sixteen of these ecocentres will be managed and operated by the Saskatchewan Association of Rehabilitation Centres, Mr. Speaker.

The Saskatchewan Association of Rehabilitation Centres is a provincial coordinating and advocacy organization comprised of 62 independent agencies dedicated to improving educational and training opportunities and the employment potential of persons with disabilities, Mr. Speaker.

The Saskatchewan association for the recovery corporation industry ran product stewardship management programs for the collection and recycling of used oils, oil filters, and oil containers across Saskatchewan. They are responsible for recovering over 32 million litres of used oil, 2.95 million oil filters, and 164,000 kilograms of oil containers, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, recycling of used oil not only helps protect the environment by removing a potentially hazardous substance, but also recovers a valuable non-renewable resource, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Senior Games in Foam Lake

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, yesterday I was extremely pleased and honoured to be asked to be part of the official opening of the Seniors 55-plus Games for the year 2000. The community of Foam Lake was this year's host for the zone 4 seniors' games.

Over 260 participants from at least 15 communities were involved in 10 different events such as bridge, horseshoes, shuffleboard, and billiards along with other more physically active events like bowling, golf, slow-pitch, and track and field attracted numerous athletes.

Mr. Speaker, as I was leaving the community of Foam Lake yesterday I stopped at the high school grounds, and I was pleased to be able to talk to a gentleman who was taking part in the 70-plus track and field events. He was entered in the 100 metre, the 200 metre, the 400 metre, and the discus. He advanced to the nationals last year in Alberta and he wants to win again, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, a very successful day of competition produced numerous medal recipients with the gold medal winners advancing to the provincial competition in Weyburn on July 16 to 19. I would like to congratulate all the participants, the 100-plus volunteers, and the entire community of Foam Lake

for a job well done. To every individual who'll be representing zone 4 in Weyburn — good luck, good sportsmanship, and have fun.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Prince Albert Tourism Awards

Mr. Kowalsky: — Mr. Speaker, this being Tourism Awareness Week, it was fitting that Prince Albert chose to hold its sixth annual Tourism Awards during this week. Wanda Carter of Prince Albert Tourism hosted the event Tuesday night. There were a record of 54 nominations in eight categories, and that's a testament to the vitality and the dynamism of the Prince Albert tourism sector.

Because they are doing an exceptional job to enhance Saskatchewan's reputation as a tourist destination, I quickly wanted to mention the names of eight winners in the category they won in.

First Lisa Martsinkiw won the Tourism Individual of the Year Award; the Gateway Mall took the Tourism Business of the Year Award; the Prince Albert Travelodge won the Customer Service Award for a business; Joanne Isbister of Saskatchewan Rivers School Division received the Customer Service Award for a business with fewer than 50 employees.

Cathy Grayson of Smitty's was awarded the Customer Service Award for a business with fewer than 50 employers; Jeanette Boyko of Marlboro won the Customer Service Award in a business with more than 50 employees. The Tourism Organization of Year is Saskatchewan Forestry Expo; and Larry Donald won the Tourism Volunteer of the Year Award.

Congratulations to all of the winners and the nominees for an excellent job done in promoting Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ORAL QUESTIONS

Maintenance of Highways

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, you know things are getting pretty bad for the government when the Liberal leader becomes the voice of reason. Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Deputy Premier suggested maybe everyone should start fixing their own highways. And even the Liberal leader said this idea doesn't make any sense.

Mr. Speaker, the Deputy Premier completely missed the point of what happened in Val Marie the other day. Those people did a wonderful job but they were acting out of frustration and desperation. That does not replace your responsibility, Mr. Premier, to look after highways in this province.

Mr. Premier, when are you going to take responsibility? When are you going to start fixing the highways instead of telling Saskatchewan people, go fix them yourselves.

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I did guess right, I did get a question.

Mr. Speaker, I want to say first of all to that member, there would not be any people in Saskatchewan that would have to be out fixing roads if the Leader of the Opposition in years past hadn't spoken out so strongly in favour of the Crow rate abolition. The member from Kindersley, as I remember, I think he described it as tough love, I think he said to farmers. He described it as tough love, that the Crow rates be abandoned.

Well, Mr. Speaker, they won that debate and we lost that debate, Mr. Speaker, and that's why railroads are abandoning branch lines and that's why thin-membraned surface roads are breaking up and people are out trying to fix them.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hermanson: — Well, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to hear an answer from the Premier instead of the flat answer from his Minister of Highways.

Mr. Speaker, the next thing you know the Deputy Premier is going to be saying, oh, you people out there on waiting lists, why don't you just do your own surgery, why don't you operate on yourselves?

Mr. Speaker, the Deputy Premier thinks everybody should go out and fix their own highway. After all, this happens all the time in the United States. Isn't that interesting? The Deputy Premier is endorsing American-style highway policy. I guess he wants to turn Saskatchewan into Alabama North or something. And you know even Mr. Flip-flop, the Liberal leader, knows it.

Your government, Mr. Premier, your government collects \$460 million every year in gas taxes and licence fees. Why should Saskatchewan people have to fix their own highways?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Mr. Speaker, and we pay \$700 million a year in interest costs on the debt — \$2 million each and every day, Mr. Speaker. We could repair miles and miles and miles of road each and every day, Mr. Speaker, for \$2 million.

Mr. Speaker, I want to say to the member opposite as well that in the past four years, Mr. Speaker, we have increased the maintenance budget for roads 68 per cent, and in the last few years, Mr. Speaker, we've increased the number of employees in the department who are responsible for maintenance by 113 people, Mr. Speaker.

We have set Highways and Transportation as a very high priority for this government, and we will do our very best to ensure that the roads are safe in Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, let's deal with the facts, and let's deal with the current problem that we have. We asked the Highways minister whether he plans to turn new gravel highways over to the RMs (rural municipalities). He said absolutely not.

But yesterday the Deputy Premier admitted that's exactly what his plan is. He's already trying to dump Highway 18 onto the

municipalities. That's their real agenda — to gravel the highways and then dump them off on the municipality.

Mr. Speaker, let's just review the new highway policy outlined by the Deputy Premier yesterday. The NDP will keep on collecting \$460 million a year from Saskatchewan taxpayers in gas tax and licence fees, but then they want volunteers and now RMs to look after the roads.

Mr. Premier, what kind of nonsense is that? Your house is divided. When are you going to take some responsibility?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Mr. Speaker, first of all I want to clarify one point where the member is factually incorrect, Mr. Speaker. I could spend a lot of time doing that sort of thing, correcting those errors. But, Mr. Speaker, the one point that I want to make to the public of Saskatchewan who have seriously asked this question as well — who are of the view that because a road is a gravel road is the responsibility of local government — nothing could be further from the truth.

We have over 5,000 kilometres of road that are gravel and are provincial responsibility. So just because, Mr. Speaker, we make the roads safer, there is no reason or rationale at all that this now becomes the responsibility of local government. It's absolutely incorrect.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hermanson: — Well, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker, the Deputy Premier, fumbled the ball so badly yesterday that the Premier's allowing the Highways minister to answer the questions today. In fact he's fumbling the ball so badly that I'm really looking forward to our football game that we're planning in the near future.

Mr. Speaker, the Deputy Premier says people should fix their own highways. The Liberal leader said that doesn't make any sense. The Highways minister says there's no plan to download gravel highways onto municipalities. The Deputy Premier said that's exactly what they plan to do.

Mr. Speaker, the ringmaster hasn't even retired yet and the clowns are already fighting to see who's going to be running the circus.

Mr. Premier, Mr. Premier, the NDP collect ... NDP government collects \$460 million a year in highway revenue. Why don't you just forget the gravel, forget the downloading, forget the do-it-yourself highway crews, and fix the highways?

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Mr. Speaker, based on the quality of those questions, I think he should let the Highways critic ask the questions as well.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Mr. Speaker, and here's the reason, Mr. Speaker, why he doesn't let the Highways critic ask the questions because I think the Highways critic from the opposition really is a responsible individual and knows what the

facts are.

I want to quote from an April 15, 2000 article in *The Leader-Post* and this is a quote. It starts like this:

However, there is only so much construction the province can complete each year as long as the federal government refuses to contribute its (fair) share of . . . twinning costs, Elhard said.

So the Highways critic understands, Mr. Speaker, that the province can't do it on their own.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, we can all ask questions. It would be nice if the minister would actually answer some of them.

That minister, Mr. Speaker, can't afford to twin the highways but he can afford to have twin deputy ministers of Highways.

Mr. Speaker, we now have a Liberal leader criticizing the Deputy Premier's loopy highway policies. The problem is the Liberal leader really doesn't have much credibility when it comes to this issue.

In the last election the Liberal leader said, and I quote:

A Melenchuk Liberal government will put every penny collected in fuel taxes into our highways, streets, and roads.

Every penny of fuel tax to highways, streets, and roads — that's what the Liberal leader said.

Well, Mr. Minister, according to your budget you're exactly \$9.760 billion short. And you might want to check your pockets because about 10 million of those pennies ended up there after you accepted . . .

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

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. After the minister collected his 30 pieces of NDP silver . . . Mr. Minister, you have completely abandoned your own Liberal highway policy, why should we believe anything you have to say on this issue?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Mr. Speaker, I'm still not convinced. I still think we should have the Highway critic asking the question.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Mr. Speaker, I still find it strange, Mr. Speaker, that day after day and including today as well, Mr. Speaker, in the Assembly today they come with petitions asking for the fuel tax to be reduced, they asked for the tax to be dedicated, they spoke in favour of the Crow rate being

abolished, Mr. Speaker, and at the same time, Mr. Speaker, they ask us to increase spending on highways.

It doesn't add up in years past and it doesn't add up today, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the Deputy Premier won't answer the questions, the minister won't answer the question, the Liberal leader won't answer the questions, and they won't spend the money on the highways.

Mr. Speaker, my question again to the Liberal leader who promised to spend every penny of gas tax on the highways. He's short \$100 million this year. But I guess when he said highways, he really didn't mean highways. He really meant a big, fat cabinet salary and a big, fancy office full of hacks and flacks.

Mr. Minister, what happened to that promise? Where has the extra \$100 million from taxes collected, where has that gone because it certainly hasn't gone on highways?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Mr. Speaker, that \$100 million and another 600 million on top of it goes towards servicing the debt each and every year, Mr. Speaker — that's where it's gone.

Mr. Speaker, we have identified Highways and Transportation as a very high priority in our government this year. We've committed \$250 million this year, Mr. Speaker; a 6.6 per cent increase, Mr. Speaker — the highest budget in Saskatchewan's history.

That's our commitment, Mr. Speaker. What's their commitment to highways, Mr. Speaker?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Elhard: — Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to the challenge today.

We have heard from the government a variety of numbers — 78 cents, 80 cents, now recently 87 cents — of the net dollar going into highways. And the only number that really counts is the 100 per cent of pure bologna we're hearing from the government.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Elhard: — Mr. Speaker, yesterday in this House we pointed out the real numbers for the public. The government takes a \$460 million take in revenue from gas tax and motor vehicle fees and only spends 170 million of that on roads. That's 37 per cent, Mr. Speaker, and that's pathetic.

But what also is disturbing is the government's far-fetched claim that selling some of their highway equipment back in the mid-'80s is the reason they can't fix the roads today. Road construction companies tell us, Mr. Speaker, that this equipment was sold . . . I'm sorry . . . road equipment . . .

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

Mr. Elhard: — I'd be pleased to do that, Mr. Speaker.

The sale of that road equipment is not the reason the roads are not being fixed today. It's an excuse and an excuse only.

Mr. Minister, why won't you admit that nine years of NDP neglect is the real reason that we are the pothole capital of Canada?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Mr. Speaker, in reference to the sale of that equipment, I've never, ever said that that was the sole reason. I've said that that contributes.

One of the main reasons, Mr. Speaker — and the member is absolutely correct — one of the main reasons is the amount of interest that we pay on the debt each and every day, Mr. Speaker. At \$2 million a day, Mr. Speaker, we could buy a lot of new equipment to repair those roads — we could repair a lot of roads.

So he's absolutely correct, Mr. Speaker. That isn't the only reason.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Elhard: — Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, in a news release this morning, the Road Builders and Heavy Construction Association of Saskatchewan raised serious questions about highway budgeting for the past couple of years.

President Wayne Morsky says they are very concerned that only a quarter of our total Highways budget for this year is actually allocated for highway construction. The government keeps boasting about an increase in the Highways budget. They don't explain that all of it is going to administration, salaries, or one airport project. In fact, the construction budget actually is \$3 million less than last year.

Mr. Minister, how do you explain your interest in having volunteers take over road maintenance in this province, volunteering their time, their equipment, their energy, at their own expense? And that's all coming at a time when the administration budget for Highways has increased significantly.

