

The Assembly met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRESENTING PETITIONS

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I stand today in the Legislative Assembly to present petitions to retain the Lanigan and Watrous hospitals. And the prayer reads as follows, Mr. Speaker:

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 the signatures on this petition, Mr. Speaker, are from the community of Young.

I so present.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also have a petition to present today regarding the Lanigan and Watrous hospitals.

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.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

The people who have signed this petition are from Allan, Clavet, and Lanigan, Mr. Speaker.

Ms. Eagles: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I too have a petition to present on behalf of Saskatchewan citizens concerned about the serious health effects in this province. 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.

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

And this is signed by citizens of Lanigan and Saskatoon.

I so present. Thank you.

Ms. Bakken: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to present a petition on behalf of people in Saskatchewan who are concerned about health care. And the petition . . . 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.

I so present on behalf of people from Saskatoon, Bruno, and

Lanigan.

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also like to present a petition concerning hospital closures:

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.

Signed by people from Lanigan and Watrous.

Mr. Brkich: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition here of citizens opposed to enforced municipal amalgamation:

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

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

Signed by the good citizens of Buena Vista.

I so present.

Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today with a petition of citizens concerned about hospital closures. 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 in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

The concerned citizens are from the communities of Lanigan and Guernsey.

I so present.

Mr. Wiberg: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I have a petition this morning in regards to the sad state of roads in this province. The prayer reads as follows, Mr. Speaker:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to provide the necessary resources to restore the Paddockwood Access Road to an acceptable state.

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

And, Mr. Speaker, this petition is signed by people throughout the entire province of Saskatchewan.

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 Lanigan and Watrous hospitals:

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 will remain open.

And the signatures on this petition are from Lanigan, Jansen, and a couple from Meadow Lake.

I so present.

Mr. Stewart: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to present a petition signed by citizens concerned with the possible closures of the Lanigan and Watrous hospitals. 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 the Lanigan and Watrous hospitals remain open.

And the petition is signed by individuals from the communities of Lanigan, Bruno, Guernsey, Regina, Semans, Watrous, St. Gregor, and Leroy.

And I so present.

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is with great responsibility that I rise to present a petition to retain 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.

As is duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

This petition is signed by the good citizens of Lanigan, Semans, and Nokomis, Mr. Speaker.

I so present.

Mr. Kowalsky: — Mr. Speaker, I have a petition here that I'm presenting on behalf of some young people in Saskatchewan. And they urge that smoking be banned in public places.

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.

These are petitions of citizens of the province petitioning the Assembly on the following matters:

The amalgamation of municipalities;

Reduction of fuel taxes;

Cellular service in Prud'homme, Bruno, Vonda, Cudworth, Strasbourg, Duval, Govan, and Bulvea;

The maintenance of the hospitals in Lanigan and Watrous;

And a total ban on smoking in public places and workplaces.

NOTICES OF MOTIONS AND QUESTIONS

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I give notice that I shall on day no. 62 ask the government the following question:

To the Minister of Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Affairs: how much money has the province of Saskatchewan given to the Metis Nation of Saskatchewan in the last fiscal year; and please provide a breakdown as to what agencies and/or persons this money was distributed.

Mr. Brkich: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I give notice I shall on day no. 62 ask the government the following question:

To the Minister of Highways and Transportation: the last fiscal year, how much revenue did your department receive from the sale of road-building equipment, either through private sale or public auction; and please provide detailed information on each item sold and the price.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Mr. Wartman: — Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to introduce to you and through you to this House, guests visiting us from Malaysia who are in your gallery with Dale Flavel, former member of this legislature.

They are Bryan Cheeng — and I'd ask them to stand, please — Bryan Cheeng and Ruth Onn. And they are here with the Anglican Church Mission Exchange, visiting Plains and Valley's parish which includes both Lumsden and Pense. So we're glad to have you here and I'd ask all to join in welcoming them, please.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wartman: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. While I'm on my feet, I would also like to introduce 26 students from Winston Knoll, grade 9 students. Winston Knoll is in my constituency. And they are sitting in the west gallery, accompanied by their teacher, Ms. Olena Lozowchuk.

And I would look forward to meeting with them following this session. And I would ask all to join in welcoming them here.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour today to stand and introduce to you and through you to the rest of the members in the Assembly, two people who have come here from the country of Germany. They are sitting in your gallery — Maria and Josef Fleming, if you could rise. Accompanying them is my husband Larry; my three daughters Crystal, Shannon, and Lindsay; and my mother-in-law Beth.

Could you please help me welcome them here today.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Trew: — Mr. Speaker, it's always a pleasure to introduce to you and through you, people. And today when the hon. member for Regina Qu'Appelle Valley introduced two guests moments ago, I did not hear him mention the former deputy speaker — who I see nodding saying, yes he was — but Dale Flavel. Anyway I guess that means you get introduced twice today.

It's really a treat to have you back in the legislature, Dale. I ask all members to join me in welcoming him.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to the members of this House, two people sitting in your gallery. Mr. Vern Hoyte and his son, Adam Hoyte, are residents of Regina Wascana Plains. And, Mr. Speaker, they've been great supporters and friends of the Saskatchewan Party. So I ask you to join us in welcoming them to the House this morning.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Kasperski: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker.

(The hon. member spoke for a time in German.)

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Draude: — Mr. Speaker, to you and through you to all members of the House, I'd like to introduce to you, 26 Grade 8 students from the beautiful town of Porcupine Plain, Saskatchewan.

Today with them is teachers Doug King and Debra Zeleny. I look forward to meeting with them later on along with one of my other constituents, the member from Carrot River Valley. So I'll see you later on.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly, two young gentlemen from Duck Lake, Saskatchewan.

Today in our gallery are Mr. Daniel Gigon and Mr. Travis Rothenberger. As well, Mr. Speaker, Travis has brought his mother along with him, Rose. Rose has been my constituency assistant for a number of years. I think, as a matter of fact, since just about 1986; does a great job for the people of Saskatchewan. And I would like them all to stand and be acknowledged. Welcome to the legislature.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to join with the member from Kelvington Wadena in welcoming the 26 grade 8 students from my hometown of Porcupine Plain. Extend a welcome to Debra Zeleny and Doug King. And I'd like to extend a special welcome to one of my favourite nephews in the

whole wide world, Denver Kwiatkowski and I also have a cousin in the group as well, Jeff Kwiatkowski.

So I'd ask everyone to join with me in welcoming them here today.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Osika: — Hon. members, I also have the pleasure of introducing students who are here seated in the Speaker's gallery, who are visiting from the Balcarres School. There are eight grade 12 students. They'll be leaving for lunch shortly, but then coming back to the building and enjoying a tour of the building.

Some of the members will also recognize Mr. Stynsky, the teacher who's accompanying them, and he's accompanied by Barry Chorneyka. Mr. Stynsky recently attended the Saskatchewan Social Sciences Teachers Institute on Parliamentary Democracy which my office hosted.

I will have the pleasure and the opportunity to meet with the students later in the Assembly to visit some more about the process and procedures that they'll witness here this morning.

I'd like to ask all hon. members to join me in welcoming them here to the Assembly.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

May Job Statistics

Mr. Thomson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday, thanks to the member from Saskatoon Sutherland, we learned that the Leader of the Opposition is not good with numbers. Today I regret to inform the Assembly the Sask Party leader is no better at predicting the future.

On Wednesday he spoke on CBC (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation) radio and said, quote:

On Friday the latest job statistics will be released and they are going to show that Saskatchewan has one of the worst job creation records in the country.

What can I say other than well, well, well, well. Perhaps I should say wrong, wrong, wrong, wrong, wrong. The stats were released today and guess what? Saskatchewan is the best in the West and is tied with Alberta.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Thomson: — Mr. Speaker, 496,100 people are working in Saskatchewan today; 18,000 more jobs than last month, 14,000 more than a year ago, 7,800 more young people.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Thomson: — Ninety-seven hundred fewer people are on unemployment, and yes, once again Regina has the lowest unemployment rate in the nation.

Mr. Speaker, all I can say is that the member, the Leader of the Opposition, should polish up the crystal ball because I think it's a little foggy. Thank you very much.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

First Nations Diabetes Coalition Formed

Mr. Wiberg: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, last evening I attended a presentation at the Sturgeon Lake First Nations which was preceded by a sumptuous banquet which I was very grateful for. Mr. Speaker, several First Nations in Saskatchewan have formed the First Nations Diabetes Coalition to combat the rapid increase of diabetes amongst Indians.

Indians have the highest rate of diabetes in North America. The average age of non-Indian diabetics is 61 years of age, Mr. Speaker, while the average age of Indian diabetics is 48 years of age. As you can see, Mr. Speaker, diabetes has reached epidemic proportions amongst Indians in our province.

Fortunately though, First Nations Diabetes . . . the First Nations Diabetes Coalition with help from Dr. Kam Vay Ung, of Sioux City, Iowa, are going to lead the charge in tackling this huge problem.

Dr. Ung has developed a world renowned process in establishing significant reductions of diabetes amongst North American Indians involving diet and exercise.

Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, there is still a large number of Indians losing limbs due to diabetic complications. Dr. Ung has also developed surgical techniques to save these limbs for all diabetics.

But, Mr. Speaker, there's one very large obstacle — Saskatchewan Health — whose bureaucratic health system discourages new, successful surgical techniques. So instead, Mr. Speaker, patients are going to Dr. Ung at their own expense — a shameful reminder of our so-called health care system.

Let's all hope that all diabetics will soon receive the dignified care here in Saskatchewan . . .

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

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Tourism Awareness Week Events

Mr. Addley: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I mentioned on Wednesday that this week is Saskatchewan Tourism Awareness Week and that we would be hearing stories and events taking place in constituencies throughout the province. Since we haven't heard anything from the opposition about tourism events in their ridings, I'd like to inform the Assembly that some of the events taking place around the province.

Throughout this week in Churchbridge, the constituency of Saltcoats, people will be celebrating the Churchbridge June Daze Homecoming. In Cannington, the community of Wawota, will be having its Fairmede Agricultural Fair. In Kindersley, Exhibitat "14" will be taking place. In Spiritwood, in the

constituency of Shellbrook-Spiritwood, The Great Canadian Show and Sale will take place today through tomorrow.

In Vibank, in the constituency of Indian Head-Milestone, the people of Vibank will be putting on their 10th annual Polkafest and Homecoming. In Warman, in the Rosthern constituency, the Diamond Rodeo and Family Days is taking place. In Hawarden, in the constituency of our friend from Arm River represents, the sports day will be taking place tomorrow. In Watrous constituency, the people of Lanigan will also be putting on a sports day tomorrow and Sunday.

Mr. Speaker, there are many more events taking place across this province this week to mention . . . and not enough time to mention them. I encourage all members of the opposition to share the good news taking place in their riding over the months to come. Thank you very much.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Tugaske Community Spirit

Mr. Brkich: — Mr. Speaker, I proudly stand in the House today to talk about a community in my constituency, which recently showed that their community spirit is alive and well in rural Saskatchewan.

The town of Tugaske, will have the grand opening of its new general store by late June or early July of this year.

What makes this event so special is the fact that earlier this spring the original store had suddenly burnt to the ground, leaving Tugaske's residents without a food store. Thankfully no one was hurt in the fire, but Shane and Doris Oram had lost their business. That's when the strong community spirit of this little town was suddenly put to the test.

Four days following the fire of April 4, community gathered on Saturday, April 8, and in 13 hours they had cleared the entire site, including the cement foundation. On April 14 a community benefit was held to assist the Orams in their rebuilding plans. The event raised 17,000 and on April 24 the cement was poured with new walls being erected May 1.

Mr. Speaker, the people of Tugaske and surrounding area came together, volunteers, equipment, and large amount of good will and co-operative spirit as essence of rural Saskatchewan. Along with the townspeople, many area farmers shut down their outfits to help out in this rebuilding process.

For Doris and Shane Oram, this whole process has been a miracle of community good will, Mr. Speaker. This is a fine example of rural towns willing to pull together to stay viable.

I congratulate everyone involved in Tugaske and the area, and I wish them all the best in the future.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I would add that now that this new store is in place in Tugaske, I would hope that the government would at least prepare the highways leading to it to ensure that its customers arrive safely. After . . .

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

Order.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Tourism Awareness Week

Ms. Lorje: — During Tourism Awareness Week, I want to remind all members of one of the many excellent attractions in my city of Saskatoon this summer. I particularly encourage the member from Cannington to make the journey to the banks of the Saskatchewan River to take part in Shakespeare on the Saskatchewan since he has demonstrated to this Assembly his love and appreciation of Shakespeare. His enthusiasm for the dramatic arts is laudable, and we are happy to provide an outlet for his passion.

This summer artistic director, Henry Woolf, and his fine cast and crew will be presenting two excellent, but seldom produced, Shakespearean plays. First up is the comedy, *A Winter's Tale*, which contains the line from which the Saskatchewan Party took its motto for this session, quote: "I am a feather for each wind that blows."

Shakespeare on the Saskatchewan's other production is the tragedy of *Richard III*. A play about a devious politician who abandons both his leader and his principles, and leads a rebellion against the rightly constituted political order of the day. The Saskatchewan Party should really enjoy this one.

So I invite everyone to Saskatoon's riverbanks this summer. The plays are world class, the setting is refreshingly beautiful, the acting is first rate, and the ambience is superb. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This week our province's tourism industry have held a number of special events across Saskatchewan to celebrate Tourism Awareness Week. And rightfully so the men and women involved in our tourism sector — be they volunteers, employees, or employers — consistently demonstrate year in, year out that our province can compete with any in terms of this particular competitive industry.

Congratulations to the entire sector for continuing to promote our province to our own citizens, Canada, and the world, and for the thousands of jobs they created and the wealth they've generated.

And congratulations to the NDP (New Democratic Party) government for their innovative ideas for the tourism industry, Mr. Speaker. Due to the NDP's unique new approach to highway maintenance, enterprising Saskatchewan businesses are now marketing new tourism products. The businesses along the important tourism route of Highway 35 to Tobin Lake are promoting 35 as the highway of a thousand lakes.