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Mr. Speaker, the facts are that there has been a huge change in traffic patterns in Saskatchewan. And the member knows it as well, especially in the southwest part of the province, Mr. Speaker, where just a few years ago, Mr. Speaker, 10 to 15 years ago, elevators existed 10 to 15, 20 kilometres apart, and now we have large inland terminals.

Mr. Speaker, since that time those elevators have closed and branch lines have closed and, Mr. Speaker, people are trucking with large trucks a much, much further distance, Mr. Speaker. So what we have done, Mr. Speaker, we've done our very best with the budget that we have in place that we can possibly do, and that's why we've increased it to \$250 million.

Mr. Speaker, we have never said that that is enough money for highways and transportation. We have always said that we need to contribute more, but part of that contribution — and even the member opposite has acknowledged in the quote that I referred to earlier — has to come from the federal treasury, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Elhard: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the quote the minister used earlier, I was specifically referring to twinning of the No. 1 Highway. I don't think we want to confuse the two issues today.

Mr. Speaker, the road builders and heavy construction association are very concerned with the excuse that the sale of highway equipment in 1984 is the reason that roads can't be maintained in this province today and I quote from their press release:

Our association supports the principal of public tendering and our members have the equipment required to maintain our (roads).

Our industry does not have enough work, companies are having to make some hard decisions about staying in business in (this province).

And it is difficult for us to understand that the people of Saskatchewan cannot have their roads repaired because of an auction sale that took place in 1984.

Mr. Speaker, the Deputy Premier suggested people should volunteer to fix their roads, but you have Saskatchewan companies here that have the equipment, have the trained work crews, but have no work because the highways are not a priority for this government.

Mr. Minister, will you explain your position that volunteer labour is the way to go to these companies and to their employees?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Mr. Speaker, except for his last statement, I could almost agree with everything he said. We certainly value the role that the road builders play in Saskatchewan. We understand that there would be much more work for them, Mr. Speaker.

As recently as yesterday, Mr. Speaker, yesterday evening, I appeared before the Standing Committee on Transportation in Ottawa, making many of the very same arguments that the highway critic makes, Mr. Speaker.

Simply put, Mr. Speaker, there has to be much more money at the table from the federal government so that we can employ many more road builders in Saskatchewan than we currently do. It's not complicated at all, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Elhard: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the road builders association is also very concerned that while most of

the Highways budget is not being spent directly on road construction and maintenance, the department itself has been purchasing its own equipment fleet. This is at a time when their members, the Saskatchewan road construction companies, have no work and are laying off their employees.

And then we also learn that you're having your own fire sale of Highways equipment. It was advertised yesterday in *The Leader-Post*.

So, Mr. Minister, if the equipment sale in the mid-'80s is to blame for you not fixing roads today, then why are you selling off your own machinery now? And why are private Saskatchewan road construction companies having to lay off people because they have no work?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — The facts are first of all, Mr. Speaker, that the equipment that the province is buying is simply replacing old equipment. It's nothing more than replacement, Mr. Speaker.

As a matter of fact, Mr. Speaker, as well, in the maintenance in Saskatchewan many private contractors are involved in maintenance in our province.

Mr. Speaker, we have increased as a percentage of the total budget, Mr. Speaker, in the last four years, we've increased maintenance on our provincial highway system by 68 per cent, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Sex Offender Registry

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

Mr. Minister, as you are well aware the special legislative Committee to Prevent The Abuse And Exploitation Of Children Through the Sex Trade is working very hard gathering information with the intent to put forward recommendations on policy and practices that will help protect our children from sexual exploitation.

One very important way to help end this exploitation is a sex offender registry because convicted sex offenders may pose a significant risk of reoffending when they are released back into the community. A registry would give police the means of tracking the whereabouts of sex offenders in their communities and police forces across the country, and here in Saskatchewan, have expressed interest in such a registry program.

Mr. Minister, is your department and is your government committed to introducing strong measures to end the abuse of children by sexual offenders and will you consider implementing a sexual offender registry?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Axworthy: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all let me thank the member for the question

and commend her on her continued interest and work in this area.

But, Mr. Speaker, I'm a little confused because I think the member must know that the introduction of a sex offender registry, which she is proposing, would in fact be much less effective than the program we have in place.

And indeed, ministers of Justice across Canada have agreed to that, and therefore have taken the approach that the most effective way of dealing with this question is to boost the national registry, the CPIC (Canadian Police Information Centre) system, which not only deals with sex offenders, Mr. Speaker, but deals with the criminal history of offenders who might affect children in a whole range of different ways.

So, Mr. Speaker, we are committed to dealing with this question. We have committed, as you know, significant resources to the criminal justice system in the province, in the budget and before. And, Mr. Speaker, I reiterate my concern about the member's position here.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Julé: — Mr. Minister, as it stands today, this province has not done anything in this regard to take the leadership role in their own province for this. And that is what is happening.

Mr. Speaker, this afternoon in this legislature I will introduce a Bill which mirrors legislation passed in Ontario earlier this year. It is an Act to establish and maintain a registry of persons convicted of sex offences in order to protect children and communities.

In effect it would allow the establishment of a sexual offender registry system in Saskatchewan. This registry, when established, would help police by requiring people who have been convicted of sex offences, anywhere in Canada, to register with police in their community within 15 days of their release from custody or if they should make a change of address. Failure to comply would result in significant penalties.

A registry of this type, Mr. Speaker, would contribute to ensuring public safety and confidence. Mr. Minister, will you support this legislation?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Axworthy: — Well, Mr. Speaker, the member would surely know that this kind of registry, which has been in existence in a number of states in the United States, simply doesn't work very well. It might not surprise any of us that sex offenders, even though they are supposed to register and in fact it's compulsory to register, they don't actually do it very often. And so we have a huge problem of the process working.

And I just say to the member again, Mr. Speaker, that the Canadian Police Information Centre, which is CPIC, our national process, is the most effective way to protect our children from pedophiles. It's preferable in a number of ways. I could reiterate them but I won't unless the member really wants me to. Well, okay, I can.

It's a national registry. It contains standard information which is accessed by police nationally, not just here in the province. It contains information of the criminal history of the offender — not limited to convicted sex offenders, Mr. Speaker. And in summary, Mr. Speaker, the ministers of Justice across the country recognize that this is a better system than the one the member is proposing.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the minister, Mr. Speaker, I have spoken, I have spoken with the Saskatoon city police as well as the Prince Albert police and the Regina police. The Saskatoon police and the Prince Albert police have told me that this legislation would be of great assistance to them, and they see a great need for it. So whatever you're talking about that's in place right now, it's obviously not helping the police.

Mr. Minister, the Ontario legislation came about after an inquest into the death of an 11-year-old boy, who had been brutally murdered by a pedophile who was released on federal parole. The inquest recommended the Solicitor General of Canada, along with the provincial governments and police, be responsible for establishing a registry for convicted, dangerous, high-risk, sexual offenders.

A similar recommendation was made in the Stockholm *Agenda for Action*, which came from the first world congress in Stockholm in 1996. They emphasized . . .

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

Ms. Julé: — . . . including the registration of sexual offenders.

Mr. Minister, will you please commit today to the intent of this legislation, and to making Saskatchewan a national leader in attempting to stop the abuse and exploitation of children for sexual purposes?

Hon. Mr. Axworthy: — Well, Mr. Speaker, this province does not take a back seat to anybody in dealing with the sex trade against children or against anyone. And our record on criminal justice system can be matched up with anyone.

The point, Mr. Speaker, that I'll reiterate, and I've now said it three times. Maybe the member doesn't agree with all the ministers of Justice. Maybe the member, the member opposite doesn't agree with the police forces across this, across this country. But the system that is in place, the system is in place, is a better system than the one the member proposes.

She proposes a system which has been shown not to work in the United States. And, Mr. Speaker, she's proposing a system which the Ontario government has proposed. And we know that the Ontario government are big friends of the party opposite, Mr. Speaker. But we also know that the Ontario government does things for . . . We know, Mr. Speaker, that the Ontario government does things for show and not action. We know that, Mr. Speaker, on a number of fronts.

And, Mr. Speaker, this was not the way to go. The member should know that. The member should know the system we

have is the best one we could possibly have.

The Speaker: — Order.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 235 — The Sex Offender Registry Act

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I move first reading of Bill No. 235, The Sex Offender Registry Act.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

STATEMENT BY THE SPEAKER

Ruling on a Point of Order

The Speaker: — Hon. members, before orders of the day, yesterday the Opposition House Leader raised a point of order regarding whether the Deputy Premier was required to table certain documents from which he was quoting during question period.

The practice of this Assembly on this matter is clear. If a minister quotes from, and I quote, "a despatch or other state paper not before the House . . .", he may be called upon to table it. This was the citation in Beauchesne's 6th Edition, paragraph 495, referred to by the Hon. Opposition House Leader.

However, there is no requirement for a minister to table a document if the item is a confidential document, a document of a private nature passing between offices of a department, or internal briefing notes prepared by a department for the use of a minister. These documents are regarded as private in that they are used to prepare ministers for deliberations in the House, whether that occurs during oral question period, Committee of the Whole, or legislative committees.

While ministers sometimes share this type of material voluntarily, they are not required to table it. I direct your attention to previous rulings of the Chair on February 4, 1935; December 4, 1973; April 13, 1981; December 12, 1986; and June 20, 1996.

This interpretation is also consistent with that of the Canadian House of Commons. I refer members to a ruling of Speaker Fraser in the *Debates* of the House of Commons on October 13, 1987, pages 9898-9.

I have reviewed the verbatim for yesterday's question period and it would appear that the documents cited by the Deputy Premier on page 1620 are in the nature of briefing material. However, I call upon the minister to indicate to the House the exact nature of the documents in question. If they are not briefing material, I call upon him to table them forthwith.

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — Mr. Speaker, the materials that I was using were a briefing material from the Department of

Highways for the Minister of Highways which I was using on behalf of the minister for question period yesterday.

The Speaker: — On that basis, the point of order is invalid.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

WRITTEN QUESTIONS

Mr. Yates: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Being an open and accountable government, we are extremely happy to table the answer to question 164.

The Speaker: — The answer to question 164 is tabled.

Mr. Yates: — Convert.

The Speaker: — Convert.

Mr. Yates: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Being an open and accountable government, where the question is possible to answer, we answer it. And we're happy to do so.

The Speaker: — The answer to question no. 166 is tabled.

Mr. Yates: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again we are extremely happy to submit the answer to question 167.

The Speaker: — The answer to question 167 is tabled.

Mr. Yates: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, being an open and accountable government, we're extremely happy to table the response to question 168.

The Speaker: — The answer to question 168 is tabled.

Mr. Yates: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again, being an open and accountable government, we're extremely happy to table the response to question 169.

The Speaker: — The answer to question 169 is tabled.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

ADJOURNED DEBATES

SECOND READINGS

Bill No. 73

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Ms. Atkinson that **Bill No. 73 — The Licensed Practical Nurses Act, 2000** be now read a second time.

Ms. Bakken: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to rise today to speak on Bill 73. Mr. Speaker, health care in Saskatchewan has never been in a more volatile state than it is today. The people of Saskatchewan, no matter what part of Saskatchewan they come from, whether it is north, south, east, west, rural or urban, the number one issue in the province and in the public's mind is health care.

Every day, Mr. Speaker, MLAs receive inquiries and concerns from people who themselves are trying to access health care or they are inquiring for a family member or a friend. The waiting lists, access to specialists, operating room cutbacks, bed shortages — the list goes on.

As deputy Health critic for the Saskatchewan Party I, along with my colleagues, place the health care crisis in this province at the top of our list.

Mr. Speaker, we see as part of the solution the importance of all the players in the health profession being allowed to contribute to their fullest. The licensed practical nurses in Saskatchewan have a critical role to play in the delivery of health care in our province. And we applaud them, as well as RNs (registered nurse), lab techs, admitting clerks, unit clerks, porters, and all others who work as a team to provide the best possible care for the people of Saskatchewan.

Many times, Mr. Speaker, this care is provided under the most trying of situations, but it is the dedication of the people who work in the health care system every day who have held the health care system in our province together over the past several years. Mr. Speaker, I thank them and I know the people of Saskatchewan thank them for the contribution that they have made to all of us.

Mr. Speaker, the legislation before us today speaks to the LPNs (licensed practical nurse) and their role in the health care system. The clause being removed, under the direction of, has been a contentious issue. While the official opposition agrees that LPNs should be able to function without being under direct supervision of an RN at all times, we qualify that by believing that the scope of practice of an LPN must be clearly defined within the legislation.

Mr. Speaker, we believe that this will benefit all those working in the health care field as well as those who we have a health care system for, and they are the people of the province of Saskatchewan.

The citizens of Saskatchewan accessing health care must have a clear understanding of the role of the different care providers, and as members elected by the citizens of Saskatchewan, we owe it to them to provide that to them. Mr. Speaker, the official opposition believes all players in the health system have a very vital role to play, that they need to be independent but also to work as a team.