And, Mr. Speaker, the industry is also developing a new golf product; it's called portage golf. It's been developed at Harbour golf and country club which is surrounded by two of the most renowned NDP adventure trails — Highway 19 and 42. And yes, Mr. Deputy Premier, at Harbour you have to fix your own divots.

And finally, Mr. Speaker, the government's grand plan for highways has given us our newest tourism treasure. Soon Lake Diefenbaker will be Canada's largest fly-in fishing camp. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Highway Project Near Completion

Mr. Wartman: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to rise in the House today with the good news that final construction work on the Pasqua Street and Highway 11 interchange in my constituency begins this week. This is an incredibly busy intersection with over 14,500 vehicles passing per day. Therefore this project is important for safety and for the free flow of vehicles.

This will be the final stage of grading and surfacing construction on this project, with completion set for late September. I look forward to attending an official opening at that time.

Mr. Speaker, this project will employ approximately 81 full-time workers. The total cost of this investment will be close to \$7 million. Stage one of the roadway construction began in June 1999 with the twinning of Pasqua Street and the relocation of the off-ramp grid road and the IPSCO pond.

When finished, Pasqua Street will pass over Highway 11 with three open lanes across the bridge, two northbound, one southbound. A second southbound lane will begin from the Highway 11 off-ramp to Pasqua Street.

Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased that we are improving the traffic operation and safety on our high volume highways through this initiative. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ORAL QUESTIONS

Saskatchewan Patients Receive Health Care Outside the Province

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This morning my question is for the Minister of Health. Mr. Speaker, a couple of weeks ago the Premier was at a conference, yipping at the Premier of Alberta about how to run a health care system.

Turns out that the NDP here must actually think Alberta's running their health system quite well because, Madam Minister, you keep sending Saskatchewan people to Alberta for medical treatment.

Last year, Mr. Speaker, over 40,000 Saskatchewan residents were sent west to Alberta for treatment. That's fully, fully 4 per cent of our entire population. Just 17,000, just 17,000 Alberta patients came to Saskatchewan. That's about a half a per cent of their population.

To the Minister of Health: Madam Minister, where do you and the Premier come off criticizing Alberta health care when you rely on them so heavily to treat people here in Saskatchewan?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. When the federal government and the provinces entered into a national health care agreement in this country in the late 1960s, there was an arrangement made that regardless of where a person lived in this country they were entitled to health services. And we had what's called reciprocal agreements, Mr. Speaker.

As we know, the members asked for this information through written questions. We've provided them with that information. The Canada health system does have portability in this country, and that means that people in the province of Saskatchewan, the province of Manitoba, Alberta, and BC (British Columbia) and so on, are able to have their citizens treated in each other's provinces.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hermanson: — Well, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker, we can't argue with the premise that people can leave the province for health care. But the imbalance states how terrible our health care is.

The NDP health system here in Saskatchewan is failing. And if you dare say Alberta's is bad, then what you've given us in Saskatchewan is an absolute disaster. Thousands of people, Mr. Speaker, on waiting lists here in this province. Thousands have to be sent to Alberta and other provinces every year. And even more people now are choosing to avoid the waiting lists altogether by going to the United States for their treatment.

And yet what does the Premier like to do? Instead of taking responsibility for his own failing system, he likes — like the NDP always do — point the finger at everybody else. He likes to point the finger at Alberta or the United States.

Madam Minister, how many patients are you going to send to Alberta this year? How much worse is it going to be here before . . . or after you choose to close more hospitals and hospital beds. What's the prognosis for our province?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Mr. Speaker, as the member may not know, all provinces in the country have similar problems and the problems are this, that in 1993 the federal government began to reduce the Canada Health and Social Transfer, which meant that for all provinces in this country \$4.2 billion was taken away from the provinces.

And you know what, Mr. Speaker? Every province and every territory in this county back-filled that money with provincial dollars.

Now, Mr. Speaker, including the Minister of Health from Alberta and the Minister of Health from Ontario, all Health ministers have been lobbying for the full restoration of the CHST (Canada Health and Social Transfer) and an escalator.

And what does that Leader of the Opposition do when we're there trying to convince the federal government? You say no

more money for the provinces.

Well, Mr. Speaker, that member has no idea what's happening in health care in this country and that member has no credibility when it comes to health care in this country.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The minister raises her voice to try to cover up the despicable shape of health care in Saskatchewan. The Premier likes to . . . to accuse everyone else of destroying medicare and the minister is trying to blame the federal government.

Mr. Speaker, it's that government, that Premier, and that minister who are destroying health care in Saskatchewan. They are violating the Canada Health Act. One of the fundamental pillars of the Canada Health Act is accessibility, and the NDP violates that principle every day in Saskatchewan.

The NDP have closed dozens of hospitals in rural Saskatchewan so rural people don't have access to 24-hour emergency service. And the NDP then closed Plains hospital and removed hundreds of hospitals beds in our major cities.

My question to the minister: Madam Minister, why are you violating the Canada Health Act?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Mr. Speaker, obviously there is inconsistency in the member's argument. And here is the inconsistency. That party is opposed to the Canada Health Act. He calls the five principles of the Canada Health Act mindless slogans.

One of the principles is portability, Mr. Member. And in fact that member is supporting Preston Manning as the new leader of the Canadian Alliance. And what does Preston Manning of the Canadian Alliance have to say about health care?

They say that they want to grant the provinces the widest latitude to pursue independent experiments on health care reform, which is code for permitting private health care in this country. And that's what that member stands for, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hermanson: — Mr. Speaker, let's talk about the fact. That minister can claim that she supports the Canada Health Act, but she and her government are violating the Canada Health Act.

The NDP say they oppose two-tier health care, yet they've created a two-tier health care system right here in Saskatchewan. And, Mr. Speaker, it's getting worse and worse every day. How much worse is it going to have to get before there's another round of hospital closures and more bed closures in Saskatchewan?

Madam Minister, why don't you stand up and give us the bad news today? How many more beds are you going to close? How many more hospitals are you going to close? How much more two-tier health care are we going to get? How much more

damage are you going to do to our health system here in Saskatchewan?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — You know, Mr. Speaker, this member who wants to be premier of this province, if you can believe it, does . . .

The Speaker: — Order. I'd ask all hon. members on both sides of the House to kindly come to order.

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — This member who wants to be the leader and the premier of this province doesn't understand the fundamentals of the Canada Health Act, Mr. Speaker. In fact, Mr. Speaker, his party calls the five principles which are agreed to by Canadians from coast to coast to coast as mindless slogans.

And what do they say about health care? They say let's allow private health care, which means that the people who have money have access and the people that don't are subject to the private system . . . or the public system.

Well, Mr. Speaker, let's look at the US (United States). The costs of health care in the US are tremendously higher than the costs in this country. And a cost-driver study will be released next week that shows that Canada has a . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Highway Maintenance Problems

Mr. Elhard: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, we brought you example of . . . or example after example of how poor road conditions affect people in this province and we'd like to highlight another concern, this one relating to health care.

Mr. Speaker, yesterday on CBC Radio, Denise Levorson, spoke candidly about how treacherous road conditions affect her job as an EMT (emergency medical technician). She related how precious time is wasted when ambulances are forced to slow down due to potholes or crumbling pavement. Even then rough rides affect patient care and the stress a patient may already be under is increased. The EMTs are not only faced with caring for the patient, but also worrying about the road.

Mr. Minister, your neglect of our provincial highways is also affecting health care. At what point are you going to realize you have to do more?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the question. Obviously we are concerned about individuals as they travel back and forth on our Saskatchewan roads. Mr. Speaker, that's why this year we've increased our Highways budget up to \$250 million — the highest in Saskatchewan's history — an increase of 6.6 per cent.

Mr. Speaker, our Highways budget at \$250 million represents

roughly less than half, almost barely a third, of the amount of interest that we pay annually on the provincial debt that they created. Mr. Speaker, I've done a calculation overnight. Mr. Speaker, at roughly \$2 million a day interest we could increase the amount of twinned roads at eight kilometres per day, Mr. Speaker.

Just so the public understands, we could build eight kilometres of structural pavement per day based on the amount of interest that we pay on the debt each and every day.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Elhard: — Mr. Speaker, I certainly hope we don't have to wait 800 days to have the roads fixed.

Mr. Speaker, EMTs are often dealing with life and death situations. When time is critical to the outcome EMTs say that they're losing time, and in many of these communities, which are hours away from the nearest emergency room, that time can mean the difference between life and death.

They're saying that putting in an IV (intravenous) or taking blood pressure, let alone conducting a more serious procedure, is extremely difficult when you and the patient are bouncing around in the back of an ambulance. Patients suffering severe injuries, especially back injuries, have a very difficult time during trips over these roads.

Mr. Minister, our highways are literally a lifeline for every community in this province. Excuses aren't what people want to hear right now. So when can the people expect to hear solutions and see some action from your government?

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Well again, Mr. Speaker, I agree with the logic of the question in that our highways are a lifeline. There's absolutely no doubt about it. But what I don't understand, Mr. Speaker, then is why do they come in here each and every day asking for us to reduce the gas tax, money that goes towards building our roads, Mr. Speaker. That's what I don't understand.

I don't understand why the opposition spoke in favour years ago of getting rid of the Crow rate which brought into this province \$320 million. We've got branch line abandonment now, Mr. Speaker, which causes many of the goods and services to now be forced to travel over the roads, creating rough roads. So I don't understand their logic.

You can't ask, Mr. Speaker, for increased services, improved roads, and yet reduce taxes. Those sorts of things, Mr. Speaker, simply do not add up.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Elhard: — Mr. Speaker, this government has been in charge of rural roads for the last nine years. It didn't take a crystal ball to perceive that we would have problems like we have today.

For several days now, Mr. Speaker, we've been asking this NDP-Liberal coalition government why they let the highways in this province deteriorate to the state they have. Why on earth,

when people pay the level of taxes they do in this province, are they also expected to go out and patch their own roads?

We've talked about how bad roads are affecting economic development in this province and the negative effect that the lack of commit . . .

The Speaker: — Order. Hon. colleagues, the question will be heard.

Mr. Elhard: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We've talked about how bad roads are affecting economic development in this province and the negative effect that the lack of commitment to highways in having on the road construction industry in this province. But all we've heard are empty excuses from an out-of-touch Highways minister and a little bit of California dreaming from the Deputy Premier.

Mr. Minister, will your government commit more money to the budget to the maintenance and construction areas in highways in the province of Saskatchewan this year?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Mr. Speaker, absolutely our provincial taxpayers' dollars should go to the right places as he described. It's just unfortunate that 13 cents on every dollar that our taxpayers pay here in Saskatchewan has to go towards paying the debt, Mr. Speaker.

Also I want to say, Mr. Speaker, that he was talking about tourism. Mr. Speaker, I want to describe for you some interesting statistics. Mr. Speaker, they claim and it's true that certainly our roads have impact on tourism. But, Mr. Speaker, just in this first quarter of the year 2000, we've had an increase, Mr. Speaker, of 100 per cent in the inquiries from Tourism Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker. An increase of 100 per cent.

So I think people are interested in coming to Saskatchewan. It's just unfortunate, Mr. Speaker, that these folks opposite preach so much doom and gloom, because there is lots of interest in Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Elhard: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There's lots of interest in Saskatchewan by tourists — once. They never come back after they've driven our roads.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Elhard: — Mr. Speaker, the Deputy Premier answered our questions on highways the other day. And he explained to the media that turning some of the highway system into this province . . . in this province over to the community volunteers was really an idea worth considering. He talked about how common it is in the United States for local people to fix their roads. And he even went so far as to mention the Boy Scouts and the Girl Guides getting involved in our problems here.

But this morning the MLA (Member of the Legislative Assembly) from Saskatoon Southeast said volunteers should certainly not be expected to take over road maintenance.

To the Minister of Highways, do you accept your responsibility to maintain our highways in this province, or are you planning a community adopt-a-highway program? Mr. Minister, which is it?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Mr. Speaker, I want to correct a fact on tourism, Mr. Speaker. Tourism, Mr. Speaker, happens to be the fastest growing industry in Saskatchewan, generating, last year, Mr. Speaker, \$1.14 billion in annual revenue and providing almost 42,000 jobs.

It just happens, Mr. Speaker, in that member's constituency there was an increase last year of 36 per cent, an increase in tourism of 36 per cent, most of them from Alberta. And I'll tell you what's happening as a result of tourism into Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, if we look at May 2000 over May of 1999, there was an increase of 14,600 new jobs. If you look at May 2000 versus April 2000, there was an increase of 18,100 new jobs. And all of these, Mr. Speaker, are full-time jobs.

Mr. Speaker, at 5.2 per cent unemployment, we're some of the lowest in Canada here in Saskatchewan. Mr. Speaker, I think that Saskatchewan is doing a very good job.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Elhard: — Mr. Speaker, the number one concern of tourism officials in southwest Saskatchewan is not the inquiries and not the guests when they get there, but how to handle the fall-out from the roads they have to travel over on their way to the tourist sites.

Mr. Speaker, the member from Saskatoon Southeast this morning also promoted the NDP plan to revert Saskatchewan highways back to gravel. She said some of our rural roads have less traffic on them than the back alley behind her Saskatoon home. That is appalling. She suggested that her back alley is more important to maintain than our rural roads.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to invite the minister and the member from Saskatoon Southeast to drive down some of the roads our members have highlighted throughout this week. I invite her to talk to rural people and listen to how they have to use those roads to get to work, to pick up their groceries, to pick up their mail, to get their kids to school and to hockey games.

I guarantee you, Mr. Speaker, that if we started talking about converting pavement in the cities back to gravel . . .

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

Mr. Elhard: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Highways, is that your government's policy on roads and highways? That good roads and highways aren't important in rural Saskatchewan, but good back alleys are in Saskatoon?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Mr. Speaker, the truth is it's obvious

that our roads and our infrastructure are critical to tourism and economic development in this province, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the simple fact is, and I want the public of Saskatchewan to understand this, that tourism across the province in all of our parks, is up 36 per cent, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Elhard: — Mr. Speaker, the member from Saskatoon Southeast said, and I'd like to quote her:

Some of the roads the Saskatchewan Party is talking about that they want to have instantly paved and patched and all that, probably have less traffic on them than my back alley in Saskatoon.

Mr. Speaker, I've been talking about Highway 18. Kids used to ride their school buses on that road. They don't any longer. People hauled grain to the elevator down that road. Ambulances carry patients down that road. Honey Bee Manufacturing imports supplies and exports their products down that road. We're not talking about a back alley, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Minister, is that what you think? Do you and your NDP colleagues believe Highway 18 is no more important than some back alley some place? Is that why you're reverting it to gravel?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Again, Mr. Speaker, for the public of Saskatchewan more than anyone, I want to clarify some of the facts. First of all we have seen a huge shift, Mr. Speaker, in the way we transport our goods and services back and forth across this province, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: — Order.

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Mr. Speaker, in the constituency that the member describes, many of those roads are thin-membrane surfaces that were constructed 30 and 40 years ago, Mr. Speaker. Most of those roads were constructed for use of small vehicles, light trucks, and cars, Mr. Speaker. With the change in transportation, Mr. Speaker, from rail to road, and a logic that most of those folks over there supported, Mr. Speaker, we're now seeing large trucks travelling over roads that were never designed for that.

Mr. Speaker, we need to work with the people and we need to work with the opposition and we need the federal government to help us put more money into roads, Mr. Speaker, so that we can design an infrastructure and a system that will help us put together a road system that will allow for this sort of traffic to move forward, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Elhard: — Mr. Speaker, it's becoming abundantly clear by the answers we're hearing that rural residents are first-class taxpayers but second-class citizens.

Mr. Speaker, the people in this province don't drive to the hospitals down the member's back alley. They don't drive to school and to work down her back alley. They don't go to town

to get groceries down her back alley. The members across the way are saying that rural roads and highways aren't a big deal because nobody's out there.

Mr. Speaker, the people of this province are sick and tired of this out-of-touch, arrogant government. I've said it before and I'll say it again: roads are the lifeline of this province for economic development, for tourism, and for the future — the very future — of this province.

Mr. Minister, will you explain to the people of this province how back alleys are more important than the roads serving rural communities?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Mr. Speaker, as a rural resident myself, I would disagree with the member opposite when he describes rural residents as second-class citizens.

Mr. Speaker, I want to just say the following as well, just with respect to the facts, Mr. Speaker. A study that was published in October 1999 by SUMA (Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association) and SARM (Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities) indicates that the total grain haul in Saskatchewan has increased an amazing 860 per cent over 1984 levels, Mr. Speaker — 860 per cent.

That's something that our government — and I would ask the opposition members to work with us — that's something that we all need to work together to try and resolve, Mr. Speaker. We need to design an infrastructure. We need the federal government at the table with dollars to help us resolve that huge dilemma, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Upgrading of Highways to Support Economic Development

Ms. Harpauer: — Mr. Speaker, we've all heard the member opposite, the Minister of Highways, rant at our member from Cypress Hills on highways being critical to economic development.

Well Mr. Larry Eggleton is the president of No. 279 Beef Producers. He called my office to ask if the government plans to upgrade Highway 20 to a primary standard and also if they have plans to make Highway 15 from Semans to Highway 20 a primary shipping road.

He is making those inquiries because his organization is planning on building a feedlot in the area, but good roads for large cattle trucks are essential. After many calls to the minister's office we were informed that there's no likelihood of either road being upgraded in the near future.

Mr. Minister, there is more proof that economic development is being stifled by poor road conditions in this province. What are business ventures like the beef producers supposed to do if the transportation system will not accommodate their business?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — First of all, Mr. Speaker, our job numbers show and prove that we're interested in economic development and they prove that we are successful, Mr. Speaker, as well.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Mr. Speaker, but I want to say to the member opposite who says that we should design roads that will support the traffic. Mr. Speaker, at \$250,000 per kilometre to design structural pavement, Mr. Speaker, the member needs to understand what the cost is. But at \$2 million a day of interest on the public debt, Mr. Speaker, we could build 8 kilometres a day of structural pavement, Mr. Speaker, 8 kilometres a day.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Harpauer: — Mr. Speaker, this is a time when the agriculture economy is struggling. Government is hindering agriculture economic development because it is . . .

The Speaker: — Order.

Ms. Harpauer: — It is not maintaining the basic infrastructure of the transportation system in this province. We have a group of investors here who are interested in beef production. They're searching for a suitable location in their area for a feedlot and the roads cannot accommodate this business.

How is our rural economy supposed to expand and diversify when the main method of moving product in and out is by roads? The roads are virtually impassable. Our road system should be a high priority for economic strength if we're to encourage more businesses in this province.

Mr. Minister, where are the highways and our road system on your priority list? If your binder boy, the deputy minister, would take a look, I don't think this highway is in there. When are you going to fix Highway No. 15?

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Mr. Speaker, the concern that the member raises is valid. And we also agree that we need roads in place to create economic development, Mr. Speaker.

But what I don't understand, Mr. Speaker, is that day after day the members opposite bring in these problems and concerns that are legitimate but they don't provide solutions, Mr. Speaker. They ask us to reduce the gas tax, Mr. Speaker, money that goes into our general revenue for the construction of roads and infrastructure in this province, Mr. Speaker.

The Leader of the Opposition, Mr. Speaker, when he was in the House of Commons, spoke in favour of the abolition of the Crow rate which caused great branch line abandonment, Mr. Speaker, which therefore, as a result of that allowed . . . and caused, I should say, huge amounts of goods and services to be transferred onto roads that, as I described earlier, were built 30 or 40 years ago and not designed for this heavy traffic, Mr. Speaker.

What we need to do, Mr. Speaker, is we need to work together with the opposition and with the federal government to try and

design an infrastructure in Western Canada, in Saskatchewan, that serves the people of Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Order. Order. I just want to . . . Order. Order. I just want to thank all hon. members for the applause this morning.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 81 — The Income Tax Act, 2000

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 81, The Income Tax Act, 2000 be now introduced and read the first time.

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

Bill No. 82 — The Income Tax Amendment Act, 2000

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 82, The Income Tax Amendment Act, 2000 be now introduced and read the first time.

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

Bill No. 83 — The Income Tax Consequential Amendment Act, 2000

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 83, The Income Tax Consequential Amendment Act, 2000 be now introduced and read the first time.

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

Bill No. 84 — The Education and Health Tax Amendment Act, 2000

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 84, The Education and Health Tax Amendment Act, 2000 be now introduced and read the first time.

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

Bill No. 85 — The Post-Secondary Graduate Tax Credit Act

Hon. Mr. Hagel: — Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 85, The Post-Secondary Graduate Tax Credit Act be now introduced and read the first time.

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

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

Bill No. 46 — The Tobacco Tax Amendment Act, 2000

The Chair: — I'll invite the hon. Minister of Finance to introduce his officials before I call clause 1.

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. With me today is Mr. Len Rog, sitting to my immediate left, who is the assistant deputy minister of the revenue division of the Department of Finance. And also sitting to my right, is Ms. Cindy Ogilvie, who is the manager of the financial management branch of the Provincial Comptroller's office, which is an office of the Department of Finance.

Clause 1

Mr. Wakefield: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman, I have a couple of questions if I could. Mr. Minister, this particular Act regarding the tobacco tax, what is the primary focus of this particular tax? Is it for social reasons, is it for health reasons, is it for revenue reasons? What is the main focus, please?

Hon. Mr. Cline: — I think to this tax, Mr. Deputy Speaker, there are all of those aspects. All of the tax revenue is paid into the General Revenue Fund which is consistent with the principles set out by the Gass Commission on government financing.

Mr. Wakefield: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Chairman, when I was reading through some of the existing, and the explanation of the expanded tax, I notice that there is a different rate on the different kinds of tobacco. A different rate for cigarettes, and a different rate for cigars, and a different rate for tobacco that is bulk.

And I just wondered what the difference was and why there's a different rate applied to each of those different forms of tobacco.

(1100)

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Mr. Deputy Speaker, I think that the differential tax treatment of different types of tobacco products has been really somewhat anomalous, to answer the member's question. I'm not sure that there has been that much rationality to it.

And I will say to the member, as I think the member is aware, in fact the intent of the legislation is to remove the anomaly by having a more or less similar treatment for all kinds of tobacco. That it doesn't matter if the tobacco is in a cigarette or a cigar or uncut, that the rate of tax would be roughly the same on all kinds of tobacco. And that is consistent with the recommendations and urgings of both the Canadian Cancer Society and other people who are trying to reduce the rate of smoking in society.

Mr. Wakefield: — Mr. Chairman, Mr. Minister, I noticed that the rate of increase on a cigar for instance can be 95 per cent of the estimated retail price. Is this a rate that is an increase significantly on cigars or is that a very significant increase because of these amendments?

Hon. Mr. Cline: — No, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the 95 per cent or up to 95 per cent tax has actually been in effect for many years. This is not changing. The only change in this legislation is that there is a minimum tax of 35 cents per cigar. So that the minimum tax moves up but the rest of it is the same as it has been for many years.

Mr. Wakefield: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. I see where that has been a maximum for some time.

Mr. Chairman, the question I have is this. Have you had an opportunity to do some consulting with vendors and with the speciality tobacco shops with regards to these amendments? I've had several calls from vendors of tobaccos, particularly speciality tobaccos and cigars, who were quite frustrated in their inability to get some answers because of this impending legislation. How extensively did you do consulting?

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'm advised that there have been ongoing consultations with representatives of retailers, grocers. I'm not sure that there have been extensive consultations specifically with tobacconists, but the department tries on an ongoing basis to consult with vendors.

I would agree with the member that there undoubtedly is some frustration and unhappiness by retailers of tobacco products, especially specialists in that kind of sale, when any tax increase comes in, because of course that's seen as a negative aspect to their business. The other side of that though is society's interest in trying to do what we can to reduce the use of tobacco.

And this . . . the member in his first question was asking about the various aspects of this taxation policy. As I indicated, the member's correct, there's a revenue aspect to it to be sure. There also is the desire to respond to the health aspects of it and to respond to the cancer society's urging that all tobacco products be charged a tax at the same rate, and essentially this is what we're doing.

That change will cause some frustration and unhappiness in some quarters, I can't deny that and it's there. But that is the rationale for the change and that is what we've responded to.

Mr. Wakefield: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Did you have an opportunity to put a submission in to the all-party special committee on taxation that has been circulating around the province, has been getting submissions and meetings, and are preparing to put forward a draft response. Did you have a chance for any input into that committee based on your previous response about both revenue and the social implications of tobacco taxes?

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Yes. I'm advised that one of the officials of the Department of Finance, revenue division, did in fact appear at the anti-tobacco committee in late February.

Mr. Wakefield: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. I think the two can generally go hand in hand. I'm sure your objectives are similar to what the committee's objectives are as well.

I've been hearing rumours, Mr. Minister, that the federal tax on tobacco is going to be reviewed and adjusted. I suspect because, as you remember, there was a reduction of the federal tax on

tobacco a few years ago with the idea of trying to stop the smuggling of tobacco across the Canadian border, particularly into Quebec and Ontario.

If the federal tax increases significantly to compensate for some of that loss, how is that going to affect the tax here in Saskatchewan? Will it have any affect at all?

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Yes, there would be an effect, Mr. Deputy Speaker, specifically that if the federal government increases the tax on tobacco then the tax that we charge, being basically 6 per cent of the retail price, would be 6 per cent of the price including the federal tax. So that if the federal tax went up by a certain amount, we would pick up 6 per cent of that amount. They would pick up a hundred per cent of their increased tax; we would pick up 6 per cent of that amount which would be increased revenue to the province of Saskatchewan.

And generally speaking, we've taken the position over the years when tobacco taxes have been lowered across the country to respond to the smuggling problems in the East, we have not been reducing the provincial taxes out of concern, certainly for revenue, but also primarily with respect to the health issue. And we've been supported by the anti-tobacco people — there are various groups like the lung association, the cancer society — with respect to that position.

Mr. Wakefield: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Chairman, I really only have one more question. And the question would be: are you planning in the near future any significant across the board tobacco tax increase other than what we're discussing here in these amendments? Is there a plan to escalate the overall tobacco tax assessed by your department in the near future?

Hon. Mr. Cline: — At the present time there is no plan to increase tobacco taxes. But I should say to the member that the all-party committee of the legislature on tobacco has recommended I believe a 10 per cent . . . or a 10 cent per package, increase in tobacco and to use that revenue . . . to target that revenue at measures to discourage tobacco use, especially by young people.

And so while there is no plan immediately at the present time to do that, we certainly will be giving consideration to the recommendations of the committee, which is, after all, a committee comprised of both sides of the legislature.

And so I can't say . . . I can't rule that out. I mean we want to certainly consider it, but beyond that there's no plan at the present time. And that would be something for the budget of next year, the budget introduced in 2001, I believe.

Mr. Wakefield: — I have no further questions. And I would like to thank you for your responses and for the assistance of your officials.

Clause 1 agreed to.

Clauses 2 and 3 agreed to.

The Chair: — I invite the Hon. Minister of Finance to move the committee report the Bill without amendment.

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I'd like to, before I do that, thank the hon. member and the opposition for their assistance in getting the Bill to this stage in the House, and I'd also like to thank the officials from the Department of Finance for their assistance.

The committee agreed to report the Bill.

Bill No. 27 — The Certified Management Accountants Act

The Chair: — Are you using the same officials, Minister?

Hon. Mr. Cline: — I have the assistance of the same officials, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Clause 1

Mr. Wakefield: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Minister, on this particular amendments on this Act, I've had an opportunity to ask questions before, and we've had an opportunity to exchange on some of the questions that were of concern.