Mr. Speaker, we believe that each member of the team must be able to translate into everyday practice the legislation that they work under so that it actually can be practical in the workplace. Mr. Speaker, at the end of the day and when this legislation is finally passed, the legislation should improve the workplace.

The legislation should allow LPNs to practice to the full extent of their education. The legislation should allow for improved health care delivery in our hospitals and health centres where duties now carried out by RNs could be delivered by LPNs and a true team could be realized.

Mr. Speaker, the legislation should give the public the assurance that they will receive the care they require. And, Mr.

Speaker, the legislation's main goal must be to improve and enhance health care delivery for all people in the province of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, the official opposition believes there should be an amendment to more clearly define the scope of practice in the legislation. And we are looking at this with the appropriate people in the legal and health fields.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Gantfoer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too rise on this very important day to discuss and offer some insights into our perspective in terms of this very important legislation.

The Speaker: — Order, order, hon. member. Why is the member on his feet?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — With leave, to introduce guests.

Leave granted.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member from Melfort.

Today in the gallery are some people that we have who represent the Head Start program, Mr. Speaker, from Val d'Or and from Sennetere, Quebec, where they have 44 children enrolled, and from my community of Yorkton, where they have 40 students enrolled.

Our guests are involved in the Aboriginal Head Start program. And today I want to introduce in your gallery from Val d'Or and Sennetere, Quebec Head Start programs, Nathalie Rivard who is the psychologist educator; Yvonne Lecoursiere, who is the educational assistant and school bus driver; and Donna Sanford, who is the participating parent. And from Yorkton, Joan Delowski, who is the program coordinator and director; and Yvonne Rusnak, who's the head instructor.

I ask all members to join with me in welcoming them to our Assembly this afternoon.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ADJOURNED DEBATES

SECOND READINGS

Bill No. 73 — The Licensed Practical Nurses Act, 2000 (continued)

Mr. Gantfoer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, as I began to say, it's with great pleasure that I rise today to speak to this very important legislation that's in the second reading stage.

Mr. Speaker, I think it's important today because it marks another milestone in the practice of nursing in the province of

Saskatchewan. As I reviewed material leading up to discussions about this legislation, it was with great interest when we met with the licensed practical nurses, that they shared with us some of the information about their history and the tradition that they have established in the delivery of health care service in the province.

So, Mr. Speaker, it strikes me as today is an important milestone in their long and important record of service in the province. And it isn't an end in itself and we shouldn't consider it as something that automatically for all times solves any of the ongoing challenges that the nursing practice faces in this province.

Mr. Speaker, in the information provided, I'm mindful of the fact that the very first time that this association or organization was put into a legal perspective goes way back to 1955 when they were incorporated under the registered nurses' association in the province of Saskatchewan.

And, Mr. Speaker, that's a long time ago. And beginning at that time it was important, I think, that what they wanted to do was begin to develop and mature as an independent agency that was very responsible and capable of delivering a very important component of health care services in the province.

In 1958 they were incorporated as a non-profit agency under the Act, or became an entity under the Act, and since that time have served the province of Saskatchewan in a meaningful role.

I'm also very mindful of the level of dedication and frustration that they must have experienced in the ensuing years, because it's my understanding that they really never received their own legislation to govern their own actions until 1988, in fact, Mr. Speaker.

And for that long period of time there was a series of meetings and information that happened. There were tours across the province, meetings with people that worked in hospitals and other agencies, registered nurses, medical professionals, to try to . . . (inaudible) . . . and get a consensus that there should be their own appropriate legislation to consider them as a professional entity in this province. And that happened in 1988.

In 1992, there was a further amendment that gave them the designation of licensed practical nurses and some other amendments in the legislation. And from that day to today, that legislation has essentially been what we're operating under the authority of.

And, Mr. Speaker, it hasn't been a perfect world. It's been an evolution, a transition. As the needs of the health system have changed, so too has the practice of licensed practical nursing, so too has the practice of registered nurses, so too has the practice of medical doctors and specialists in this province.

Health care service delivery is not a static thing. It is not something written in granite and that can live and stay the same no matter what happens. It's a thing that changes and evolves as our needs evolve. As people's understanding as to what is the most appropriate care delivery change, it evolves and it changes.

And, Mr. Speaker, human nature being what it is, very often there's a great deal of fear and mistrust that enters into the system. There ends up being harsh words spoken sometimes. Sometimes inferences are made by people in the professions that are taken the wrong way. And before you know it, people get their backs up, people start misinterpreting things, people start operating in a way that is no longer co-operative and supportive, but confrontational.

And, Mr. Speaker, I don't think that there is many professions anywhere, and certainly not in health care, that have undergone more pressure for change than the nursing profession. And I mean that in the broad category of nursing, those people who deliver those nursing services across the spectrum.

Mr. Speaker, there have been ebbs and flows about the relative importance and prominence of different components of the health care system. Certainly we've gone from a period of time when physicians were the only gatekeepers. The physicians were indeed the people that pretty much determined how people were going to access and where they were going into the health care system.

That is changing, not just in this province or in this country, but around the world. And increasingly there is an increased discussion happening everywhere about expanded and broader roles and functions for nurses in the health care delivery field. And we think that's an important direction and an important service that can be provided in health care.

And, Mr. Speaker, I would be the first one in my colleagues to say clearly and without reservation, that licensed practical nurses serve a critical and important role in that service function. It's absolutely essential and critical.

And when I received the honour, I think, of being the Health critic by our leader, one of the things that I came to understand very clearly is that the whole relationship in health care needed a lot of work, needs some healing, needs some bridging of gulfs that have been created over the years, and certainly that is across the piece.

But in particular, there's been a particular hurtful gulf between people within the nursing profession between registered nurses, registered psychiatric nurses, and the LPNs. And I think that frustration of trying to bridge that gulf has resulted in recent time — the lawsuits and the frustration of saying we've got to establish a new relationship that is professional, that is respectful, and that is independent and lets all of us, all of us, practise to the limits and the potentials of our scope or practice that are based on our education and training, which determines our competency. They all need to function.

(1445)

And, Mr. Speaker, and members of this House, we need these people, all of them. And no one can afford the luxury any longer of having people that are only allowed to do parts and parcels of what they're trained to do and what their competencies clearly indicate is appropriate.

And so, Mr. Speaker, we are very supportive, in principle, of this legislation. We do believe that it is going to be another step.

It isn't the end and it isn't everything to all people for all time. But it is an important step in the transition of the way health care is going to be delivered, not only in this province but in this country. And so, Mr. Speaker, we support the general thrust and the principles in this legislation completely.

Mr. Speaker, we have had discussions with a number of people, including the licensed practical nurses, about our concern about wording in terms of the clauses related to the definition and scope of practice of licensed practical nurses. And the intent of this is not to limit what should be allowed, but to clarify it, to give clarity to it so that we try to eliminate as much as we can misinterpretation and misunderstandings between the categories in the nursing profession.

It is our endeavour, and serious endeavour, in discussions that we've had with people in the nursing profession and indeed with the minister's office, in terms of trying to find words that we believe will be helpful in clarifying what we think is an area that needs to be strengthened and improved.

Mr. Speaker, we intend to continue that process and we're working with people who are good at the legal words and the appropriate words and we're seeking advice — and I think it's fair to say everyone is trying to seek the advice — to find the words that will appropriately describe the important role and function that this very critical segment of the nursing profession should have within their legislation.

And so, Mr. Speaker, that process is ongoing. We believe that we can work through that in the next days as we move into committee work and into the detailed clause by clause discussion of this legislation and we look forward not only to working with licensed practical nurses, but all people that are concerned about how we do a better job of delivering health care service in this province, with legal people who will give us appropriate wording to make sure that happens.

And so, Mr. Speaker, I would like for us, as the official opposition, to go on the record in principle at this stage of saying we're supportive of this legislation, we're supportive of the direction that it's heading, we're supportive of the fact that we believe it'll go some distance in the journey towards a better understanding between all nursing professionals in this province. And, Mr. Speaker, we look forward to working further on it as we move into Committee of the Whole in the days ahead. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Bill No. 63

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Axworthy that **Bill No. 63 — The Legal Aid Amendment Act, 2000** be now read a second time.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to rise in the Assembly today to speak to Bill 63, An Act to amend the Legal Aid Act.

As is my understanding, Mr. Speaker, one of the main changes that is being made is to remove one of the clauses that presently

allows a legal aid client to choose any lawyer in Saskatchewan to represent them for a crime that is punishable for life in prison.

As the minister stated in his second reading speech, this is something that has been cost-shared with the federal government; that they have now removed this. So what does this Bill . . . what this Bill does now is allows the Legal Aid Commission to determine whether outside counsel is necessary.

The minister also made reference, Mr. Speaker, to the rising costs of legal fees. And with this provision being removed, I have some concerns that families will not have the financial means for the best defence. There are also some other references to recommendations made in the Rosten report and these are to separate some of the complexities of the administrative system in the legal aid process.

I don't even have to say, Mr. Speaker, that the government opposite are the members of creating administrative nightmares. But it is important that they have addressed this by separating the offices of the chief executive officer and the chairperson.

Mr. Speaker, everyone in our province deserves the best possible defence if they find themselves in trouble with the law, particularly if it is a murder charge. As we have seen in the past, Mr. Speaker, with the Larry Fisher trial, the province picked up the entire tab for this individual. Now one has to question whether every citizen in Saskatchewan can expect that to happen for them. I would suspect not.

Mr. Speaker, there have been some cases that I am familiar with where an individual has chosen counsel outside of Saskatchewan to represent them and the province has picked up the tab for the entire costs. But conversely to that, I have heard of instances where the exact opposite has happened.

Mr. Speaker, I feel that at this time there is more need for consultation and careful study of this piece of legislation, and therefore I move adjourn debate of Bill No. 63 at this time.

Debate adjourned.

Bill No. 66

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Axworthy that **Bill No. 66 — The Personal Property Security Amendment Act, 2000** be now read a second time.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, once again it is my pleasure to rise in the Assembly to speak to Bill No. 66, An Act to amend The Personal Property Security Act.

Mr. Speaker, as the minister indicated in his second reading speech, there are two main purposes of these amendments: the sale of assets from the Bank of Montreal to the credit unions; and the second is to transfer all assets, employees, and functions to the land information services.

Mr. Speaker, at the time when the Bank of Montreal announced that they would be making some major closures in rural communities, it was indeed very unfortunate for a number of

community members out there who regretted seeing the Bank of Montreal do these closures. But the credit unions did step in and they decided that they would provide the necessary banking services to rural residents, which came as somewhat a relief.

Regarding the second main purpose of the Bill, the minister stated in his second reading speech that this would increase efficiencies for land titles. Well, Mr. Speaker, I sincerely hope that these efficiencies will not have to cost any more money than they already have.

Mr. Speaker, the amendments proposed in this Bill and the concerns that we have, I feel would be best addressed in committee. There are many, many items within this Bill that I think need to be questioned. There is many, many people in Saskatchewan and certainly in our caucus that are quite concerned about some of the statements here and the implications. And so I think that those questions would be best answered in Committee of the Whole, and we look forward to doing that at the nearest opportunity.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Bill No. 61

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Sonntag that **Bill No. 61 — The Engineering and Geoscience Professions Amendment Act, 2000** be now read a second time.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the members of the opposition have put forward their thoughts and concerns regarding this amendment Act, and we agree that we would address any further questions during Committee of the Whole. Thank you.

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

Bill No. 43

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Axworthy that **Bill No. 43 — The Summary Offences Procedure Amendment Act, 2000** be now read a second time.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, once again it is my pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 43, an Act to amend The Summary Offences Procedure Act, 1990.

As is my understanding, Mr. Speaker, one of the main provisions being made in this piece of legislation is to disallow those individuals with an outstanding driving offence to renew their driver's licence. But as my colleagues pointed out that having a driver's licence is not a privilege — in a sense it is — but it's also a necessity.

Mr. Speaker, the other amendment is regarding the red light cameras which now will be allowed to be used as evidence if one fails to stop at a red light. I had the instance not certainly of

having been caught at this, Mr. Speaker, but I did . . . they must have been practising out there in the cities with the red light cameras. And I recognized the officers sitting by the roadside and really wondered what was happening here, whether there was a law passed that I hadn't been aware of yet. But it certainly does make a person think twice, that's for sure.

Like I said, fortunately for myself, I did not receive one of those tickets in this province or any other province. So I really haven't had an opportunity yet to see the clarity of the photos. And that is the concern that I do have with this is that the right person gets tagged with the ticket. And so I'm sure that many other residents of Saskatchewan will be questioning that.

I recognize also, Mr. Speaker, that in Alberta a friend of mine did receive a ticket in this manner and were presented with the photo when the ticket came. And these people could see their licence plate quite clearly.