I guess one of the things that I had mentioned earlier was the fact that I had the opportunity, during the debate and as the time that I had, I was able to contact several people in the industry and get a feedback from them and — during these adjourned debates — and I was able to report to you, I think, Mr. Minister, that there seemed to be consensus that this particular Act or the amendments could go through.

Just if I could, I'll take a moment or two to follow up on one or two of the questions that were still outstanding in my mind. I just wondered if you'd had the opportunity as well, Mr. Minister, or your officials, to be able to consult regarding these amendments with people in the industry, the professional associations, and so on. And which ones did you consult with?

(1115)

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Mr. Deputy Speaker, I can report to the member in the House that we've had in fact extensive consultations with the certified management accountants, but also discussions with their sister organizations like the chartered accountants and the certified general accountants as well. And the consultation has been quite extensive and there seems to be a strong consensus that the legislation is very appropriate.

I might just add that one of the things that we've been doing as government throughout the 1990s is to try to reform quite a number of professional statutes, some in the area of accounting and finance like this one; many in the area of health, where I had some experience earlier, first of all when I was a private member on the Legislative Review Committee for four years, but then as minister of Health, where we did statutes relating to, for example, the physical therapists and so on.

And you might ask, what's that got to do with this statute. What it has to do with this is we've been trying to put all of these professional statutes into a sort of a common pattern and this is what this statute would conform to, if I can put it this way, a modern-day view of professional legislation generally.

And they incorporate things like: trying to make the powers of

the profession consistent with other professions; trying to make the discipline provisions where they discipline a member consistent, build in the concept of fair treatment and the right to be heard, that sort of due process; and also to improve the protection of the public, to involve the public actually on the professional body and to give the public some eyes at the table, what are they doing in terms of their fees and is this in the interests of the consumer. And have they got appropriate safeguards in place to make sure that the profession is giving good service to the public at a reasonable rate?

So in any event, there seems to be a very wide consensus — not just with the accounting professions, but across the piece, the professional bodies — that legislation like this legislation is the way to go.

And so this is what we're doing and I think there's a strong support for the direction that we're taking.

Mr. Wakefield: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Chairman, I'm happy to hear that because my next question was in fact in that particular area. I know that other professions have had legislation passed on their behalf, and I assume that this would — not having experience with those — I assume that this would somewhat mirror the different . . . those conditions from other Bills.

Am I correct in saying that this mirrors the kind of objectives in direction as you earlier stated?

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Yes, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that's entirely correct. We have some officials in the Department of Justice who are in fact lawyers who work in government, and they look at this legislation, along with the other professional legislation, to ensure that the legislation falls into a consistent pattern as I described before. And that certainly has been done with respect to this legislation.

Mr. Wakefield: — Mr. Minister, is there anything in these amendments that would protect the public in a way that if complaints are coming forth from the public, is there anything in there that will address that? Or does it have to be addressed through the professional association itself?

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Yes. There are provisions with respect to the protection of the public, as I said, and I'll give the member a few examples.

One is that the legislation would provide the council of the certified management accountants with the opportunity to have procedures like practice inspections so that they will have people that will inspect the practice of the certified management accountants to ensure that the proper procedures are being followed, first of all.

Secondly, the . . . included in the Bill is a provision for representatives of the public at large to be included on the institute's council and disciplinary committee. And those appointees will represent the interests of the general public to make sure that there are procedures in place: first of all to inspect the practices that are going on — to make sure they're in the public interest; and to make sure that if there's any activity which is detrimental to a particular client or the public

interest, that the member who's doing something detrimental will be disciplined under the Act.

Mr. Wakefield: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. That leads me then to the question as to the members that will be appointed to the council. These members are — correct me if I'm wrong — appointed from the public, and I wondered if there's consultation. What kind of consultation will be in place before those members are appointed?

Hon. Mr. Cline: — What is generally done is that we consult with the council of the professional body with respect to, you know, some names that we may have, to see if those names seem to be acceptable to them. Sometimes the professional body — I don't know about this particular one — but sometimes they will want someone with a particular expertise or professional background.

I can think of one professional body that has requested that the public representative be a legally trained person because they want assistance with respect to procedures when they're disciplining members. And they're not a large body and they don't have the resources necessarily to hire a lawyer, so they think that having a lawyer on their body would be helpful.

It is not the case that we ask the profession to select the person to go on their body, because that would in fact be detrimental to the idea of public representation in the sense that it becomes kind of a closed shop.

But yes, we would like to consult with them I think about any wishes they may have, any views they may have with respect to prospective members.

Mr. Wakefield: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. I have just one more question, and it's somewhat related to that.

In the amendments, it says that the minister has the ability to have influence over the bylaws that are passed by this association.

I just wonder under what circumstances that you might envision minister involvement in reviewing or having bylaws altered or amended?

Hon. Mr. Cline: — I should say that this is a standard provision across the professional legislation — nothing unusual about this Act. But one of the long-standing traditions with respect to professional legislation is that they are self-governing bodies and they are monopolies if you will.

For example, to use the law society as an example, you can't practise law unless you are a member of the Law Society of Saskatchewan. And that's because they have been given sort of quasi-legislative powers by the legislature to make certain rules that may impact on the public, because . . . well naturally, the law society, as an example, will have an impact with respect to the cost of legal services. I mean I think it's justified. I think that you have to protect the public from people that aren't properly qualified.

But my point is this, that when you give a group of individuals that kind of power, a sort of quasi-legislative power, we have a

duty to look at the bylaws that they pass and to determine that those are in the public interest. And if they're not in the public interest — for example, if a bylaw said that there shall be no competition in prices, every member of this profession will charge a minimum of \$100 per hour for whatever service and would not ever give any pro bono or free service to somebody that needed it — we would say no, that bylaw is not appropriate.

Now having said that, although I think you need that power, it's a very unusual situation where the government overturns a bylaw of a professional association. I don't know even if it's happened in the recent past — it may have and I don't recall. But it's not something that happens, and yet we receive bylaws from the professional associations on a regular ongoing basis.

The people that run the professional bodies, including this one, I think do so with the public interest in mind, and I don't expect that they're going to do anything that the government would disallow.

But at the same time, it's a long-standing tradition that the government does have the authority to disallow a bylaw because we, the legislators, are in effect granting to these professions quasi-legislative powers. They can make rules that impact on the public and we have a responsibility to retain the ability to make sure that those bylaws, that we're delegating the power to them to make, in fact are made in the public interest. And if they do something that will hurt the public, we have to reserve the authority to say no, you can't do that. Having said that, it's not something we have to do very often if at all.

Mr. Wakefield: — Mr. Minister, Mr. Chairman, I don't have any further questions other than to again thank the minister for his response and to thank your officials for their assistance in this. Thank you.

Clause 1 agreed to.

Clauses 2 to 49 inclusive agreed to.

The Chair: — I invite the Hon. Minister of Finance to move that the committee report the Bill without amendment.

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Before I do that, I'd like to thank the hon. member from Lloydminster for his questions and assistance, and also the members of the opposition for their assistance in moving the legislation through the House. And I'd also like to thank Mr. Rog and Ms. Ogilvie for their assistance today.

And with that I will move that this Bill be reported without amendment.

The committee agreed to report the Bill.

(1130)

**Bill No. 26 — The Tabling of Documents
Amendment Act, 2000**

The Chair: — I'll invite the Hon. Minister of Justice to introduce his officials.

Hon. Mr. Axworthy: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. On my left, Susan Amrud, who is the director of legislative services in the Department of Justice, and on my right, Cindy Ogilvie, who is the manager of the financial management branch of the Department of Finance.

Clauses 1 and 2 agreed to.

Clause 3

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman of committees, and thank you, Minister, and hello to your officials here today. We want to welcome you here to the legislature.

I just wanted a . . . on this particular clause, I wonder, Minister, if you could provide — even having gone through the explanatory notes — I wonder if you could just provide a very brief rationale for the need for the changes represented in this particular section.

Hon. Mr. Axworthy: — Well actually, Mr. Speaker, there's, Mr. Chairman, there's nothing of substance changed here. It's just an improvement to the drafting. So there's nothing of substance in the change to clause 2(b).

Clause 3 agreed to.

Clause 4 agreed to.

Clause 5

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. And I guess this is the substantive part of this particular Bill. And to the extent that it would improve the accountability of this particular government, I think there's a lot of . . . I personally think there's a lot of merit in it. And having discussed it with many of my colleagues in detail, I think they believe there's a lot of merit in it too, Minister. Because openness and accountability, frankly, have not always been the hallmark of this government. And we only have to look to a couple of things, I think, to underscore that fact. I think if you mention the word Channel Lake, that might fall into that category.

Mr. Chairman, if you mention the word SPUDCO (Saskatchewan Potato Utility Development Company), I think that might fall into that category as well in terms of maybe a bit of a lack of accountability and certainly not a lot of openness on the part of this government.

And recently in this session my colleague, the member for Rosthern, has asked some very interesting questions about a pipeline debacle undertaken by SaskEnergy wherein over . . . I mean hundreds of millions of dollars have been spent on a pipeline that apparently SaskEnergy has no use for.

And you know there was not a word of it, not a single word of it, in the official documents tabled by that Crown corporation which is owned by the taxpayers of the province of Saskatchewan.

And so that's a concern with this Bill I think that we have. And certainly you've addressed a timeline for tabling of documents, but it seems to leave to the government, and in particular this

government is what we're dealing with right now, to be honest with what indeed it is that they're tabling.

But I guess the question that I would have on this particular section, Minister, relates to the fact that the time period that we're speeding up this process by is phased in. Why? Why is it phased in? Why did you choose a period . . . you've chosen and why would we need to wait for this phase-in period to get the, frankly, the benefits of this Bill in place for the taxpayers' of Saskatchewan?

Hon. Mr. Axworthy: — Well, Mr. Chairman, the commitment exhibited under this Act is a commitment to be more open and more accountable and to speed up that openness and accountability process.

And there are two reasons for the phase-in process. One is that it enables those who will in fact prepare the reports to acclimatize themselves to a speedier process. And the second, and perhaps more important, is that it enables the Provincial Auditor to adjust his or her workload in order to address these concerns too. It is not something that . . . the work is not something that can be switched immediately. So the phase-in period is to enable the accommodation both within the work of the preparers and the work of the Provincial Auditor.

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Minister, and Mr. Chairman of committees. Interesting. In your answer you mentioned that officials wanted the phase-in period so they can become . . . so they can be climatized to the new, more demanding timelines in terms of tabling documents in the legislature. And my guess would be that for the most part the preparers of the document are officials of either Crowns or line departments of government or Treasury Board Crowns.

And I guess that would sort of lead to my next question, is that the group — I mean I know when you're looking at legislation, you consult with a number of groups — did you consult with the people that prepare these documents when you came up with a phase-in, or was this something that simply your senior officials in the department assumed that the preparers needed?

Because I think the question goes to the heart of whether or not the government really is indeed the government, and whether it requires of its officials what is fair. And in this case we're talking about the prompt reporting and tabling of documents that should fit in to the people's time frame not the time frame of public servants.

The Chair: — Why is the hon. member for Wadena on her feet?

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

Leave granted.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Ms. Draude: — Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. To you and through you to the members of the Assembly I have the great honour for the second time today to introduce a school group from my constituency.

With you in the east gallery is 21 students from Pleasantdale School, grades 7 to 9. With them is Mrs. Graham, Mr. Perkins, and their bus driver, Don Kager.

I'd like the members to know that this school has a higher-than-normal average of students on the honour roll in grade 12. And I think that we're very proud of this school, as we are of many of the . . . all of the rural schools.

Thank you very much for coming to the legislature, and have a great day in the city.

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

Bill No. 26 — The Tabling of Documents Amendment Act, 2000 (continued)

Clause 5

Hon. Mr. Axworthy: — The experience of officials — this is in response to the question of consultation — is that it would in fact take some time to make the shift to a speedier reporting time period, and discussions within departments confirm that. And it's certainly the case that the Provincial Auditor, who has been advocating a speedier process, is of the view that it would take some time within his office to ensure that this work can be done in a timely fashion.

Mr. Wall: — Mr. Chair of committees, just one final question as it relates to this section. And I notice in there a good portion of the section, Minister, deals with the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly receiving the documents and then distributing them to whom they need to be distributed.

And I wonder as a matter of course, I don't think it's specifically laid out here, but just as a matter of course if you're aware or if your officials are aware of how long it will be before these documents are also posted to the Internet? And is that an option — that they're looked at? It's not called for directly in the Bill, but certainly more and more of Saskatchewan people have Internet access and rely on it, frankly, for timely information, perhaps more timely than any other medium that is available to them.

So I wonder if that was contemplated in the Act either . . . if not in the Act then in the regulations or in the implementation of the Act?

Hon. Mr. Axworthy: — Mr. Chairperson, the, I think, appropriate response to that question is that once the documents are in the hands of the clerk, they are public documents. And certainly . . . and the preparers could certainly put those documents then on the Internet or indeed distribute them in any way they see fit.

But I think the member has raised an interesting question about how we might prompt more documents to be on the Internet for the ease of access of citizens of Saskatchewan.

Clause 5 agreed to.

Clause 6 agreed to.

The committee agreed to report the Bill.

(1145)

THIRD READINGS

Bill No. 46 — The Tobacco Tax Amendment Act, 2000

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Mr. Speaker, I move that the Bill be now read the third time and passed under its title.

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

Bill No. 27 — The Certified Management Accountants Act

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Mr. Speaker, I move that this Bill be now read the third time and passed under its title.

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

Bill No. 26 — The Tabling of Documents Amendment Act, 2000

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

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

COMMITTEE OF FINANCE

General Revenue Fund Post-Secondary Education and Skills Training Vote 37

The Chair: — Before I call subvote 1, I invite the Hon. Minister of Post-Secondary Education and Skills Training to introduce his officials.

Hon. Mr. Hagel: — Thanks, Mr. Chair. I think most of the officials have been previously introduced, but it's been some time since we've been here and for the information of the members of the committee, to my left is the deputy minister, Neil Yeates. Seated behind is Frances Bast, senior policy advisor, finance and operations branch; and behind me, Lily Stonehouse, assistant deputy minister. Behind the bar are Brady Salloum, executive director, student financial assistance, and Margaret Ball, associate director, facilities planning unit.