However, there was an indication to me by the person I was speaking to that as the ticket was written, it was indicated that there was an assumed speed — I think it was, so that was the wording on it — or a sort of judged speed. So there was no absolute evidence of what the speed was and that caused them to question exactly whether or not this is a really just measure.

So I think that that's some of the things that we will probably be talking about further in Committee of the Whole. And there are other parts of the Bill that we need some clarification on from the minister.

But I do feel that all of these questions would be best addressed from here on in in Committee of the Whole. Thank you.

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

Bill No. 48

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Axworthy that **Bill No. 48 — The Adult Guardianship and Co-decision-making Act**, be now read a second time.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it is yet once again my pleasure to rise in the Assembly to speak to Bill No. 48, The Adult Guardianship and Co-decision-making Act.

Mr. Speaker, the legislation before us is to replace The Dependent Adults Act which includes a variety of provisions to protect those adults that require guardians. And as is my understanding from the minister's second reading speech, the steering committee that was set up in 1997 made several very positive recommendations. And I too would like to commend them on all of their work.

Mr. Speaker, in those cases where a guardian is needed, particularly in emergency situations, it is very important that the right person is put in charge of the affairs.

This is where most of the concerns that I have are, Mr. Speaker. They surround some questions regarding the assuredness that those very vulnerable people are not taken advantage of any

further.

And as I read through this Bill, Mr. Speaker, there was a lot of language in the Bill that suggested to me that there could be some complications when there's co-guardianship. And I think just about every member of this Assembly, as well as many, many people in our province, have a member of their family, or certainly extended family, that might require extra help — those that are incapacitated mentally or that cannot make decisions on their own.

(1500)

And I would certainly hope that if, in fact, their extended family members, for instance, in the event that the parents of a handicapped person should pass away, I would hope that the extended family members would be considered as the guardians, if that has already been provided for in a will.

If in fact this Bill assumes to ensure that there are any members of state, for instance, that would also have the right to make decisions with the family, I think there would be some rebut on the Bill. And I think that those questions we can certainly put forward in Committee of the Whole.

And, as I've said, Mr. Speaker, it's just my concern that all vulnerable adults are not taken advantage of in any way or form. And so I will forward this Bill to Committee of the Whole and I look forward to addressing the minister with further questions of concern. Thank you.

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

Bill No. 52

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Belanger that **Bill No. 52 — The Wildlife Amendment Act, 2000/Loi de 2000 modifiant la Loi sur la faune** be now read a second time.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to make a few comments in regarding Bill No. 52, The Wildlife Amendment Act, 2000.

Mr. Speaker, as we're all aware and people across this province are aware and certainly just looking outside today and the sunshine and the fact that we're into that spring season, summer season; and people are thinking, while we're sitting in the office, and we're thinking of Friday and the weekend and the opportunity of being able to — if able — to head out to the lake for the weekend or enjoy the great outdoors.

We certainly in Saskatchewan, many times, just take for the granted the environment that we are so privileged to enjoy, and certainly our province has a lot to offer when it comes to activity, resource activity and recreational activities as a result of the type of climate we have and the lakes and that type of recreation.

Mr. Speaker, however, when we look at this piece of legislation, we're quite concerned as an opposition in regards to a number of the changes that have been . . . have taken place

and the fact that people across this province who have and continue and will continue to enjoy the great outdoors, however, find that it's going to cost them significantly more to enjoy that lifestyle — to be able to enjoy our parks, to be able to go out and enjoy fishing or even the hunting pastime.

And, Mr. Speaker, I might add when it comes to hunting, I've talked to certainly the wildlife federation in this province and many people who have been avid hunters for a number of years who are concerned about the fact that we're actually losing people who are interested in enjoying hunting and fishing and what have you. And part of the reason for that is the increase, the continuing costs that are placed upon people, that financial burden. And the fact that the . . . as you increase the costs, it restricts people from being able to enjoy those areas of recreation and fun. And in many cases, Mr. Speaker, they are the types of activities that families certainly can enjoy.

But, Mr. Speaker, when we look at The Wildlife Act one has to recognize as well though, while we take for granted the number of species of wildlife, whether it's game or whether it's flowers or shrubs or whatever in the province of Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, we also must be mindful of the fact that through the period of the last number of years the human species certainly has destroyed a number of . . . or has been instrumental and guilty of destroying a number of particular species that we have had in the past, some extinct, and some that are becoming very . . .

Well when we talk about the word extinct, Mr. Speaker, I was just looking at the Minister of Finance and I was beginning to wonder if the Minister of Finance was exactly wondering what I was talking about when I was talking about extinct, and I guess that's something we'll find out when we get to the next provincial election.

However, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker, we as a group of individuals certainly need to be concerned about our resources, about the species that we take so much for granted. And when I say that, Mr. Speaker, I've been raising the question about highway construction and certainly the upgrade of some of the highways in the province of Saskatchewan.

And one of the highways in my area in particular, this is the first time that people have come to me. But I've had a number of people have come to me and said, you know, they're quite concerned about the fact that, well Highway No. 48 needs some major construction and actually needs to be rebuilt.

They got driving down that highway as rough and as uneven as it is, floating from side to side. And they happened to notice, I guess because they had to slow down because of the potholes and the nature of the highway, they happened to notice a number of species of plants along the roadway and the right of way and they thought to themselves: you know, if we rebuild this road, we're going to destroy those species and they may never come back.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I think we have seen through the years that, whether it's highway construction or whatever, a lot of the species of flowers and plants that we have, usually regenerate themselves, even if they're . . . some of the area is destroyed as a result of highway maintenance.

And I'm not for once saying, Mr. Speaker, that we don't construct roads, because we need . . . we definitely need to maintain our infrastructure. Because part of this legislation talks about even tourism in the province of Saskatchewan.

And while we can bring people in because people might like to come to the large expanses in the province to look at the animals and nature and the different flowers and those species, but, Mr. Speaker, in order for them to get to observe those types of nature, they've also got to have good road . . . they need a good road base to travel on. They need a good highway system, Mr. Speaker.

And so it's important, Mr. Speaker, when we talk about the environment, we talk about wildlife, that we keep all of these things in mind.

Mr. Speaker, I think it's also important when we look at the Act in front of us, the Act, I believe, eliminates totally the big game damage fund. And I know when the government removed that fund two years ago, we were quite concerned as an opposition party about the fact of the . . . who was going to address the concerns in regards to wildlife damage in regarding . . . or in regards to agriculture, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, since I've been in this Assembly, on many occasions over the past number of years, I've had farmers come to me with concerns and with problems they've been facing as a result of wildlife damage on their crops.

And as you're aware of, Mr. Speaker, and members of this Assembly are aware of right now, while we're into the seeding phase of putting another crop and hopefully looking forward to an excellent crop this fall, farming is not as rosy as the picture may be painted right now. There's a lot of farmers who are just sitting on the edge, and the crop, a good crop in the bin will mean quite a difference as to whether or not those farms continue to function or operate into the coming year.

And so when you have wildlife damage on your crop, something that you've worked so hard and you put so much into it, and then there's no compensation for it, Mr. Speaker, it becomes very frustrating.

And our concern, Mr. Speaker, with the elimination of the big game damage fund is the fact that the new plan that is put in place, we're concerned about the fact that it may become just another area of more bureaucratic red tape that farmers have to go through. And while we appreciate the fact the federal government's involved in helping fund the program, we're concerned about what farmers may see at the end of the day — whether or not they will be . . . receive the proper compensation for the loss they incur.

So that's an area in this piece of legislation we're somewhat concerned about. While it's been removed, I think, Mr. Speaker, the government should have given a little more consideration, and we trust and we certainly, Mr. Speaker, will be offering some suggestions to the government when we get into committee on the Bill in regards to the wildlife fund and . . . or the big game damage fund, and how it is currently functioning, whether or not the new role that is playing is indeed meeting the needs of producers in this province.

Mr. Speaker, also in this legislation I believe there's a section that allows wildlife officers to lay charges for possession of wildlife for the purpose of trafficking. And it says, I believe the minister mentioned . . . made the comment in his second reading speech that the officer doesn't have to wait for the offence to occur now and can act accordingly. And he said, it's similar to the drug enforcement legislation.

Mr. Speaker, I would have some concern with that. The reason I would have some concern with that, I don't believe wildlife and the selling of drugs are two and the same things. I think there's a considerable difference.

And in regards to, if you will, as the minister talked about trafficking in wildlife — and I'm not saying that we don't have people who don't go and bag big game and then turn around and sell it — but we have for years acknowledged the fact that a person can go out and get a licence and bag big game for their own personal use. You can't turn around and sell it. And there is concern that there have been people who have violated this.

However, my concern is the fact that if an officer believes, and that's what I'm reading from what the minister is saying, if the officer believes that a person is out hunting simply to traffic, they can go and actually step in and arrest that . . . or lay a charge before the act has even occurred.

And I would have to ask exactly what do we mean by this. Exactly where are we going? Because I would be concerned about the fact that a person might be legitimately hunting and have a resource officer come up and say they believe that the only reason they're out there hunting is so that they can sell the meat in order to raise some cash.

And I think there are some questions in regards to that section of the Bill that we're going to have to certainly take some time to deal with the minister and get some clarification on as to where we're going in regards to that piece of the legislation.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that in the past we have dealt on a number of cases with the areas and concerns that have been brought to our attention in regards to how wildlife and resource officers have treated people.

And there's no doubt, Mr. Speaker — some people in this Assembly have actually worked in the police services — and we're all aware of the fact that no matter what area of life you're involved in, that there are people who really take their job and take it seriously and work very diligently and treat the public with fairness and dignity.

And then there are other people who take . . . especially when it comes to a resource officer or the police force, some people who go overboard. They've got a bit of power now. And that's why I have some concerns with regards to this section.

And it's important that we really set out the criteria as to what is involved in regards to arresting a person or laying a charge against a person because that resource officer may feel that individual may be only out there hunting for the purposes of trafficking. So as I said, Mr. Speaker, it's a question that we want to and will take some time to raise and hopefully get some clarification and answers when we get into committee.

Mr. Speaker, as well the minister talked about the fact that there are many endangered species. There are species where we're really . . . the number of species and any . . . or number of, whether it's birds, the number of birds in any specific species of birds are really becoming low. And we have excellent habitat in our province for different species of birds or animals.

However we need to take the time to protect those areas of habitat as well so that these species or at risk, Mr. Speaker, will be . . . the at-risk area will be addressed so that the young generation of today and tomorrow will be able to continue to enjoy the vast array of species of birds and animals we have in the province of Saskatchewan, so that we can continue to generate tourism and create tourism in the province because people want to come to this province because of the many lakes and the wide-open spaces that we have for people to enjoy.

Mr. Speaker, when I talk about lakes I hear that over the past few weeks there's been a terrific movement of people to Long Lake to . . . or Diefenbaker Lake I believe, if it was, where the accidental spill of . . . from a fish farm.

And it sounds to me like a lot of people have all of a sudden flocked to Diefenbaker Lake and from some of the media reports they're actually getting some . . . pulling out some pretty . . . or having pretty good luck in getting a pretty good catch out of Diefenbaker Lake.

(1515)

And when you talk about fish farming and the accidental release, I guess there is a concern as well when you have a large number of certain species entering in a water system or a water ecosystem. The concern is that there might be other species in that lake that might be threatened because of the certain influx of that specific species.

However, Mr. Speaker, for the angler out there it's been a time of great fishing and so I hope that . . . And I guess as well it's great, it's some economic development around Diefenbaker Lake as people have gone out to fish in that area.

Mr. Speaker, as well we've seen and will continue to see that our wildlife system continues at times, it really builds, and you get large influxes of animals such as coyotes and foxes, certainly in our area they were very high. The last couple of years they've kind of reduced again because of the fact that as they overpopulate, the nature itself seems to take care of itself.

But, Mr. Speaker, one of the concerns that has been raised with our caucus in regards to coyotes, and certainly wolves in the northern part of the province, is the fact that some of these species tend to attack domesticated livestock. And we want to, Mr. Speaker, we want to make sure that the livestock industry in this province are, as well, protected when we talk about wildlife species.

We may want to protect the wolf or we may want to protect the coyote species, but at the same time, Mr. Speaker, we also want to share the concern of livestock producers who may lose the livestock. And many have. In fact, Mr. Speaker, this last spring and certainly a year ago, many producers were finding that they were having a major problem with coyotes in their pastures.

And so when we talk about The Wildlife Act, Mr. Speaker, we want to make sure that the Act reflects not only protection of our resources, but also recognizes and carries with it some responsibilities in how we deal with people and certainly the different sectors of our economy who depend so much not only on wildlife, but also their livelihood that may be hindered as a result of an overpopulation in the wildlife sector.