And also, Mr. Chair, before going to the first question today from the hon. member from Last Mountain-Touchwood, I would like to provide the written response to a question asked last time the estimates were before a committee.

Subvote (PE01)

Mr. Hart: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, to the minister: upon reviewing the estimates for his department, I see that a sum of \$200.8 million has been allocated to universities, federated and affiliated colleges and educational agencies. I wonder if the minister could provide a breakdown of how those funds will be

allocated in the fiscal year?

Hon. Mr. Hagel: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. To the hon. member. The increases in that funding category are in the amount of 4 per cent. Each of the federated colleges has received a 4 per cent increase in their funding already. And there is 4 per cent that's also targeted to be distributed to the universities. The final distribution of that, in precise terms, has not been finalized but it will be very shortly provided to the universities.

Mr. Hart: — Thanks to the minister for his answer. Mr. Chair, I wonder if the minister, being that the finalization of allocation for this current year have not taken place on fund allocation, I wonder if he could indicate then, in the past fiscal year, how the funds were allocated — give us the breakdown as to the various institutions, how much money the various institutions received?

Hon. Mr. Hagel: — Mr. Chair, in 1999-2000, the fiscal year upon which we're building, the amounts allocated to the universities were as follows: University of Regina, \$47,092,800; University of Saskatchewan, \$125,428,300. There was \$3 million allocated to university special initiatives, which is shared by the universities, and then a library outreach of \$200,000.

The federated colleges in the current fiscal year with their allocations then, our total — this is to Champion College, Luther College, St. Thomas More, Saskatchewan Indian Federated College, and St. Peter's College — in this current fiscal year, the one before review of the House at the moment, is \$7,096,300 to the federated colleges combined.

Mr. Hart: — Mr. Chair, to the minister, I wonder if the minister could explain how those funds were allocated to the two universities. Is there a percentage of the total budget that goes to each university? And if so, what is that based on?

I think there is some question on behalf of citizens that are concerned with funding to universities as to exactly how this breakdown is arrived at, and if the minister could explain that process, please.

Hon. Mr. Hagel: — Mr. Chair, to the hon. member, the breakdown of the funding, which has been a formula that's been in place a couple of decades, so really quite some extended period of time as this follows: the University of Saskatchewan receives 70 per cent of the funding, 26 per cent to the University of Regina, and then 4 per cent to the federated colleges.

Mr. Hart: — Mr. Chair, to the minister, I understand this funding formula has been reviewed by a Mr. DesRosiers and he brought forward some recommendations. I wonder if the minister could explain what the ... give us the gist of Mr. DesRosiers's recommendations and perhaps indicate his government's position on the DesRosiers report.

Hon. Mr. Hagel: — Mr. Chairman, again to the hon. member for Last Mountain-Touchwood, following a review at the university — at the universities I should say, that would go back some three or four years — there was a decision made to review the formula of distribution, the formula for distribution of university funds in the province of Saskatchewan. And

Edward DesRosiers was engaged to provide some framework for that. Mr. DesRosiers did that then in 1998, and since that time there has been work to attempt to refine his proposal which was very much an activity-and cost-based formula, is what he was attempting to provide for the province and for the universities to understand the appropriate distribution here in the province.

Just very recently then, Mr. DesRosiers has been re-engaged to provide more specific advice and I have not yet received his report. I do expect to receive it very shortly, and then after receiving that report what I will do then is provide a recommendation which government will then consider. And I anticipate making a decision in a relatively near future.

Mr. Hart: — Mr. Chair, it's my understanding that Mr. DesRosiers' report indicated that the funding to the U of S (University of Saskatchewan) was not sufficient in comparison to the programs that it offered when you looked at the funding that was going to the U of R (University of Regina).

In other words, if you were comparing the funding to the two universities and programs that were being offered, the cost of the programs that were being offered, the depth and scope of research being done at the U of S, that there was some fairly significant deficiencies in funding to the U of S.

I wonder if the minister would care to comment and give some more particulars on those statements.

(1200)

Hon. Mr. Hagel: — Again I thank the hon. member for the question, Mr. Chair. Mr. DesRosiers has been working recently, after consulting substantially within the province with all the stakeholders that have vested interest, and is in the final stages then of getting to me that final report which will be his more detailed analysis of the application of the activity- and cost share-based formula.

It will be then, after receiving that report, that I will move that forward to review what it is in precise terms that — as precise as we can define — that the province will do relative to the distribution of funds.

I just think it would be somewhat premature and inappropriate of me, Mr. Chair, to be speculating that in advance, and we will be dealing with that just shortly.

Mr. Hart: — Mr. Chair, I'd like to thank the minister for his answer, although he really hasn't clarified the situation for me. I understand by consulting with the universities, and particularly with the people at the U of S, that Mr. DesRosiers' report actually found that the U of S was being underfunded by some 5 or 6 per cent; in other words moving the funding to the U of S up by an additional 6 per cent. And if additional new monies cannot be found, that would mean a reduction in funding to the U of R.

Now I don't think it is the U of S's position that there should be money taken away from one institution and given to another. But I understand that according to their calculations using the formulae or the findings of Mr. DesRosiers, that if they were applied, that it would mean possibly an additional \$26 million

that the U of S should be funded to in order for them to adequately carry out the programs and taking into consideration the cost of some of the programs that they offer, and those sorts of things.

And I would like the minister's reply to that situation as to whether in fact that is in fact the situation.

Hon. Mr. Hagel: — Thanks again, Mr. Chair, to the member, for his question. I do acknowledge that both of the universities will have their calculated perspectives as to what is the appropriate application of the activity-and-cost-based formulas. They won't be in total agreement on what those are.

And that's precisely why Mr. DesRosiers has been engaged to reconsult . . . not reconsult, but continue the consultation further to what he had done in 1998 with the universities, and then to make his recommendation which, as I say, I expect to see very shortly.

What we'll be doing in this fiscal year, the fiscal year before it's reviewed and before the House right now, is providing funds within the allocations that are before us. And then if it is required, beyond the amounts of monies available to reach an equitable distribution, then we'll look at doing that over a period of time in the years ahead. And both of the universities quite understand that, and I understand they're amenable to that kind of an approach to dealing with the matter.

To be more specific than that is just not possible for me at the moment. I do understand the interest of the universities, and I too will want to resolve this matter as quickly as we possibly can.

Mr. Hart: — Mr. Chair, I wonder if . . . the minister has indicated that he will . . . he'd like to resolve the funding issue in this current fiscal year to the university as quickly as possible. Would the minister be prepared today to put a time frame as to when this decision will be reached?

Realizing that the universities are in somewhat of an awkward position where they are trying to set their budgets, which has a direct impact on what level of increase they will be looking at in tuition fee increases and those sorts of things, it has certainly ramifications for students who are looking at attending at the universities.

Particularly the U of S who has indicated earlier this past month that if there . . . that they may be required to raise their tuition fees from 6 to 14 per cent and those sorts of things. So there is a lot of uncertainty out there not only for the institutions, but also for the students that are looking at attending the universities this fall.

And I wonder if the minister is prepared to say that . . . give us a time framing by which this decision will be made.

Hon. Mr. Hagel: — Mr. Chair, I appreciate the interest of the hon. member and his colleague. I would expect to be in a position to advise in precise terms both of the universities as to their operating fund increases within the next two weeks.

Mr. Hart: — Mr. Chair, I'd like to thank the minister for his answer. I guess further to this area of funding for the

universities, is the minister in a position to give some assurances at this time that particularly the U of S will have sufficient funding so that they will not be forced to increase tuition fees to the point that they had indicated earlier — 6 to 14 per cent?

Can you give any assurances today to the universities and to the students who are looking at attending particularly the U of S?

Hon. Mr. Hagel: — Mr. Chair, and to the hon. member, he will appreciate I know one of the principles that's involved in trying to give that specific an assurance at this point in time. It is a principle that I value and has traditionally been valued by the Government of Saskatchewan in its relationship with the universities to respect the autonomous relationship.

That is an important relationship for a number of reasons not the least of which is the relationship between a law-making and budget-providing body, the Legislative Assembly, and an institution which, by its nature, is a knowledge-producing body. And all too frequently we're inclined to sometimes underestimate the significance of that in a free and democratic society.

I'm proud to say that that is a tradition that has been respected and I continue to respect. And unfortunately what that means is that when there is that autonomous relationship between the province and the university, at the end of the day, the final decision regarding tuition fees rests with the universities. And I think the hon. member does both understand and appreciate the significance of that.

I will be providing to the universities, as I said, within the next couple of weeks, the specific information to assist them in making their decisions related to operations. And included in that will then be the conclusions that they will each draw related to the tuitions for the coming year.

I will certainly be asking the universities — and this will be no surprise to either of them — to do the best they possibly can with the funds that are provided. And we've defined the amounts of money that are available to be added to their base operating, plus there will be some that will be dedicated to the DesRosiers adjustment, I think is the terminology related to the matter the member has just raised with me.

After having received that, they will make their decisions, and as I say, I, in providing the specific information, will be asking both universities to make the tuition fees as affordable as they possibly can to the students at both the universities in Saskatchewan.

It is also, I think, significant to just put it into a context that I think the universities, to be fair to them, have been working with that as their objective. And it's for that reason that here in Western Canada the university tuition fees are really very favourably compared to other universities, and that's a characteristic that I think we all value and would want to see continued.

Mr. Hart: — Mr. Chair, I wonder . . . what I would like now is to move to another area that has to do with funding to post-secondary education institutions, and that is

post-secondary capital funding.

I see in the *Estimates* that the minister's department is proposing to spend approximately \$31.8 million in capital funding. I wonder if the minister would provide the House with a breakdown of that funding and what specific projects perhaps at the various universities that some of the funding is going to?

Hon. Mr. Hagel: — Mr. Chairman, to the hon. member, I appreciate the question and to break it down for him: of the \$31 million plus in capital, in the department that you refer to, the precise amount that's dedicated to universities is specifically \$28.7 million in total. And just to put that — I'll break that down in just a moment — but to put it into context, which is fair I think because we are certainly hearing in a number of . . . from a number of universities across the country, concerns about capital infrastructures. And there has been, I think over the course of the past decade, a substantial response to that.

(1215)

And I point out that in the 1992-93 fiscal year, the amount dedicated to university capital was precisely \$3 million. And last fiscal year, that we just ended, was just a touch under \$20 million. And this year it's bumped to \$28.7 million dollars.

That's broken down as follows. To the University of Saskatchewan, for the Thorvaldson and Kinesiology Buildings, \$7 million is committed to that this year for those capital projects.

And related then to the nursing education program and the expansions that are required because the number of seats for training nurses in Saskatchewan has been expanded from 180 to 260 — and as the hon. member will know, that's training that combines both SIAST (Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology) as well as the university — but the university portion of that at the University of Saskatchewan is \$750,000, three-quarters of a million dollars, in capital.

At the University of Regina, there's a million dollars dedicated to the chiller to assist with the air conditioning needs at the University of Regina campus.

And then the basic capital assignment to the universities combined is just a touch under \$20 million. When that's all added up, it totals \$28.7 million for the universities, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Hart: — Mr. Chair, I'd like to thank the minister for his answer.

Mr. Chair, when I recently visited the U of S, it was very obvious that the oldest building on the campus, the College Building, is no longer being used. It's in a state of disrepair to the point where I'm told that within a year or two, it may have to be completely demolished.

And I'm sure, Mr. Chair, the minister knows that this is not only the oldest building on campus, it's an integral part of the heart of the university. It's situated on the east side of the bowl. It's a historic building.

Some people will argue that it's probably the most historic

building in the city of Saskatoon, and some people will take it a step further and say that it's probably the second most historic building in the province. I won't enter that debate, but I feel that it is, you know, certainly not only a university building, but it is probably part of our heritage.

I wonder . . . and I'm also told by officials at the U of S that at this point in time they have no funds to restore the building or to put it in such condition that it is not a hazard. And I wonder if the minister would tell us if there are any plans by his department to deal specifically with the College Building at the U of S.

Hon. Mr. Hagel: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. To the hon. member. The historic place of the College Building, I think it's fair to say that the university has made well known to anyone who might have some relevance to maintaining the building, and they've done a good job of communicating that.

In dealing with the capital priorities of the University of Saskatchewan specifically, because that's what you're asking about, they identified the Thorvaldson Building and Kinesiology Building as their priorities, and that's where the funding is directed in this budget that's before us now.

On the matter of the College Building, we continue to work together with the University of Saskatchewan to try to investigate possibilities for being able to sustain the building. I think it's becoming increasingly obvious to everyone that the likely solution will involve some kind of combination of partnerships. And I am well aware that included in that, that the university continues to as well make a request to the federal government to assist in that regard as well.

So we'll continue to pursue a variety of possibilities that may achieve that objective, working co-operatively with the University of Saskatchewan, and to do the best we can balancing the capital affordability of the sector and the demands we have from many institutions of course with their capacities to perhaps find funds from other sources, and to see if there's some way that working together that that can be achieved.

Mr. Hart: — Mr. Chair, I'd like to thank the minister for his answer. I'd like to pursue this issue of the College Building a bit more.

Mr. Chair, I'm told that to stabilize the College Building, it would cost approximately \$11 million. And that would be just to stabilize it and put it in a condition that it would not have to be dismantled and destroyed. It would require an additional \$7 million to render the building functional and to be used, for a total of \$18 million.

Now that would also help the U of S with the severe space shortage that they have. I believe Mr. DesRosiers determined that for activities that are carried on at the U of S, that they require an additional 18 per cent increase in space. And by bringing the College Building on stream would help to go a long way to alleviate that problem.

As the minister indicated in his answer that . . . I have been told by the U of S that they are looking at a partnership arrangement to bring this building back into usable condition.

I noticed in the budget that there is \$5 million set aside under the Centenary Capital Fund for post-secondary education. I wonder if the minister could give us any indication as to how that \$5 million will be used in this fiscal year.

Hon. Mr. Hagel: — Again, Mr. Chairman, to the hon. member regarding his question related to the Centenary Capital Fund. One of the things that I was very pleased about the budget before us is that it did stipulate in six different categories that there was a Centenary Capital Fund, 4 or \$5 million a year for each of the next four years, to assist in dealing with capital demands that we would like to respond as we move forward to the beginning of Saskatchewan's second century as a province. And I'm very pleased that one of those capital funds, the Centenary Capital Fund, was assigned for the use of Post-Secondary Education and Skills Training.

What we have done there, Mr. Chair, is we have been in touch with all of the stakeholders in the post-secondary sector, including of course the University of Saskatchewan and all of the rest, and have invited them to identify their capital needs and to make application and to lay out as accurately as they can their numbers and rationale.

And it will be no surprise to the hon. member that the University of Saskatchewan in its identification response to that, included the College Building of course.

And that will be then, Mr. Chair, in the not too distant future, we'll come to some conclusion related to this fiscal year. We're currently analyzing them, and analyzing them as the stakeholders were advised in the context of the needs of the sector in its entirety and also in the context of the training strategy and the post-secondary education strategic plan.

We discussed early in the estimates some of the broader thrusts of this budget that we're trying to achieve and things, some of the new initiatives giving much higher priority, for example, to technology-enhanced learning in order to better bring the campus to the students that we heard so much about when getting particularly outside of the two larger cities, and other things.

And so, Mr. Chair, when we look at the capital requests we think it's extremely important that the tax dollars that are being dedicated there are spent prudently. And that there needs to be a consistency between the balance of the needs of the institution to achieve what they need for their operational purposes as well as the needs of the province in its entirety, to support the post-secondary system.

And so it will be in that context. And included in those considerations then, will be the specific project that the hon. member raises and that will be in balance with a whole host of others.

Mr. Hart: — Mr. Chair, I'd like to thank the minister for his answer. I guess I just would have one more question dealing with this College Building at the U of S. I also noticed as part of this Centenary Capital Fund that there is \$5 million set aside for parks and heritage functions.

I wonder if the minister has taken to his cabinet colleagues and

the Minister of Finance the suggestion that because of the uniqueness of the College Building, it's importance in our heritage of the province and that sort of thing, whether he has proposed to his cabinet colleagues that perhaps some funds from both the centenary allocation that has been allocated to Post-Secondary Education and also that \$5 million that has been allocated to parks and heritage, whether it's not possible for the minister to find some additional funds to put towards the . . . to start the process of rehabilitating that building?

I certainly realize that it's a huge undertaking and it can't be accomplished in the matter of one fiscal year. But I feel and I know the university feels that if the province was able to come up with a bit of additional funding to put in specifically towards that project, that that perhaps would attract additional dollars and we could begin the process of saving that very significant building at the U of S, which not only serves as an educational building but also is a heritage building. I wonder if the minister would care to comment.

Hon. Mr. Hagel: — Thanks again, Mr. Chair. My department will be raising that issue with the Department of Municipal Affairs, Culture and Housing regarding their deliberations related to determination of Centenary Capital Fund. At the end of the day, it will be through consultation through both Treasury Board and cabinet that we'll reach the final decisions on the Centenary Capital Fund.

So there will be plenty of opportunity to do that, certainly in the post-secondary world as well as all of the others. And again, I say to the hon. member that we will be doing our best to take the funds we've got available to match them with the needs as defined by the stakeholders and the needs of the sector, of the post-secondary sector. But on the particular heritage characteristic that he raises, we'll consult as well with Municipal Affairs Culture, and Housing in that regard.

Mr. Hart: — Mr. Chair, I'd like to thank the minister for his answer. I have one more question dealing with the universities, and this is a question that I have been asked by a number of citizens and it has to do with foreign students attending our university.

It seems that there's a concern amongst the citizens of the province that perhaps they realize that a number of foreign students attend our universities under exchange programs and those sorts of things. But there's also a number of foreign students that come directly to our universities with not being part of any exchange program, that sort of thing. And the question that citizens have is, do these foreign students pay the same tuition fees as the students of our province and our country, or do they pay somewhat higher? And I wonder if the minister could elaborate on that whole issue.

(1230)

Hon. Mr. Hagel: — Mr. Chair, to the hon. member. I think he will be interested to know there is what is referred to as a differential fee whereby foreign students do pay a different and higher fee than a Canadian student would.

And I think most students on our campuses would see the presence of foreign students as a plus in the campus experience.

And I would also point . . . well no, I won't get into a different area than the member's question.

Mr. Hart: — Mr. Chair, I'd like to thank the minister for his answers. And at this time I would defer to my colleague from Saskatchewan Rivers.

Mr. Wiberg: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair. Mr. Minister, I noticed in one of the regional colleges, in the past few years they've managed to . . . been able to have very modest surpluses. And of course they start to add up over a period of time.

I wonder if you'd be able to respond then, Mr. Minister, as to how well all the regional colleges are doing and being . . . to accumulate small surpluses through the last several years in their budgeting?

Hon. Mr. Hagel: — Mr. Chair, to the hon. member, the surpluses in the regional colleges collectively in the last fiscal year have grown to the range of 5 to \$6 million. One of the main reasons for that was the unpredictability of federal funding.

Mr. Wiberg: — Mr. Deputy Chair, Mr. Minister. Certainly with the unpredictable financial contributions from the federal government, which has helped to create these surpluses, I see also a few that the monies are not getting used to reduce tuition fees and rather that these monies are being used to invest in SaskTel bonds, in Saskatchewan Savings Bonds.

I wonder if you would be able to elucidate for me and for the rest of our caucus here, why the department feels so strongly that they need to take taxpayers' money and reinvest it into the government and not use those monies a little more wisely and maybe use them to reduce tuition fees.

Hon. Mr. Hagel: — Mr. Chair, to the hon. member. The tuition fees that are charged by the regional colleges for their students who are taking SIAST or university classes are identical to the tuition fees that are assigned by SIAST or the universities.

On the matter of the fiscal management of their surpluses, the regional colleges do have the authority to choose how they manage that and they do that, in my judgment, in a responsible way, dedicated to the ongoing operations of the colleges. I do point out as well that those financial reports are all audited and are all tabled and are public knowledge.

Mr. Wiberg: — Mr. Deputy Chair, Mr. Minister, certainly we need to give credit to the regional colleges' boards for being able to accumulate the small surpluses and not running deficit budgeting as we see throughout so many other areas of the province in regards to handling of provincial monies.

But I guess when we see that that money is being invested and as an example in Saskatchewan savings bonds where the maturity date is the year 2003, should the regional college run into any financial difficulties, these monies are then not immediately available.

I'm wondering then, has the department, Post-Secondary Training and Education, thought about putting any guidelines in

place so that those kind of monies that are in surplus are being a little more readily available?

Hon. Mr. Hagel: — Mr. Chair, to the hon. member, the policy that is used to guide the regional colleges in their investments is the same that guides the province. It's from the comptroller's office.

Regarding the specific question he asks about Saskatchewan savings bonds, I think the hon. member will be somewhat reassured to know that Saskatchewan savings bonds are redeemable annually.

Mr. Wiberg: — Mr. Deputy Chair, Mr. Minister, when I first started my questioning, one of your first answers was that one of the problems that regional colleges have is being unsure of how much funding is going to be attributed to them from the federal government.

Now I noticed that in the past, on their budget lines, there's certain monies comes from the federal government. Now is this monies that . . . kind of a new monies from federal government, or is this still in the same package that normally comes through transfer payments from the federal . . . from the feds to the provincial government?

Hon. Mr. Hagel: — Mr. Chair, to the hon. member. Up until June of 1999, a year ago, the federal government would engage in direct purchases of training with the colleges, and that was a direct relationship.

The federal government has now, for all practical sakes and purposes, withdrawn from training. And so in that context, the relationship with the federal government has become substantially more predictable.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair. Good afternoon, Mr. Minister, and good afternoon to your officials.

Mr. Minister, I was just wondering if . . . I'm going to put about four very clear questions to you, at least I hope they come out clearly. And I hope to get some very specific answers because we're trying to fit in a number of people with questioning in estimates today within the time period we have.

Mr. Minister, how many seats are made available in the College of Nursing in each of the cities of Saskatoon and Regina?

Hon. Mr. Hagel: — Mr. Chair, that's a difficult . . . if the hon. member is into short snappers that's a difficult one to respond to in that context.

The question is clear; it's the answer that is a little more complicated than it may seem. The hon. member will appreciate that there will be combinations of SIAST and the university training in total, and that the number of entry seats have increased over the last year.

But I don't have those precise numbers with me, and if it's acceptable to the hon. member I'll provide them to her in writing.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Minister, I would

also ask if you could provide in writing for me the answer to the following questions. How many seats were there available in the College of Nursing 10 years ago; how many seats 5 years ago? How many nurses graduated 10 years ago, how many nurses graduated 5 years ago, and how many nurses graduated within this past year?

And I'd also like to know how many applicants were there for this year? And I'd like to know also, Mr. Minister, how many people are on the waiting list in each of those centres to enter the College of Nursing?

I just want to make a comment in addition, Mr. Minister. It seems to me like all of the health facilities it seems in the province are stating that they're short of nurses. There's a number of nurses that have indicated to me that they're really running. They feel that they're short-staffed and that their duties have gotten to the point where they're not sure that they can in fact do them safely any more because of the shortage of nurses.

In view of the shortage of nurses, I'm wondering why there aren't more seats opened up.

I await your response, especially the response about waiting lists. And I would hope that your government would ensure that there are enough spaces, enough seats, made available to accommodate the need for nurses in Saskatchewan.

So I thank you and I will look forward a little further down the road to your answers.

Mr. Minister, would you like to comment? Thank you.

Hon. Mr. Hagel: — Thanks, Mr. Chair. I know the hon. member will be encouraged to just acknowledge the recent history where the number of training seats for entry into nursing has been increased from 180 to 260. So it's been an increase of 80 seats.

And there is . . . with your colleague earlier we talked about some of the capital implications of that as well in order to accommodate it. And I know as well the hon. member will be encouraged, Mr. Chair, by the nurses' bursary program that was introduced this year through the Department of Health, and it had a very high level of interest.

Regarding the other detailed questions that she asks, she's quite right — I don't have those numbers off the top of my head. And we'll provide them in writing.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Minister, I acknowledge and I understand that the seats have increased from 180 to 260 in the past couple of years. However, the questions I asked you previously I think will indicate that there was a drop in the seats in years previous to that.

And, you know, when seats are not available and there's a drop in the number of seats that applicants can vie for, then of course it stands to reason that the minister and your government should see to it that seats are increased because there has been quite an outcry lately of a need for more seats and more nurses.

(1245)

And so yes there has been an increase, but prior to that time I believe that there was quite a significant decrease, and this is really quite an interesting game we're in here.

I think what we have to recognize is that we do need to have nurses, and that there is a shortage, and that quality care of patients is at stake here. And again, I would ask your minister to acknowledge that there is a need for further seats. Possibly, once you look at the waiting lists, that may become more clear; and something may be done.

Hon. Mr. Hagel: — Yes, Mr. Chair, I think the hon. member will recognize that the attempt is to do the best balance, the use of public resources to respond to the defined needs that you have. I think that's what she's suggesting should have to be done, and that's certainly what the province has been intending to do. Thanks.

Mr. Hart: — Mr. Deputy Chair, if I could, I have just one or two questions to the minister dealing with the area of skills training.

The minister, Mr. Deputy Chair, I've been approached on a number of occasions by people who operate small- and medium-sized businesses in our province, and they're telling me that they're having difficulty obtaining and attracting a skilled workforce.

I can point to an example in my own constituency of Lilydale Foods in Wynyard. They are constantly searching for people to work at their plant. They're having problems getting people who have the basic skills that are required and that sort of thing. And they feel that perhaps that the minister and his department could be playing a more active role in preparing people for the workforce.

And I wonder if the minister could comment as to what programs they have in place to prepare people for people such as Lilydale processes in Wynyard?

Hon. Mr. Hagel: — Mr. Chair, the hon. member puts his finger on what is an important role and responsibility of the department, and that's to make the best connection with the resources we've got available to respond to the employment needs here in Saskatchewan. And we do that in a number of ways that I think are, by and large, working pretty effectively.

We will have regional needs assessments done largely through three bodies. One is the career and employment services centres, which are located in 20 communities around the province; a second is through SIAST and its various advisory committees and so on that they have; and as well the regional colleges will work close at hand with employers within their regions, and in fact, I think there's been some experience to that effect in the specific case that the hon. member raises.

One of the main projects that . . . or one of the main programs, I should say, that's used to respond to specific skills training that's targeted for employers will be the JobStart, Future Skills, and that's a program that will be drawn from both career and employment services centres as well as the regional colleges in order to respond to individual needs.

Mr. Hart: — Mr. Deputy Chair, I know there's a number of areas that we would like to continue to explore, but in the interests of time I believe my colleague has one last question for you so I'll defer to the member from . . .

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Minister, Mr. Deputy Chair. Mr. Minister, with your good sense of humour it would be most enjoyable to sit here the whole afternoon and deliberate with you.

Mr. Minister, what I was wondering, and I'm not sure if you can divulge this information at this time, but with the Centenary Capital Fund of \$5 million being designated to different institutes, I'm just wondering whether or not that Centenary Capital Fund funding will be considered for the Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies that is proposed?

Hon. Mr. Hagel: — The answer to that is no, it's a federally funded institution.

Ms. Julé: — I thank you, Mr. Minister. And I will take the honour of thanking you today for being here and answering our questions and providing information for not only the official opposition, but all the people of Saskatchewan. And I thank your officials for coming out today too.

Hon. Mr. Hagel: — And I thank the hon. member for her comment, and her threat that this jocular working relationship, Mr. Chair, might take us on and on into the afternoon.