And when I say that, Mr. Speaker, I think of our area. And I come back to the fact of the wildlife. And certainly in the southern part of the province, which we haven't seen in a long time, we are seeing larger flocks of Canada geese certainly beginning to nest in our area. And that is becoming a concern. And that goes back to the whole debate of wildlife compensation for damage to property, Mr. Speaker.

So I think there are a number of areas, Mr. Speaker, in this piece of legislation that need to be reviewed very carefully. We need to take the time to review them, need to take the time to determine whether or not we are actually protecting resource or whether we're creating an imbalance in the province of Saskatchewan in our resources to the detriment of the people and the livelihood of individuals within this province.

And having said that, Mr. Speaker, I think and I believe it would be appropriate for us to just review this legislation a little more diligently before we would move on. And we certainly look forward to a time in the future to address some of these concerns directly with the minister in Committee of Finance.

However, Mr. Speaker, at this time I would move to adjourn debate.

Debate adjourned.

Bill No. 53

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Belanger that **Bill No. 53 — The Wildlife Act Consequential Amendment Act, 2000** be now read a second time.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know, Mr. Speaker, that the thoughts I shared a few moments ago had everyone on the edge of their seat, and they're waiting for what I have to add to, in regards to The Wildlife Act Consequential Amendment Act, 2000.

However, Mr. Speaker, I will say this: that Bill No. 53, with all due respect, reflects a lot of what is coming forward in Bill No. 52. And at this time, I'm not sure that it would take a lot or that I should tie up a lot of the Assembly's time in debating an issue that where most of the meat of the legislation is actually dealt with in the previous one.

This Act just adds to the Bill No. 53 in talking about wildlife species at risk and naming them. And I believe we can address a number of these concerns more directly and more succinctly in Committee of Finance . . . or Committee of the Whole.

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

Bill No. 60

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Belanger that **Bill No. 60 — The Forest Resources Management Amendment Act, 2000** be now read a second time.

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to enter into debate on Bill No. 60, The Forest Resources Management Amendment Act, 2000.

And as I enter into the debate, Mr. Speaker, I note that some of the members opposite are howling and it's almost as if it's a howl of pain, Mr. Speaker. But I can assure the members opposite that whatever pain they're in is nothing like the pain that this government has inflicted on the province of Saskatchewan in the eight years, nine years that they've been in power.

I'm sure, Mr. Speaker, we will all agree that the protection of our forests is an extremely important issue. And not just important for us here today, but important for all future generations to come.

The forestry resource is a magnificent resource, Mr. Speaker. It not only is part of our ecosystem and takes a . . . plays a tremendous role in terms of renewing our environment, but it has also created and allowed for a livelihood for many, many of us in this province since we became a province, Mr. Speaker. So there is no doubt that we must do all that we can to protect this resource.

This Bill, Mr. Speaker, has a couple of primary components to it, some of which cause us some concern, and one of the first areas is the area of the licensing. The harvest of forest products in this province is done through the granting of licences, Mr. Speaker. And one of the things that this Bill intends to do is to give the government greater control in terms of the application of those license conditions and in situations where the holders of those licences may change, where their licences may in fact be transferred.

Now if this is a responsible approach to monitoring the use of the forest and monitoring the ability of the licence holders to responsibly use the resources of the forestry, then I think we're headed in the right direction. But there is some concern here that this Bill could encroach a little into that area of undue interference.

There's a difference between being responsible in terms of the monitoring of the resource on behalf of the citizens of the province and interfering to the degree that we could actually restrict business from being successful, from employing the large number of individuals that are employed in the forestry industry in this province, Mr. Speaker.

So on the responsible, monitoring side, I think we've got to look at how we do that. With the transfer of licences, there are a lot of things that happen as a licence is transferred from one licence holder to another.

And in the last couple of years in this province, we've actually had quite a significant number of licence transfers. And not in

all cases has that gone smoothly. We have had transfers from one company to another in this province over the very recent past that has caused some concern in a lot of the communities where those companies operate, Mr. Speaker. And I think specifically of the community of Hudson Bay and the large area surrounding it.

Certainly there were a couple of transfers that occurred there in the last couple of years. And I think while the community generally was hopeful that those transfers could be monitored in a way that there wouldn't be any negative impact on their community and the surrounding resource, there in fact have been some difficulties, Mr. Speaker, not the least of which is what appears to be a lack of monitoring that has led to a lot of waste in the Hudson Bay, Carrot River areas.

And I've actually had residents of those communities, first of all, tour me through some of those areas, and in fact show me photographs of other areas where the amount of waste is in fact something to be of great concern, Mr. Speaker.

So I think that while we're looking at the ability here to monitor the transfer a little more closely, we have to look at the ongoing monitoring of the licence as it evolves over the time that it's in effect. We can't have the communities in which some of these companies operate concerned that their interests aren't being looked after and that the interests of the resource around them aren't being looked after.

Quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, I on a lot of occasions am so very impressed with the people that live in the communities whose livelihood generally comes from the forestry because these people are probably the most ardent conservationists that I know. And the reason for that, Mr. Speaker, is that they do make their livelihood from the forestry. They understand that in order for them to continue to earn a livelihood from it, they have to manage it with respect and they have to treat it well in order that they and their families for generations to come can continue to earn a livelihood from the forestry as well.

So I think one of the things that we've got to look at, and perhaps one of the suggestions that we would like to be making is, is that while we do want to monitor the transfer of licences and we do want to have a better handle on how that happens through mergers and sales, etc., we also want to make a better effort, Mr. Speaker, to manage and to monitor the after-effects of a transfer of licence in order that the communities can continue to sustain their resource.

We also want to be able to do it in a way, Mr. Speaker, that involves all the stakeholders, that involves the communities, that involves the business folks involved, in the sense that they can all be happy with their input being respected.

Now oftentimes we put these types of monitoring regimes into place, and without adequate consultation, and consequently we may in fact end up undermining both sides of the equation here, Mr. Speaker. And certainly while we want to respect the communities' input, the one thing that we do not want to do is go to the degree that now we're starting to interfere with a business that is generally ran by individuals from those small communities to the degree where they can't, where they can't operate.

Now I know that there were a number of public meetings around some of these issues with the land use planning and those kinds of things, and certainly those are part of a process that one has to follow in order to be able to strengthen what it is that the government and the Department of Environment and Resource Management wants to do here.

And I think to be fair, Mr. Speaker, the other thing is that SERM (Saskatchewan Environment and Resource Management) officials themselves probably need a little more time in order to fully understand how the transfer of licences is going to affect the ongoing forestry. Because as I indicated, we've had a couple of fairly rapid turnovers in the transfer of licences here just within the last couple of years. And I don't think we fully understand the fallout from that rapid series of changes just quite yet.

(1530)

The other interesting part of this Act, Mr. Speaker, is that it addresses an issue in the wild rice industry. And we're talking about, through this Act, being able to allow government to confiscate wild rice crops for the non-payment of fees.

Well I have some concern around that, Mr. Speaker, in the sense that instead of jumping to the conclusion that people aren't paying their fees and that we should automatically start confiscating their crops as a result of that, I think maybe the government should be looking at why it is, investigating why it is that these fees aren't being paid.

Could it be, Mr. Speaker, that they are in fact too high in the first place and that the producers can't afford to pay for them? Could it be, Mr. Speaker, that the taxation levels in this province are so high that it makes their ability to pay the fees more difficult?

So I think somehow we've jumped a step here, Mr. Speaker, where we're going straight into talking about confiscating crops and wild rice crops and how they would be disposed of, but we haven't, or the government doesn't seem to have really made an effort in terms of trying to understand why it is that those fees aren't being paid. And I think that that is something that we certainly would like to take a little more time and be able to understand a little bit better.

Now there are a number of stakeholders affected by both components of this piece of legislation, Mr. Speaker, and we would like to have the opportunity to be able to consult with all of them, and I think particularly the communities with respect to the licence . . . transfer of licence issue that have been affected by the licence . . . the number of licence transfers over the course of the last couple of years.

And in the case of the wild rice industry, I think certainly we would like to be able to consult with the producers, Mr. Speaker. Because I think any time we hear about government confiscating crops, that gives us all cause for great concern.

So just in conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I would like to say that we will attempt to consult with these stakeholders as quickly as we can. And at this point I'd like to adjourn debate.

Debate adjourned.

Bill No. 3

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Ms. Crofford that **Bill No. 3 — The Health Labour Relations Reorganization Amendment Act, 1999** be now read a second time.

Mr. Allchurch: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it's a pleasure for me to rise in the Assembly today to point out a few issues regarding Bill No. 3, the labour health reorganization amendment Act.

This Bill simply extends provisions for . . . of health reorganizations passed in 1996. It seriously reduces the number of bargaining units in the health care professions in the province. This reorganization is commonly known as the Dorsey commission.

The number of bargaining units were reduced from 538 to 45. And, Mr. Speaker, that is a large number to be dropped down to. The SGEU (Saskatchewan Government and General Employees' Union), usually a staunch supporter of the NDP, was upset in particular about the changes since many of its members were moved to other unions. In total it lost about 3,500 members.

This was supposed to make labour negotiations more manageable. It is ironic then, that we've had so much labour strife in the health care files in the last year.

In reality this Bill did little to calm labour problems because the government was . . . has done nothing to improve working conditions. We still hear from nurses and other health care workers constantly about the working conditions in our hospitals.

While reducing the number of bargaining units it did make sense . . . the heavy-handed approach of government took in accomplishing this was typical. It's the same type of approach we saw with the creation of health districts themselves and what we'll probably soon see with the NDP's drive to amalgamate municipalities.

And like the amalgamation of health care unions, there will probably be little consultation in the area of municipal amalgamations either. And what consultation there is will likely be ignored as the provinces . . . as the province probably had this legislation already to go.

As in the case of municipal amalgamation, we were told at the time of the Dorsey report, that these changes would make labour negotiations more smooth and make the system run better. And then we were faced with the nurses' strike last year, Mr. Speaker. And there's a strike that went on, and on, and on.

Clearly, amalgamation in the health care sector did not cure the real problems. Just like the government's plan to force amalgamation will not do anything to improve the lives of those living in rural Saskatchewan.

When the original Dorsey recommendations were put in place, not only were some union members angry, there were plenty of non-union workers who were angry to find out themselves they

were being forced into joining a union.

This is typical of the NDP Party and their labour policy, Mr. Speaker. We'll soon see the same thing in the construction industry where the government plans to force non-unionized employees into unions whether they like it or not.

If we are to attract health care professionals to Saskatchewan, especially our nurses, we're moving . . . we're going to have to do a lot more than tinker with how the unions operate. We've heard over and over this government's commitment to hire hundreds of new nurses in Saskatchewan, who are deeply needed. But we've heard from many health care workers how the nurses that are coming here are refusing because of the labour unions that are in place now. We don't seem to be making any progress fast.

Instead of tinkering with health care unions, let's get on with the job of improving our health care system. Let's find a way to make the jobs for those working in health care more tolerable once again. This will make it better for the workers, but it will also make it better for the ones that really need — and that's the patients.

Let's find out what's going wrong with our health care system. We have to find out where the money is going. We spent more than even before on health care, but are receiving less in the way of our services.

On the labour front let's bring fairness back to our trade union laws. Just as it is wrong not to allow someone to join . . . or to form or join a union, it is also wrong to be forced into joining a union. It is wrong to make it clearly impossible to decertify even if a majority of workers want that. We should have a system in place that is fair for both employees as well as employers or we are going to start losing more jobs to other provinces.

Mr. Speaker, there has been a lot of questions raised regarding this Bill. There are a lot more members who have questions for . . . regarding this Bill. But therefore I would like to have them done in Committee of the Whole. Therefore I move Bill No. 3, the health labour reorganization Act to be moved to committee.

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

COMMITTEE OF FINANCE

General Revenue Fund Economic and Co-operative Development Vote 45

The Chair: — I'd like to ask the minister if she'd introduce her officials.

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Thank you very much. Next to me I have Larry Spanier, who's the deputy minister. Next to Larry is Debbie Wilkie, who's director of marketing and corporate affairs. On my right is Bryon Burnett, assistant deputy minister of operations. Behind Bryon is Lynn Oliver, who's the chief information officer of the information technology office. And then we have Donna Johnson, who's the executive director of

corporate management; and Rob Greenwood, who's the assistant deputy minister of the policy division.

The Chair: — Thanks very much, Madam Minister.

Subvote (EC01)

Mr. Wakefield: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Madam Minister. Welcome to your officials. I think we had a chance to greet them once before, but I'd like to continue on with some of the questions that was carried over from our earlier conversation some time ago now.

Madam Minister, when I look at the materials in vote 45, we'd already responded to some of the questions and I appreciated those answers.

I would like to refer to the section on the Saskatchewan Trade and Export Partnership. I wonder if you could just give me a quick overview of the objectives and the role of that particular subvote, please?

(1545)

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Mr. Chairman, I thank the member opposite for that question; it's a very good question. The Saskatchewan Trade and Export Partnership is a private/public sector partnership; that is, it's got government funding but it also has private sector funding. It's run by a board of private sector people who are involved in trade and they set the overall objectives in terms of which parts of the world we're going to focus on, which missions we're going to take to different parts of the world.

The government retains a policy role with respect to trade. Clearly we have to because we're responsible for working with the federal government on trade policy.

But what this has really helped to do is, it's helped to focus the government's activities. So that now if a minister goes on a trade mission, we're on that trade mission because the private sector business people have said they need a minister there. And we have a specific objective in mind.

I just came back from a meeting with the Ambassador to China, and he pointed out to me China of the . . . what Canada exports to China, 25 per cent of it comes from Saskatchewan. So that, for example, that was one of the places I went on a trade mission to in February because it's a huge, huge export market for this province.

And the business people will tell you we need a minister on this trip because we need access to the highest levels of government or industry. So it's a very good partnership. We have the policy role; they have the role in terms of the practicalities, the trade missions, the parts of the world that are most important to their members. And that we co-operate — they tell us when they need us involved in their missions to ensure they're successful.

Mr. Wakefield: — Thank you, Madam Minister. Mr. Chairman, I have a question following up on that, and I appreciated the response. I have personally been involved in some of those trade missions, and I know just how valuable they really are,

and I would encourage the minister to continue that.

I think the important part is that it is very much focused on the private sector partnership with direction becoming particularly from the private sector. And I think that that has a lot of positive implications for the future.

I would like to move to the next item in the budget statement. And before I really talk or ask questions about the Saskatchewan Opportunities Corporation which I'd like to in a moment, I'd like to touch on another growth fund that you have, and that's the Saskatchewan Government Growth Fund.

I would like to look at some of the comments that were made in the *Report of the Provincial Auditor, 1999 Spring Report*. And as I read through some of the comments, I see that the mandate of the Saskatchewan Government Growth Fund has been changing over the years. Could you give me a bit of a summary of what the purpose originally was, how the focus has changed, and for what reasons, please?

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — The Saskatchewan Government Growth Fund was an immigrant investor fund created in the 1980s by the federal government. The province has no money involved in it. We have no guarantees. We don't guarantee any of the loans. So we have no direct financial role in the program. In 1999 there was a new program introduced to replace the existing program and Saskatchewan was one of several provinces that declined to participate in the new program.

And there were several reasons why we declined to participate in the new program but the main one was the government was going to have to guarantee the loans. And so we were not prepared to do this. So that particular program will be wound down after the current investments in the system are placed.

Now the auditor made some comments about the changes in directions of funding there which we actually are taking under advisement. Basically — I'm not sure which comments you were referring to, we could clarify that — but he made some points about what happens to the surpluses. And those surpluses don't exist now. That's a future prospect. But we're actually looking at his comments and probably will look at complying generally with what he's saying.

Mr. Wakefield: — Thank you, Madam Minister. I guess one of the comments that I found interesting was that the management corp — and I assume that's the overriding board that reviews these investing groups or investing funds — decided to reduce the risk of the investments held by SGGF (Saskatchewan Government Growth Fund) by investing in assets and lease them to the Saskatchewan Crown Corporation. Is that essentially what is being done now with at least one of these funds?

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Mr. Chairman, there are eight different funds. The management board really does nothing except ensure that the policy framework is in place in the overall management but they don't actually do any of the direct investments.

Each fund has a different purpose designated to it so some of the funds . . . And that's because the fund itself would have

decided that this particular fund will be dedicated to leases; this particular fund will be dedicated to small- or medium-size enterprises. But that's decided when the investments first are placed. They're not decided now by the government but by those investors. And as I say, it varies from fund to fund in terms of what the purposes were of the fund, what the scope is of the investment.

Mr. Wakefield: — Thank you, Madam Minister. Mr. Chairman, just one further question then on the Saskatchewan Government Growth Fund. It seemed to me that there was an overall positive aspect to these funds when they were originally introduced. Conditions changed, as you explained, probably made them less attractive from your point of view.

Is there any opportunity to go down this trail once again and try to initiate in conjunction with the federal government some offshore investor funds? Because they are not funds from taxpayers. It is coming from offshore and certainly is a source of funding for economic development in this province if we could make sure the right conditions were in place. Would you agree with that?

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Yes, I think that's a possibility. Again it's . . . Saskatchewan wasn't the only province that said they weren't prepared to sign on to this new arrangement because of some of the provisions. Certainly it's a possibility.

And before we would just allow SGGF to be wound down, we will look at other options for investment in the access to capital that can be invested in Saskatchewan through SGGF.

So certainly our commitment is to not just sit here and allow it to be wound down but we are looking actively at other choices open to the government.

Mr. Wakefield: — Madam Minister, Mr. Chairman, just to reiterate then, and I think from your earlier question I wanted to make sure. Is there any exposure to the provincial government on the basis of these funds as they are being played out or being wound down?

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Mr. Chairman, no, there's absolutely no exposure to the government. And as I say, that's the main reason why we weren't prepared to sign on in 1999 to the new program, because under that program there would have been exposure of taxpayers' dollars.

Mr. Wakefield: — Thank you, Madam Minister. Mr. Chairman, I have another question and I want to jump to the last item on page 37 of the 2000-2001 *Estimates*, and that is referring to the office of Northern Affairs.

And I looked down some of the initiatives, some of the objectives at the top, and I see it says the office works in partnership with federal and provincial departments, works in conjunction with industry, communities, to enhance the planning, coordination, integration, implementation, and so on for some of these projects.

Could you give me some examples for the record of what these projects might be.

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Mr. Chairman, the office of Northern Affairs is actually a separate, is a separate entity. Now they were here for about an hour yesterday I know. And they're not here today because they, of course, have to come from northern Saskatchewan. So I can take those questions under advisement and get you answers to those questions.

Mr. Wakefield: — Thank you, Madam Minister. I would appreciate just some examples of what these programs have been, what their . . . your evaluation of their effectiveness.

And I have another more specific question if you could please relay that too — the one under the sub-programs, northern development fund, of 1.730 million, for this particular estimate it's up slightly from 1999-2000, lower a little bit from the year previous. Can you tell me what that fund is intended for, how it's administered, and where the fund is at this position . . . at this time, who's in control of the fund, and what's it intended for?

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Mr. Chairman, we will check with *Hansard*, get the transcript of the question. We'll send it to Northern Affairs and we'll be sure that you get an answer to those questions.

Mr. Wakefield: — Thank you, Madam Minister. Mr. Chairman, another question I would like to propose now is focusing on the Saskatchewan Opportunities Corporation. And I know it has a very extensive investment portfolio, there's several aspects . . . or several reports that I've looked at and summaries.

Could I just get an overview again please of what the objective, the overriding objective, for Saskatchewan Opportunities Corporation is? And in fact what its mandate is in terms of its economic development opportunities here in Saskatchewan?

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Mr. Chairman, yes. To the member, thank you very much for that question. Every province and virtually every state in the United States has a vehicle of this kind. And really the issue is there are many usually small, but sometimes medium-sized, businesses that simply would not get off the ground, would not see the light of day if they had to rely on traditional financing mechanisms.

That is if they had to go to the banks or even the credit unions or even sometimes other funds, they wouldn't get access to capital because they often don't have a track record, they're brand new companies. They are companies like . . . One of the examples that I use in our province is the Moose Jaw spa. Who would have ever believed that you could have a successful spa in Moose Jaw?

And so they come to an agency like the Saskatchewan Opportunities Corporation, which takes newer, smaller, in some senses riskier — but not always, just newer and smaller sometimes — ventures that traditional institutions, financial institutions won't lend money to.

This corporation has acted very effectively. It's created about . . . created or sustained about 1,700 jobs. It's levered 38 . . . it's invested about \$38 million dollars and levered much more activity from the private sector.

And I think the point that has to be emphasized, is there's no cost to the taxpayer. In fact, there's a return on the investment that SOCO (Saskatchewan Opportunities Corporation) makes. We actually make money on our investments. We've been fortunate because if you look at the track record, the success record is very, very, very high.

So from our point of view, the taxpayer is not footing the bill. There are benefits in terms of jobs being created, and there are benefits in terms of many, many businesses in this province that are incredibly successful, started with the help of SOCO.

Mr. Wakefield: — Thank you, Madam Minister. Mr. Chairman, I was looking at the financial statements of Saskatchewan Opportunities Corporation annual report 1999. And under the financial position statement on page 22, I noticed that the investments are listed as \$18,773,000 for 1999. And that's up quite significantly over 1998.

Can you give me a bit of a summary as to why that increase in investment please?

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Mr. Chairman, to the member opposite, the investments are all listed on page 12 of the report. And as you'll see there's been a lot of activity in that time period in hog barns, which is a very key sector of our economy . . . (inaudible) . . . to promote hog barns, and to promote the processing of pork in our province.

And you talk to people, like I was just talking to the ambassador from China — they're big consumers of our agriculture products — and ag biotech is another area where there's a lot of activity in this past year. And when you travel to different parts of the world, Saskatoon is known to people in different parts of the world because of its world-wide reputation in agriculture biotechnology. It is truly a world leader there.

And if you look at some of the companies that are at Innovation Place at ag biotech, they are literally from all over the world. So that's the activity that's occurred. And as I say the specific firms are listed on page 12.

(1600)

Mr. Wakefield: — Well thank you, Madam Minister. Those on page 12 do in fact list the . . . both the equity, which would be the investments, and also loans.

Looking at the number of loans, for instance, and I'm looking at the investments in the notes on page 26, I noticed that the loans receivable as well has increased — as well as the equity — it's increased considerably from ten million three roughly to eighteen million. That's quite a percentage increase over seven million.

Can you tell me if all those loans that are listed there under loans receivable, are in fact . . . are they currently in place? Are there any of them in jeopardy at this time? Or what is the risk for the taxpayers of Saskatchewan against these loans?

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — They are all in place. They are none that are regarded as risky to the taxpayer. And a lot of them are in the agricultural area, particularly in diversification in

livestock activities. And so, as I say, that's the explanation, but none of them are in a risky category.

Mr. Wakefield: — Thank you, Madam Minister, Mr. Chairman. Following that I, just for clarification, I noticed under that note 2 on the same page 26, there is an item called the total, and then under it less total provision for investment impairment, and following that, referring back I believe to loans receivable, there is an item called non-performing loans.

Can you give me an indication of the difference between investment impairment and non-performing loans because they're both listed under the investment section?

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Mr. Chairman, to the member opposite. They are essentially the same idea, and it's the idea that because you want to ensure that any risk there is covered, to set aside a certain provision; 25 per cent is set aside so that in case there is an impairment of a loan, you have the money set aside.

Now if you look at the level of loan loss provision and investment impairment which is essentially a provision for investment impairment, the same idea, you'll see that the loan loss provision is actually quite generous. It's conservative in the sense that we set aside a significant percentage of the capital to ensure that we aren't in a vulnerable position.

Mr. Wakefield: — Thank you, Madam Minister. I guess my question then would be from an investment in this year — sorry, I'm just going back to the number again — investment of 18.7 million or roughly 18.8 million as indicated in the financial position, you've set aside \$5 million for investment impairment. That's a significant percentage against loan.

That would lead the average person to suspect that a lot of these loans might be suspect or in trouble, or why would that kind of money be set aside against the investment impairment section of the report?

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — This is actually an accounting requirement; that is, it doesn't vary from year to year. It's just you're being very cautious. You're saying we're going to set aside this amount of money to ensure that if there is a problem with any of these loans, nobody is caught off guard; there's money to cover any losses.

It doesn't mean in any sense that you expect that level of losses. And if you look at the history of SOCO as I said before, you would find the success rate is very, very high. And those loan loss provisions then turn out to be a lot higher than they needed to have been. But we'd rather have them higher than they needed to have been than to be in a position where we were leaving the government, the taxpayer, vulnerable.

Mr. Wakefield: — Mr. Chairman, that sounds very prudent, and I just wondered why the loan loss provision has increased quite substantively in 1999 compared to 1998. There was a loan loss impairment there as well, but increased this year. Is that a signal of something?

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Mr. Chairman, to the member opposite. The only reason the loan loss provision has increased

is because the level of activity has increased. So it's just a percentage of the level of activity. The more money that you're lending or investing, the more the loan loss provision has to go up to ensure that you're covered.

Mr. Wakefield: — Thank you, Madam Minister. I guess that leads me to something that is similar in intent and also in that particular note where it says that the . . . included in the loans receivable is this \$3.645 million of non-performing loans. That is a provision set aside.

But I noticed that 3 million, 3.6 million roughly, has increased from only \$119,000 last year. That is a very significant increase and I'm wondering why that very large number from 1998.

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — First of all, I'd say to the member opposite that that figure needs to be explained.