I just want to . . . did the hon. member from Last Mountain-Touchwood want to make a final comment? No? Then let me, on behalf of the department, say a word of thanks to all the hon. members, but under the leadership of the member for Last Mountain-Touchwood as the Post-Secondary Skills Training critic in the opposition, for the questions that have been raised here.

It is an important principle in this democracy that there be an element of accountability that occurs, and this is the forum for doing that. I have appreciated the working relationship that we've established since I've had the honour of coming to this portfolio.

And I've appreciated the interest that was shown by the hon. member for Last Mountain-Touchwood and a number of his other colleagues, as well as from my own colleagues from this side of the House, in the public consultations around access to post-secondary education.

That's a very important subject for the people of our province and I'm very pleased that it's been taken very seriously by both sides of the House. And I thank the hon. members for their questions and their interest.

And I also want to say a word of thanks, Mr. Chair, to the officials from the department. They're hard-working officials. They do a very, very professional job and I'm very proud to be associated with the quality of work that they do on behalf of the people of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Chair, I will ask that the committee report progress.

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

The Deputy Chair: — I'd like to invite the minister to introduce his officials.

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair. To introduce my officials: to my immediate left we have Stuart Kramer, who is my deputy minister. To my immediate right we have Dave Phillips, who is the assistant deputy minister of operations. Right directly behind me we have Lynn Tulloch, who is the executive director of corporate services, and next to Lynn, to her left is Bob Ruggles, assistant deputy minister of programs. Thank you.

(1300)

Subvote (ER01)

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. And thank you, Mr. Minister, for this opportunity to get together again and once again, welcome to your officials as well.

And I know that we have a lot of things that we need to discuss this afternoon, but I would firstly like to invite my colleague, the member from Swift Current, to pose some questions that are of concern to him.

Mr. Wall: — Mr. Deputy Chair of committees, Mr. Minister, and welcome as well to your officials here this afternoon.

Mr. Minister, Mr. Deputy Chair, my questions relate to action that the department has taken recently against the city of Swift Current. And I will try to phrase my questions so that you are free to comment knowing that, I believe, the proceedings are currently before the court. So I'll keep that in mind and try to phrase my questions such that you'll be able to comment because I frankly think the taxpayers of Swift Current would like to hear some answers with respect to this particular action.

I mentioned this particular issue to the minister some time ago at the beginning of session and I was appreciative for his prompt response; maybe didn't agree with the answer necessarily, but I thank him for discussing it with me early on.

Mr. Minister, you will know the background to this has been a problem, a historic problem, that the city of Swift Current has had with respect to its sewage effluent. And from time to time over the decades, especially in wet years, the city has had to seek a permit from the department under its various names to discharge into the Swift Current Creek.

Now that was an undesirable option that the city simply had to pursue — it had no choice. And the department recognized that when it granted those permits and — in the past — and of course there were public meetings held and a lot of concern expressed from downstream residents and that's completely understandable as well. I think the people of the . . . the residents of the city of Swift Current who maybe were not directly affected by the discharge were also very uncomfortable with the fact that this had to happen.

And so there were several options presented to the city as a result of a working committee that was put in place, including officials from the department under a different name at the time, and several options were explored, all of them fairly pricey for the taxpayers of the city of Swift Current.

The most effective and one of the least costly of those was a new technology called snow-fluent, where literally during the winter months snow is made from effluent and the purification process, which has been duly licensed by our province and other provinces in the Dominion and other jurisdictions on the continent, purifies the effluent and then it melts in a decanter pond, and we don't have to get into the technical aspects of that particular technology.

But it isn't cheap technology either. And when you combine the \$1 million-plus that the city taxpayers spent on that technology, when you combine that with the fact that the taxpayers also funded the construction of additional lagoon cell, or that they currently fund a very extensive and not inexpensive effluent irrigation program whereby they've had to purchase land, because farmers simply don't want to take irrigation when they don't need it — and so the city basically had to purchase land for that as well, as well as irrigation equipment — when you add all of that investment that the taxpayers of the city of Swift Current have made to earnestly and honestly try to deal with this serious problem, you're getting well over \$2 million over the course of time that I'm talking about.

Now, minister, I think that demonstrates a resolve and a willingness on the part of the taxpayers and on the part of the various city councils. And I believe there's been two different city councils involved now to deal with this issue honestly.

Obviously cities, like every jurisdiction, would like to use public monies for . . . well probably to provide some park services, to cut taxes. In the case . . . in this case, I'm sure the city would have liked to have used \$2 million-plus for other things, but they didn't feel it was right to leave the problem unaddressed. And your department, quite rightly, said this problem has to be addressed; we can't continue to discharge.

Now I'll quickly fast-forward to an incident — I believe it was early last spring in the city of Swift Current — where there was a very accidental, very accidental discharge of effluent in the city of Swift Current.

When it was reported to the city, the city immediately dealt with it. They dealt with their staff and were upset with what was a human error in terms of a valve not being turned off. But despite that, your department has pursued legal charges against the city of Swift Current, against the taxpayers.

Now I can understand that kind of approach if the city had proven to be negligent or if the city had demonstrated a lack of care or caution as it relates to this issue in general. But clearly that's not the case, Minister.

And so I know you can't comment on the case that may be currently before the courts, but I would ask you today to stand in your place please, sir, and inform the members of this committee on how you could possibly reach the decision, in advance of it now being in the court, how could you possibly

reach the decision to go ahead and lay charges against the taxpayers of the city of Swift Current when they have demonstrated the kind of goodwill they have demonstrated to deal responsibly with the problem of excess effluent in the city of Swift Current?

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair. Very quickly I'll respond as best as I can and I'm sure the member can appreciate that this being in the courts that it's very difficult for us to make very many comments.

What I will say is that it's very, very important to SERM's (Saskatchewan Environment and Resource Management) role and obligation to the people of Saskatchewan and to the people of Swift Current and other areas, that we take our role in terms of working with waste water and the sewage systems throughout the province very, very seriously. It's not in my interest, and it's not in the purview of SERM, to see any Saskatchewan residents being charged much less the city being charged. Certainly that's something that we don't look forward to doing and something that we simply like to not do.

However in stating that, I think it's again very important — and I know he can appreciate this — that we don't want to make too many comments other than to say that it's something that we take very seriously in terms of our role, and as well that as always it's something that all the people of Saskatchewan want us to do. When you're looking at the proper handling of sewer wastes it's got to be done. And all this information of course, as you're probably aware, will come out to the court cases and it's best that we not make any comments in reference to this being before the courts. Thank you.

Mr. Wall: — Mr. Deputy Chair of Committees, and, Minister, thank you for that answer. I did try to word the question such that you could comment on it as a result . . . understanding that it is before the courts. And I appreciate what you're saying. I think the taxpayers of the province do expect that SERM and other agencies of government including SaskWater are wanting to ensure that both our drinking water and how we are treating our sewage and our effluent is in the interest of public safety.

I also expect that they would want you to enforce the laws that are in place fairly and that they would want the department to ensure that communities are complying with the regulations involving effluent and the discharging of effluent. And I guess that goes to the heart of this particular issue and it's why, Minister, I do take great exception with how the department has acted in this case.

Because, if they were dealing with a belligerent community or a negligent community who were almost purposely being negligent in respect of this issue and not really caring to resolve the problem of excess effluent, I would expect them to take a very hard line. I would expect them to go to court. I would expect them to hold that community and its leaders and I guess indirectly its taxpayers responsible.

But, Minister, that is not the case here. That is not the case here.

We are talking about a community that invested well over \$2 million to try to address the problem of excess effluent. We're talking about a city whose total operating budget is \$30 million

a year. I think their capital budget for the whole city this year was under 5 million. So that's a huge amount of money for the taxpayers to have spent in good faith, earnestly, to try to avoid the discharge of effluent into the Swiftcurrent Creek.

And so I guess as a more general question I would ask this, with that preamble: what option would the department have — and I won't ask about this specific case — but if the department has laid a charge like this against any municipality or body, what option do they have to revisit the charge and to drop that charge? That would be the question.

You don't have to comment specifically on this issue because it is before the courts. But maybe you could answer for me, generally speaking, what options would you have, if you had a will to, to drop a charge or withdraw a charge like that?

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you again for the question. I just want to point out that it's always to our value as a government, certainly as taxpayers of Saskatchewan and people involved with the province, that we make every effort to encourage people to follow the proper processes, the proper procedures. And we put systems in place to ensure that the public safety is one of the primary concerns that we have.

And in relation to the sewage problems in Swift Current, we're always, as I mentioned, always looking forward and are quite excited at some of the initiatives shown by various cities. And we certainly commend all the players in doing that.

And as we mentioned before, some of these systems that we have set up is intending to do exactly what we all want to see happen, and that is to protect the public interest.

And in saying that and I again state, that it is not my intention from day one to have any Saskatchewan residents being charged under any infraction. We do our very best to try and avoid that because this is certainly something that we want to see a lot of co-operation, collaboration, and certainly common objectives are shared by many people. So we want to bring as many people as we can to share in that workload; so charging them is certainly something that we don't like to see happen.

What we do know, that in this particular instance when a community or a certain system doesn't follow the rules and regulations, charges are generally recommended by Justice. All the evidence is certainly brought forward by SERM and this is where Justice also plays a role in indicating, yes there is the ground for laying charges. And whether or not the alleged infraction is requiring charges is determined by the public prosecution branch of Justice. So they have certainly the upper hand.

But what I'll say in terms of, you know, if a municipality or a RM (rural municipality) or a village has a particular charge and a challenge in the court system, that I think the mediation process — the whole system of look, listen, there was a mistake made here, we have to make sure that it doesn't happen again in the future whether it be one charge or another — that through the court process, mediation is always something that is an option.

And we would encourage as many communities out there to: (a)

follow the rules; (b) that if there is an infraction, that they do as much as they can to immediately solve the problem; (c) is not to take any other action that contributes to the problem, and of course; (d) is go through the process of . . . hopefully through the courts seeking the mediation option.

(1315)

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman of committees. And, Mr. Minister, thank you for the answer. I guess, what intervention have you made with Justice officials if any then in terms of this mediation process because I agree with you and I appreciate the remarks that you make in that regard.

And I guess I'd like to go on record as the MLA for the area as encouraging you and the department, when consulted by Justice throughout this process, to advocate a position. I would recognize maybe there was a mistake made here. Maybe common sense needs to prevail and realize we're not dealing with a rogue community that doesn't care about the downstream residents in the Swiftcurrent Creek and the quality of water in that body.

And I would seek that commitment here and then I would thank you in advance for your answer and to your officials for their indulgence. And I indicate I think that the member for Kelvington-Wadena will be pursuing questions as well.

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you very much. Once again I have to inform the member that indeed we haven't had any interaction with any Justice officials or anybody else for that matter on this particular issue. And I'm sure he appreciates the fact they have to be very, very safe and careful on this one. So therefore I can't make any comments on the case.

All I can say is that it's something that we are aware of. It's before the courts and we have to allow the courts to go through their due process. Thank you.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Chair of Committees. Welcome to the officials, Mr. Minister. Last time that this department was up, Mr. Minister, the member from Carrot River Valley asked one question about logging in the area around Hudson Bay, especially dealing with the contracts for Weyerhaeuser. And we understand that last year the government determined that instead of letting the contracts out through the government department, they would . . . Weyerhaeuser would be making that decision.

I've been contacted by a number of private contractors now who have now had their contracts lapsed by Weyerhaeuser. They hadn't been aware before that this was going to be happening.

A number of contractors had made significant purchases in equipment and machinery last year, to the tune of a quarter of a million dollars on just one contractor. So now they're not allowed . . . they won't have the capability of working . . . of Weyerhaeuser purchasing from them or them going directly to the mill.

Can you tell me how this decision was made? If there's any opportunity for these private individuals to come to you and say

. . . at least to have given them some fair warning that this was going to have happened?

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I just want to point out to all the families and all the contractors that are involved in this particular challenge at this time is that it's always unfortunate, and sincerely my heart and thoughts go out to some of the families that are losing their jobs and opportunity.

However in terms of the logging in the areas around the Hudson Bay area, this is totally Weyerhaeuser's choice. As a business that's running in the forestry field they make these choices as a business, and as always as a government we strongly encourage Weyerhaeuser to be fair in their dealings with all the contractors.

There is no question, sentimentally I agree that some of the challenges that many of these families have faced and some of the planning that they done, all of a sudden they don't have contracts, you know. I think everybody across the province certainly can relate to that in their lives because this often happens to many folks. But as we mentioned before, Weyerhaeuser's the ones that are actually contracting these folks. They're the ones that decide how much you're getting paid, who's getting the work, and so on and so forth. So this is entirely a business choice. But on one hand we also strongly encourage them to be fair to all the people so we can minimize some of the impact that you're speaking about.

Ms. Draude: — Mr. Chair, Mr. Minister, I do appreciate that you are sincere in what you're saying and I know that you don't like to see people out of work. But sincerity, Mr. Minister, doesn't pay the bills.

Last year, one of the contractors that I talked to had been speaking with the government, and they were excited about the possibility of more work because of the mill opening up in Hudson Bay. They weren't given any indication at all that this is going to have happened. So when you put your life savings at risk and believing in this province when you have a government contract, I think that's sort of different than when you are dealing in a private business.

I know there seems to be some sort of feeling especially for bankers that if you're dealing with the government, then it's solid. I believe that there's some obligation on the part of government to make the people that they're dealing with aware of what's going to be happening. We can't just wake up in the morning and hear what's going to happen to our lives on the radio.

So, Mr. Minister, I know that you can't go to Weyerhaeuser and tell them you've got to hire all these people back again, but can you tell me what I can go to my contractors and say? I know they're going to be pleased that you're sincere in your regrets of what's happening, but that isn't going to pay the bill, Mr. Minister.

So is there any plans by your department to see what kind of follow-through that you can do for these people?

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Again I want to thank the member for

her question. And I think the most important thing is, as I mentioned, is that nobody in Saskatchewan, certainly myself, want to see any families lose their opportunity, lose their employment, and certainly be at risk of losing a lot more if they don't have work.