What you're saying when you talk about a loan that's non-performing is that there are issues out there that have to be resolved. It doesn't mean though that you're potentially on the hook for that amount of money because you'll have for those loans or investments, collateral or security of various kinds which in . . . you haven't probably accessed yet.

But you put them in that category because they are the ones that you regard as, at that time, risky. And in many cases, the issues are worked out before you ever have to go to the collaterals or security.

But for all of those there would be as well collateral and security. So it doesn't mean in any sense that those number of dollars are at risk.

Mr. Wakefield: — Okay, thank you, Madam Minister. Mr. Chairman, would that mean then that some of these loans, although you called them not at risk and then we talk about a provision for risky, does that mean that some of the loans that you feel are pretty secure are in fact . . . non-performing to me would be that the interest is not paid, principal is not paid, but you still have confidence that they are going to, sooner or later, respond as you had anticipated in the earlier statement of non-risk.

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Right. You were asking me about the increase in activity of the loans receivable from 10 to 18. You asked me whether they were dispersed. They're dispersed. They're in good shape. There are no risk in those.

This is part of the whole portfolio going way back to the beginning. And so what this is really saying is that there is that amount of . . . those loans are non-performing right now. That is, they are not keeping up with their obligations. It doesn't mean that they're going to be written off as a loss though because those often are worked out over a period of time.

And certainly the other point is we will have security for those loans, or collateral of some kind, that we can access if in fact they go to the point of being more than just non-performing.

Mr. Wakefield: — Mr. Chairman, I appreciate that response. I'm just wondering if I could ask again — maybe I didn't hear the response or maybe I didn't understand it — why the

increase, the very large increase in 1999 over 1998.

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Mr. Chairman, to the member opposite. A couple of comments about this. First of all we're very cautious. That is, we quickly, if there's any problem at all in your payment, we'll put you in this category. So that if you miss one payment, you're very likely to end up in this category. So it doesn't mean in any sense that you've got a long-term problem. You may have a short-term problem.

If there's any one explanation for the increase in the people in that category, was because of the amount of investment in hog barns, the downturn in hog prices. Now because prices will come back up, a lot of these, if you ask today, would not be in this category. They would have exited from this category back into the performing category.

Mr. Wakefield: — Thank you, Madam Minister. If I understood you correctly, that might be an anomaly just for 1999, depending upon things like the hog barn and other commodities that affect the ability to service the loan for SOCO. Is that correct?

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Yes, that's correct. Because a fair number of our investments are in agriculture in one way or another. And so if there have been problems as there have been in prices, this can be a . . . this can temporarily affect such numbers. But once you come out of the problem, most companies usually do survive and they go out into performing loans once the prices go back up.

Mr. Wakefield: — Thank you, Madam Minister. I think I have that clear.

On page 23 of the annual report under statement of operations and retained earnings, under the section, revenue, operating contribution from the General Revenue Fund, I see a figure of 4.085 million, up slightly from the year before.

I assume that that operating contribution . . . would that be things like rent against capital projects that you have? And what might those capital projects be?

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — That money would be primarily to fund research parks, operations, and the investment division.

But the other thing that we haven't talked about, which is a huge part of this portfolio, is the research parks — the proposed research park in Regina and the very, very well-known, world-class Innovation Place research park in Saskatoon.

Which again, to go back to my ambassador from China, he was on his way to Saskatoon to visit Innovation Place because they're extremely interested in working with us on what we're doing in agricultural biotechnology. He thinks it's got a tremendous future in his country and wants to learn from us.

So that's the other part — the big part that's in that subvote . . . or that number.

Mr. Wakefield: — Thank you, Madam Minister. I thought it might be. And I want to talk a little bit about the research park because I think it really is a showpiece for Saskatchewan and

has a lot of potential.

But before I get there, under that same revenue heading that I was referring to earlier, on page 23, statement of operations and retained earnings, there's another entry called investment contribution, and that would be from the General Revenue Fund as well — 2.664 million.

Now that is a very significant increase from 1998, which was 1.072 — well over a \$6 million increase between the last figure of operating contributions and investment contributions.

What particularly is the investment contribution? Is that for investing or is that for a potential for bad loans that you were referring to earlier?

(1615)

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Mr. Chairman, it's the latter. That is exclusively the loan loss provision. So it's the money that is there in case there is a problem with any of the loans, and it's increased dramatically just because the activity has increased dramatically. Because you're lending, you're investing more; you have to have a higher loan loss provision but it's exclusively loan loss provision.

Mr. Wakefield: — Thank you, Madam Minister. I guess my comment is that that is a very significant increase in a demand on the taxpayers' ability to contribute money to this SOCO — almost a 45 per cent increase in 1999 over 1998, if you look at both the operating contribution and investment contribution.

When I look at the provision of \$2.6 million from taxpayers' money set aside for potentially a bad loan or bad investment, that makes me kind of nervous that there isn't the confidence there that I would have hoped to see from some of these investments.

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Again to the member opposite, as I explained before it's an accounting requirement that is 25 per cent no matter what you're investing in. It's got nothing to do with the particular companies you're investing in. Automatically from an accounting point of view, 25 per cent has to be set aside as a loan loss provision, same as a bank would have to. So that if there was a problem and there was for some reason or other a big sector of the economy that was completely wiped out, you wouldn't be . . . you would be able to meet your obligations and the taxpayer wouldn't be vulnerable.

So it's just an accounting requirement. It's an automatic 25 per cent. And all that really says is there's more activity in the province. And I think if you look at Saskatchewan, one of the things that you're going to find is that rather than needing less of this, what I would call venture capital type money, we probably more of it than we do have.

Mr. Wakefield: — Thank you, Madam Minister. I would agree that if our future is to look bright we need sources of venture capital. Where we get that from I guess will be determined.

I want to go back to your comment about the research part, because I think it is like such a showpiece for the province. I

see that in 1999 under the financial position under assets, it's showing \$105.528 million and I assume that includes the assets both in Saskatoon, Innovation Place, and also the new park here in Regina as well.

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — I agree with the member opposite. And I actually would not mind reading into the record, comments made by the Bank of Montreal, Vice-Chair, and he's talking about Innovation Place in Saskatoon. And he said:

He singled out the work being done in Saskatoon by the Saskatchewan Opportunities Corporation. "With 100 companies involved in advanced research and development, Innovation Place in Saskatoon is an outstanding example to other Canadian cities on the potential of joint ventures by the public and private sectors," . . . "And the list of value-adding capabilities in Saskatchewan goes on and on, from extensive expertise in information technology and telecommunications to the pure science promise of the Canadian Light Source Synchrotron."

And then he goes on to explain what a Synchrotron does.

Mr. Chisholm emphasized that making the transition from capabilities to commercialization is where many e-business clusters falter. As a member of the Canadian e-Business Opportunities Roundtable, created to establish Canada as a globally recognized e-business leader . . . (he) was one of 30 Canadian business executives who delivered a report . . . to this year's federal budget:

I agree with the member opposite. Innovation Place is something that put Saskatchewan on the map well beyond our province and well beyond our country. I can go to other parts of the world, as I say, Canada's ambassador . . . I mean China's ambassador to Canada was off to Innovation Place because they want to learn from what we're doing there as well.

Mr. Wakefield: — Thank you, Madam Minister. Mr. Chairman, just following up on the research park, what percentage of occupancy do we have here in the research park in Regina? And what do we have in Saskatoon?

I know it's a very costly infrastructure that we have here. And I want to just for the record, make sure that we have a record of what the occupancy is here in Regina particularly.

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Mr. Chairman, the Regina research park isn't constructed yet. It's still a concept. It's still a series of proposed buildings, but it's not constructed.

In Saskatoon the occupancy rate at Innovation Place would be well over 90 per cent. In fact our main problem at Innovation Place is keeping up with demand. It's a park that is actually difficult to get into.

We only build buildings at Innovation Place when we have the tenants already lined up. We think of ourselves as the landlord. When the tenants are lined up ready to pay the rent we'll build the building or the research facility. But we always have waiting lists for them to get in. And the occupancy, as I say, is well over 90 per cent.

Mr. Wakefield: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for the correction on the Regina facility. But following with your question, you would only move ahead with the Regina park if there was tenants already lined up. I guess that was the direction that I was going with my question.

Is in fact . . . is there a list of people interested in coming into that park, and is some of this money that we've . . . you've set aside in 1999 going to go toward that, or is that just for the existing park?

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Mr. Chairman, the answer to both questions is yes and yes. Part of the money is for the Regina research park. It's being constructed because we have tenants who are ready to move into it when it's constructed.

Mr. Wakefield: — Okay, thank you, Madam Minister. Mr. Chairman, I have . . . still talking about SOCO — just because it's such a varied and broad investment portfolio that you have — and I'm looking at a report actually from just this past April which I think is very similar to the one that you have published very recently.

I guess I'm wondering what the parameters are for selecting a particular investment or investment opportunity as you might say it and I might see it rather. And I guess the one that I would look to . . . I'm very familiar from my own constituency, the loan, the \$2 million loan that was placed with Ballater exploration in the Lloydminster area. At least Ballater exploration from Calgary, with the loan going to a Saskatchewan field.

What was the . . . why was Ballater selected? There's a lot of oil companies in that area. They operate side by side with other companies — Husky, and we can name others — I wondered why Ballater was given the honour of the \$2 million loan in this case.

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — I would say, first of all, they came to us; they applied. It's from the point of view of return on investment, we can't give you all the details, but it's a very attractive investment.

Our policy is that we go after companies in strategic sectors of the economy, agriculture, agri-food, oil, gas, forestry are the key sectors of our economy that we focus on as growth sectors or the preferred sectors.

Our criteria is much tighter than Alberta's. Alberta's will fund mom-and-pop operations which are very controversial. And very disliked by the business community because we don't like investing in your company when you're competing with the person sitting right next to you. That is we don't want to compete, we don't want to compete with the private sector.

So we try to avoid that. We try to focus on companies that are in key sectors that are not . . . they cannot be in retail. They cannot be at the retail level and we cannot be saying that we're supporting your corner store relative to somebody else's. That's a bad place for government to be and it causes a lot of criticism of agencies that do that.

So our Opportunities Corporation — which is actually the same

name as the Alberta one — is much more constrained in terms of not competing, getting in there and favouring one kind of a sector company over another.

So this company came to us with a proposal. It's attractive in terms of return on investment, but it would be open to any one of those companies, and we would welcome those others coming with a similar proposal because it is a strategic sector and it is one that is a growth sector in the economy.

Mr. Wakefield: — Thank you, Madam Minister. It's an area that I think has not been investigated before. I think this is one of the original investments into the petroleum field if I remember some of the discussion and press statements earlier.

And I know there are some people and younger people that venture, young entrepreneurs wanting to get established in the oil industry with the innovation of one kind or another. They were turned down or the conditions were so stringent that they just actually backed away and in fact moved to Alberta to use some of the facilities there. And now we don't have them as either a resident or a company.

So I'm wondering, is the focus of those kind of investments, is it for investment return for SOCO or is it for venture capital to try to help these young people or early initiatives get off the ground and established?

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Certainly the goal, as I mentioned at the beginning, is to take small- and medium-sized enterprises that often don't have a track record and get them off the ground. So that's the main goal. But it has to be commercially viable, because if it isn't commercially viable, really what you're doing is giving away taxpayers' dollars.

And I think SOCO has a good track record in taking on ventures that are new and don't have a track record. The Temple Gardens spa in Moose Jaw which I gather is now planning yet another expansion, and it's one of the most successful tourism facilities in the whole province. We backed that when a lot of conventional lenders would have said, a spa? We don't think it's . . . we don't think a spa is going to fly in Moose Jaw.

So we have no problem backing something that is new without a track record. But what it has to show is commercial viability, that it's going to return the money back to the taxpayer. And so . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . well this wasn't from SOCO. We're talking about SOCO. And I think if you look at the track record, it's a very good track record.

Mr. Wakefield: — Thank you, Madam Minister. I'd like to look at an example of Clifton Associates. I see that they're developing engineering software programs used for environmental management. That's a million dollar loan. Can you give me some assurance that that software which shouldn't cost a million dollars, that particular loan is going to what the description has stated?

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — If you look at . . . that's a company in Innovation Place as well. If you look at what they're doing, it's leading edge. It's leading edge in terms of the engineering component, the information technology component. And that

particular loan was to assist them in exporting. Because we have to get more and more of our companies into the export markets.

And you may remember that there was a ceremony just about a month ago with Clifton Associates landing a major contract in Latin America — in Central America actually — with the Government of Colombia to provide environmental equipment, environmental technology to Colombia.

So their goal was to expand into export markets. And certainly if you look at the recent announcement of that major contract just a few weeks ago, they're succeeding in that goal.

Mr. Wakefield: — Yes, Madam Minister, I remember the press release. So against an engineering company that develops the software and then looking at future export markets, I assume then that the million dollars is fully covered by some kind of security that SOCO is comfortable with.

(1630)

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — All loans have to be covered by some kind of collateral security that we feel comfortable with, that in the end of the day we will be in a secure position.

Mr. Wakefield: — Thanks, Madam Minister, I hope that's right. The other question that I have about one of these other ones . . . and I'm selecting some of the ones that I've kind of red flagged because I thought they were interesting. One of course is Shuttle Craft International that has been in the papers recently — that's a listing here at least — a 1.25 . . . a \$1.250 million loan, and from the press releases that I've seen, that's a loan that might in fact be in jeopardy if Shuttle Craft International is . . . has ceased operation.

Or maybe you can tell me what the status of Shuttle Craft International is and how SOCO's involvement continues there, please?

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — On that one we're still looking at restructuring and refinancing options for Shuttle Craft, and now you know that you're getting into difficult territory in terms of talking of the status of a loan that is under current consideration.

I would say about Shuttle Craft is it was one of the big winners of the ABEX (Achievement in Business Excellence) awards, the Saskatchewan business excellence awards. So it was a company that was regarded as a star, and obviously it ran into some difficulties.

We're still working on that one, and that's about all I can say right now.

Mr. Wakefield: — Thank you, Madam Minister. Mr. Chairman, then is it the . . . can I make an assumption that some of these loans might turn into equity positions in the restructuring? Not trying to get into the details, but is that a common practice?

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — All I can really say to the member opposite is what we'll do is we'll do the due diligence. The goal is always to ensure that a company carries on and survives, but

we have to look at the whole scenario.

And we're in a state now where that's about all I can say about that particular investment.

Mr. Wakefield: — Okay. Thank you, Madam Minister, and Mr. Chairman. It might only be only one and a quarter million, but it's taxpayers' money, and I think that disclosure sooner or later is really warranted.

The other one that I've red flagged . . . And I'm not sure, Mr. Chairman, how much time we have to proceed here. Is there another estimates to be followed?

Then I have another question if I could then, Mr. Chair, and it would be regarding Unitec International Controls Corp., Burnaby, British Columbia. I see that they have on your record a \$2 million loan. And they're talking about manufacturing systems sensory control and data acquisition systems and environmental monitoring equipment.

Can you tell me, because it was Burnaby, BC (British Columbia), can you tell me a bit about that particular portfolio and where is it going?

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Okay. The company's actually located in Regina and they actually supply SaskEnergy with equipment.

I would say before we wrap this up, when you have that many loans and investments out there, I mean you know what the odds are. There are going to be some . . . and this isn't one by the way. It's got nothing to do with the last company I'm talking about.

There are going to be some that — the member from Kindersley should get his files straight; we're talking about SOCO — there are going to be some that are going to be problematic. But they're all done on a commercial basis, and you'd find exactly the same thing in a credit union or a bank, as you know. And if you look at the track record here, it's actually quite a good track record because you'd find over 90 per cent have panned out the way they should so far.

Mr. Chairman, I move that we now rise and report progress.

General Revenue Fund Public Service Commission Vote 33

The Chair: — Before I call the first subvote on page 100, I'll invite the hon. minister to introduce her officials.

Hon. Ms. Hamilton: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. I would like to introduce to you today Wynne Young who is the Chair of the Public Service Commission; and seated on my right behind Wynne is Clare Isman. Clare is executive director of human resource development division of the Public Service Commission. Beside Clare and behind me, directly behind me, is Sharon Roulston, director, administrative and information services division; and diagonal to myself and just beside Sharon is Rick McKillop, who is executive director of employee relations for the Public Service Commission.

The Chair: — Thank you, Minister.

Subvote (PS01)

Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. And I'd like to thank the minister and her officials for being here.

My first question from the estimates is regarding the administration. It is my understanding that role of the administration is to provide excellent . . . or executive direction, leadership, and a variety of other tasks.

Madam Minister, the costs for the administration is estimated to increase by over \$100,000. Could you please indicate the need for such a drastic increase?

Hon. Ms. Hamilton: — Yes, I thank the member opposite for the question. As you would know, the Public Service Commission is responsible for the collective agreements and salary adjustments for the public service. And so you would see an increase of \$57,000 for the Public Service Commission itself for pay equity and negotiated salary increases.

You would see a \$65,000 increase for a return of a one-time information technology funding that is being reduced later, which will help for reductions in later years. And as you would know, the Public Service moved to a new location, which also on the savings side produced a savings of \$352,000 per year.

So we do have some increases there related to salaries and to some information technology advancements.

Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you, Madam Minister. Mr. Chair, Madam Minister, in going through the most recent *Public Accounts* book that I have, I noticed an unusual expenditure of \$35,652 to Peoples Jewellers. Could you explain why we had that expenditure?

Hon. Ms. Hamilton: — Yes, I would say to the member opposite, it was a pleasure for me this year to attend the long-service recognition awards nights. And as you would know, we baby boomers are making quite an impression all through the land; this is not any different within the public service. And so we honoured 400 individuals this year for service of 25 years, 30, and 35 years. They could choose a watch for their long service commitment — or rings — and the money is allocated through the Public Service Commission, but each department then is responsible to pay for the costs of the long service recipients. Thank you.

Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you, Madam Minister. Mr. Chair, Madam Minister, also in this same *Public Accounts*, there is \$130,000 spent on travel expenses. Could you please provide some indication as to why there would be that travel expense within the Public Service Commission?

Hon. Ms. Hamilton: — I thank the member opposite for the question. It's been outlined to me that we do participate with other provinces in many conferences to talk about compensation and human resources issues, and training and staffing and the updated information on how we would relate to the public service.

And many items are related to the Chair of the Public Service Commission who would travel to such things as The Conference Board of Canada public sector executives network meeting, which was held in Winnipeg; the civil service commissioners' annual conference and meeting, which was held in St. John's, Newfoundland; the IPAC (Institute of Public Administration of Canada) round table that occurred in January in Edmonton, Alberta; public services sector executives network that was held in Toronto.

So those would all be related to one or perhaps a few individuals depending on their area of expertise to be able to take advantage of national conferences and training opportunities, and to learn what's the newest and updated material in the area of training opportunities, executive/human resource decisions that are taken and those kinds of things. Thank you.

Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you, Madam Minister. Mr. Chair, Madam Minister, have you had an increase in the number of public servants in your department, and if so — from last fiscal year to this one — and if so, in what departments have we increased public servants on that are hired?

Hon. Ms. Hamilton: — Just for clarification if the member opposite wouldn't mind, are you speaking about the Public Service itself and the administration of the Public Service? Or you're saying government-wide, what would be the difference in the number of people employed from last year to this year?

Ms. Harpauer: — Government-wide.

(1645)

Hon. Ms. Hamilton: — This year's budget overall would show a net increase of about 68 full-time equivalents, and that's over the budget the year before. On a department by department basis, you would see four departments have no change at all, six see a reduction in their staffing complement, and eight receive an increase.

Now largely this budget has been called almost a status quo budget, and as I said, with some increasing slightly and some having a reduction. The four department areas that have the majority of the increases, one would be no surprise to you and your members opposite, would be Agriculture and Food with 60 full-time equivalent increase. Many of them transferred in from the Agricultural Credit Corporation and they weren't previously recorded in our estimates. So that was the net influx there.

The next one again wouldn't be a surprise. My colleague, the Minister of Highways, mentioned that we have additional workers who are trying to get much needed work done on our highways. And they would see a full-time equivalent increase of about 45.

And in Social Services. We've had that discussion as well in the Assembly and the workload of people who are involved in people issues and protections of people and children in our communities, you would see 40 for regional services to address the workload issue. So you would see overall in Social Services about a 47 full-time equivalent increase.

Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you, Madam Minister. Mr. Chair, Madam Minister, I'm going to a specific issue that I'm sure has been brought to your attention because I've received a letter, and there is also a letter to the editor in the newspaper. It's a letter from a Miss Wendy Stone, indicated that those who graduated with a Bachelor of Human Justice degree from the University of Regina will no longer be recognized as an equivalent to the Bachelor of Social Work and a Bachelor of Indian Social Work, and this is apparently a new policy for your department.

Could you please indicate the need for the change of your policy, particularly since there are so many of our youth that are leaving the province due to a lack of job opportunities, and particularly since we need so many workers in the social work area?

Hon. Ms. Hamilton: — We have tried in as many areas as possible, to move to a competencies model. And each department gives us information on what they would see would be equivalencies when we're talking about jobs and qualifications and degree qualifications.

And so Social Services has been the one that gives us that information. And we try to provide, then, what would be the core competencies that would be needed for those positions and what would be equivalent educational requirements in those areas. They are the ones dealing with Ms. Stone and her complaint in that area.

That's all I can say on behalf of the Public Service Commission.

Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you, Madam Minister. Mr. Chair, Madam Minister, in the Public Service Commission's annual report it states that under the collective bargaining that it will be phased in and the final pay equity adjustments will occur on April of the year 2001. Madam Minister, my question is what will be the cost of this pay equity adjustment to your department?

Hon. Ms. Hamilton: — Thank you. The member opposite will know that equal pay for work of equal value can be done in a number of ways. We've chosen to do that in a structural way and to look at the job evaluations. To provide that we don't see sort of a bump up at a one time and then see the lag come into the future, we've tried to do that job by job in a structural way.

And when that is completely implemented through executive government as of April 1, 2001, the total cost for the new job classifications and the equal pay for work of equal value will be \$16.1 million.

Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you, Madam Minister. Mr. Chair, Madam Minister, with all the panic centred on the Y2K (Year 2000) bug that we had last year and all the computer systems were required to go through major upgrades in order to become Y2K compliant, could you tell me what the cost was for your department?

Hon. Ms. Hamilton: — Thank you. In the package of standard answers that we gave to you, there's a reference in one of those pages to the computer hardware, software, and training

supplies. And on that page, it does say for toner cartridges, \$890,000, and those are capital costs over the piece.

But you would be asking more about some of the computer maintenance upgrading and so on. And it's hard to differentiate because we did have a major purchasing, as I mentioned earlier when you asked the question earlier about where the expenditures were. One of them is for an updating of a system that would see better tracking of the people who are employed and their salaries, and to be able to keep track of all of that on a more updated basis.

And the overall cost was about \$1.6 million last year. Some of that would be Y2K related, but some of it would just be ongoing maintenance or upgrading and some of the purchasing to complete the system that we've gone into at present.

Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you, Madam Minister. Mr. Chair, Madam Minister, could you please indicate if you have any major capital projects that are currently underway or that you're planning for the near future?

Hon. Ms. Hamilton: — To the member opposite, we've outlined to you where we've just looked at the new computer system and the maintenance, the Y2K commitments to those. We have new premises that are now in our second year. They are saving us some dollars. And there are no planned additional capital expenditures in that way.

Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you, Madam Minister, Mr. Chair. Madam Minister, for a final question, I'd like to give you the opportunity just to give a brief outline of the mandate of your department.

Hon. Ms. Hamilton: — Well we do have a strategic plan, so I'll answer the question in two ways. First to tell you basically all provinces have a Public Service Commission. We're certainly not alone in that and it has been in place for a good number of years everywhere and is responsible for the independence of the hiring practices, to look at a professional civil service, so the training and development of our employees.

And as the legislated mandate outlines, the Public Service Commission is the independent agency responsible for leading effective human resource management in government and representing the public interest in the administration of The Public Service Act.

And to that end, we try to . . . as our vision outline, that a preferred employer that attracts and retains people to the public service, and people who are talented with commitment and innovation and have innovative ideas that can contribute to the upgrading and the professionalism of the civil service.

It's acknowledged for its effective human resource management policies and practices. And in that I put, respect for its attitudes, knowledge, and skills, and so responsible for . . . for example in equity initiatives, the education and the training that people would need to make sure we're carrying forward with our goal in the equity issues.

We have ongoing training and development of our managers and people who are in the field with respect to human resources

and the hiring practices. And people who are dedicated to providing quality, affordable services that Saskatchewan citizens need, and representative of the diversity of the province.

So with that we, in all of our areas, try to maintain the integrity and the independence and the professionalism of the civil service that would give government its knowledge base, recommendations, and information in all of the critical areas of service to the public today.

Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you, Madam Minister, and I thank all your officials for being here. I have no further questions.

Subvote (PS01) agreed to.

Subvotes (PS02), (PS06), (PS04), (PS03) agreed to.

Vote 33 agreed to.

Hon. Ms. Hamilton: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. I would just like to thank the member opposite for the work and the interest in the vision and the goals of the public service for the province of Saskatchewan, and thank the officials for their support, and the timely advancing of the information to me to be able to respond to you.

And with that I would move that the committee rise, report progress, and ask for leave to sit again.

The committee reported progress.

The Assembly adjourned at 5 p.m.