But what I do want to know . . . what I do want to point out is that Saskatchewan is certainly looking at expanding the forestry industry. Forestry is also expanding in the Hudson Bay area. As the member may know, there's a brand new OSB (oriented strand board) plant being built. There'll be a number of brand new jobs in that area and clearly there's some excitement in forestry in general. And I haven't got all the figures and the stats in front of me as to what this does for the economy and for employment in that particular area.

But what I will say again is that we hope that the families are able to find other work and we sincerely again can sympathize with their challenge.

But clearly Weyerhaeuser are the individuals that decide who their contractors are. Government does not have a role in determining who they will employ or who they will not employ. Thank you.

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. And thank you, Mr. Minister. This worked out very, very well in terms of your last answer and where I want to go next.

Recently there was an exemption granted in the Porcupine . . . Pasquia-Porcupine forest management area from using softwood with a top diameter of less than 10 centimetres. Now this exemption apparently lasts until eight months after the new OSB mill that you just mentioned is completed.

Can you explain to me, Mr. Minister, why that exemption was granted?

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I just want to point out that the information that you've given me today is very sketchy. I would need very specific information as to who the exemption is to, which area you're speaking about. And if you could either give me more information now or forward us a letter indicating the complete information, we'll be able to find out exactly what the issue is at hand.

And I want to assure you that we'll try and do it in a timely fashion where you're not waiting three weeks for the answer. So if you give us more information now or by way of a written letter, you know, certainly we'll get the answers for you.

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Well, Mr. Minister, I think you probably are aware of this. I know that it has been discussed by your advisory committee, and I know that you probably have gotten some concerns from individuals in the Hudson Bay area on this particular topic.

But bottom line is, is that what has happened here, as I understand it, your department has granted an exemption for the use of any softwood timber less than four inches in diameter which is basically the tops, the tops of the trees. Now there are some estimates that say that in the Hudson Bay area this equates to about 65,000 square metres annually of wasted fibre.

And a little earlier this afternoon, Mr. Minister, I forwarded to you some pictures taken by citizens in the Hudson Bay area of the waste as a result of this exemption. And I think after having looked at them you would probably agree with me that it's pretty dramatic to see that amount of our natural forestry resource being wasted and left strewn around in the bush the way that it is. And the exemption of anything less than four inches in diameter is different, of course, than what was previous because it was three inches and less.

So this has added huge volumes of waste that are being left around in the . . . particularly the Pasquia-Porcupine forest management area. And my question was: what purpose was given for the granting, or what reason was there for the granting of this exemption? And was there ever any effort to find some other use for this extra fibre that, as you will see from the photographs, is just piling up in the bush?

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. I just want to point out to the member, and I appreciate the information that you have given me and certainly in the follow-up question, and I want to assure you that I was not aware of the exemption that you speak about. And again I encourage you to give us the exact details and we will get back to you.

I think the important thing is the people of Saskatchewan through time and continuing through time will also encourage us to be very, very rigid in some of the manners in which we manage our forest.

And as you probably are aware, there's been a new Forest Resources Management Act proclaimed April 1, 1999. As well, we have new forestry regulations enacted April 1, 1999 as well. So Saskatchewan is the leader when it comes to proper forest management.

And a photograph that . . . you did show it to me and I appreciate that information and certainly it really hits home, some of the comments that you've been making that we should find total utilization for all the wood and the timber supply that's out there. And I certainly view that sentiment . . . and that is our objective as well as government.

And we always discourage and frown very, very hard on those individuals that may want to waste this valuable resource. So my point to you is that, give us the exact details as to where the area is, who the exemption is for. If you have any additional information, we will investigate that particular aspect, and if an exemption was granted, and we'll also give the details as to why it was, but certainly from our perspective, exemptions of that sort, personally I don't feel that there's a warrant . . . it's warranted throughout the province.

As I mentioned before, our objective is to manage the forest as best as we can. That is what the people of Saskatchewan wants, that is what the industry wants. And so I think it is incumbent upon us as government to really look at some of the challenges facing forestry as a whole.

So when we get information from opposition, or from interest groups, or from any of the environmental groups that are out there, we sincerely appreciate that information. And we will investigate and we will get back to you in terms of why the

exemption was granted and exactly how we can improve the whole problem.

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Mr. Chair, Mr. Minister. Some of the information that I relate to you, Mr. Minister, came directly from documents that you provided me through a freedom of information request.

Let's move to the Prince Albert forest management area. And as I indicated in the Pasquia-Porcupine, we were looking at a situation where the exemption was only going to be granted for eight months after the completion of the new OSB mill. But in the Prince Albert forest management area — and this was authorized in a letter to Mr. Hanen, I believe of Weyerhaeuser, from Lorne Scott — the letter authorized them to leave about 661,000 square metres annually of softwood fibre, with a top diameter of less than 4 inches, in the bush for up to, in this case, ten years.

So can you explain to me, Mr. Minister, why we now are wasting huge amounts of fibre in both of the forest management areas?

(1330)

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — I want to thank the member for the question. And as I mentioned before, Saskatchewan really has some very tough management Acts in terms of forestry. We have all the regulations and the rules we feel is necessary to manage the forest as best we can. And as always, we also are looking for advice and comments, as I mentioned earlier, on how we can improve that system.

And what I wanted to point out is that, sincerely, we appreciate the information that the member has given us. And we want to get to the bottom of that because obviously, as he's mentioned, if some of the figures that he's mentioned are correct, then we don't want to see any waste of any sort.

And I would encourage the member . . . from the documents that you've given me, from the photographs, the only information that I have in this particular documents are the words on the bottom marked, image 47.jpg. Now if that's a code for a certain place or a certain part of our forest then maybe you can share the code with us so we know exactly the area you're speaking about.

But clearly SERM is managing 37.7 million hectares of land in the province of Saskatchewan. And it's a job that we really embrace, and we look forward to doing. We do our very best to manage all those interests on that land as well.

But as I mentioned, in terms of forestry, we take that work very, very seriously. And this department and certainly this government made an effort to develop the forestry industry so we can maximize all the potential jobs that might be created, while at the same time achieving that balance of trying to make sure that we don't see any waste of this valuable resource at all. And if there's another market, if there's another industry we can use some of the exemptions that you speak about to minimize the waste, then certainly all avenues will be looked at.

But again I encourage the member as always just to, if you can

for us, is to give us the specifics on which area you're speaking about, of the exact amount of volume of wood, who's getting the exemption, how long this has been going on. We can find that out if we get the basic information from you.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Well, Mr. Minister, I'll go one better. The gentleman who in fact took those photographs asked me to extend an invitation to you to come and visit, particularly in the Hudson Bay area, and see for yourself first hand the waste that has been going on there particularly this last winter.

Because the community is very, very concerned. And as I indicated yesterday in speaking to the forest management Act, the community and the communities that derive their living from the forestry, the individuals in those communities are perhaps the most ardent conservationists because they are the people that derive their living from the forestry. So they are the people who are the most concerned, and who get very upset when they see the kind of waste that is happening in their area.

Now there are also I think, and this relates even to some of our previous discussions around fire control, there are other issues there that perhaps Environment and Resource Management should be giving some thought, as I've had indicated to me by people who know far more about this than I do.

But with the amount of waste that you see in those photographs, laying on the forest floor, apparently that waste can become quite a fire hazard as it dries out over the course of the year. So there may be all sorts of other issues related to this as well that should be explored.

But I would like to ask the minister if he would be interested in responding to the individual and individuals in the community who invited him to come out to the area and take a personal tour for himself.

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you very much. And I just want to advise that member that I will accept his invitation, kind invitation to attend a visit to the area and to look at the particular problem area as well. What I will point out though is that I think previous ministers had been to the site, and I understand that the Hon. Lorne Scott, the previous minister of SERM, was in there to visit the site and view the site.

And to also point out, earlier I mentioned the fact that certainly the government has some tough acts in place to ensure that forestry is not abused. I think a lot of the environmental groups that are out there, the movement in general is very concerned about the number of activity in terms of forestry happening in the province of Saskatchewan.

But more so, Mr. Speaker, the third component of a good forestry management plan and partnership that is necessary is also the forestry companies. Now it's unusual for a Minister of the Environment to get up and defend the forestry companies. We don't do it too often, but what I will say is that in general the forest companies themselves know and appreciate that this is a very valuable resource. They will not knowingly, I think, make a great effort to waste a resource and do things that are

contrary to good forest management practices.

So not only do they assume that responsibility that it's more so their job to make sure that they manage the resource once they get the resource — that they value add to it, that they create jobs and so on and so forth.

Their role is clear. And we've had conversations with a number of forestry companies where we have said that we're quite serious in enforcing the rules and regulations that the province has put in place, not only because we have to, because the environmental movement, the people of Saskatchewan, the people involved with all kinds of industry across the border want, is they want that balance between environmental stewardship, and certainly the development that needs to happen to create jobs and opportunity for the people of Saskatchewan.

Now that being said, I will say again that I accept your kind invitation for the visit to the site. Certainly I know that my predecessor, the Hon. Lorne Scott, was at the site previously, and that we'll continue working with the people of Hudson Bay, continue working with the environmental movement, continue working with the forestry companies, and continue working with the people that are impacted, not only those that have jobs in the forestry sector, but those that could be having other opportunity whether it's outfitting, or whether it's having a cabin in the area.

But we must do our very best to be inclusive of all people that, as I mentioned, have a need for the 37.7 million hectares that SERM manages throughout the whole province.

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Minister, it appears that we've gone to a very high grade form of logging in this province with what these exemptions have allowed to happen in terms of the amount and the volume of wood that's being left in the bush.

I should advise you, Mr. Minister, that a number of months ago I actually met with Weyerhaeuser to discuss some of these very same concerns, and in a lot of ways we had much the same conversation as you and I are having now.

They explained to me why they felt it was necessary to go to you in the first place and get the exemptions in order to be able to allow that . . . or be able not to use the material that was four inches or less.

The one frustration that I had in that meeting, Mr. Minister, was I suggested that if all of their reasons were legitimate and that the department had seen them as legitimate and was able to grant the exemption, then perhaps there should be a way of using the material that was left behind. And there are lots of people throughout all of northeast, northern Saskatchewan that could use the material for rails, fence posts, firewood, any number of different things.

And as a matter of fact, there's something really interesting happening in the town of Hudson Bay itself right now. There is a new program being developed for people with disabilities. And I know, Mr. Minister, you have been involved and have a great deal of understanding of the various programs, services,

that are offered for people with disabilities. And there is a program that is going to be developed in the town of Hudson Bay.

Now this could be an opportunity for both government and the company to make some extremely good use of this waste and to as well be able to allow someone who requires an opportunity to be able to be productive and become engaged in business and employment by allowing them to use some of this. Perhaps, as I say, in the production of rails or posts or firewood, whatever the case may be.

And can I get some assurance from you, Mr. Minister, that you would encourage everyone involved here to look at any way possible of using this waste? And particularly if there is some very, very socially relevant way of doing it in terms of services to persons with disabilities or perhaps providing firewood to individuals who are having a more difficult time in terms of income and that sort of thing.

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair. I just want to point out to the member that I think the idea that you share with us is a very good idea.

And I know that you have a long affiliation and a long history with such folks as SARC (Saskatchewan Association of Rehabilitation Centres) and SARCAN, and certainly I think you can appreciate the value that many people that do have some disabilities are able to contribute economically and socially to the great province of Saskatchewan.

And I also commend the people of Hudson Bay, because certainly some of the ideas that they've come up with in terms of this particular concept is something that we should certainly pay a lot of attention to and support as best we can.

There is no question that throughout my travel in Saskatchewan, that each trip and each meeting that I have, I'm very, very encouraged and very, very enthusiastic of the type of intelligence and the type of planning and the type of commitment, but more so the type of energy the people from Saskatchewan, from all across Saskatchewan, all walks of life, have towards trying to do the best that they can in their particular capacity to make the best of the world that they live in. And certainly that's all throughout Saskatchewan.

And Hudson Bay, as I've mentioned, certainly should be commended for that concept of using any particular waste wood that is available out there to try and create some employment opportunity to people with disabilities, for firewood, and so on and so forth, railings. And the list goes on.

But any time that we have the opportunity to support that . . . strengthen that initiative, we'll undertake to do exactly that.

In reference to the point of the smaller wood, it should be noted to the members of the Assembly, and certainly to the member from the Northeast, that in terms of the smaller wood, Weyerhaeuser are looking for the best uses of materials left behind. And we're strongly encouraging them to look at that particular option.

The Hudson Bay . . . The OSB plant you spoke about in terms

of the tremendous jobs that will be created in the Hudson Bay area, they can indeed use small and large hardwood fibre. So there is a market for the small wood. Wapawekka sawmill that just opened is designed to saw and use small timber. There's some exciting, innovative ways in which they can use small timber and they are looking at that option. As well, the new Big River sawmill expansion is better technology for smaller timber.

So in reference to the issue of waste, as I mentioned before, it's certainly incumbent upon us as the ministry that's taking care of the forest, that we ensure that some of the forest companies that have the right to harvest wood utilize all that wood as best as they can.

And there is some exciting new expansion plans for the province of Saskatchewan; there's the 10,000 jobs that people are speaking about. While we're quite proud of that particular aspect of the government, what we have to realize, that as SERM our primary job here is to make sure that they're harvesting within their guidelines, that they're following all the rules and regulations.

So we're very serious in that regard. So when the opportunity comes for expansion and economic benefits, we say use all that wood, don't waste all that wood. If there's anything leftover other people have other uses for it. And we do it under a sustainable attitude. And I think in the long run that will best serve the Saskatchewan people's interests and especially the people in Hudson Bay.

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Minister, well, you're right about the OSB plant in Hudson Bay, but the fact of the matter is that the waste will continue until at least eight months after it's completed; and in the Prince Albert FMA (forest management area), apparently from the exemption that you granted, it will continue for 10 more years. And I think, Mr. Minister, it's very, very fair to say that there are a tremendous amount of individuals and communities that are very, very concerned about that and concerned throughout the entire province.

(1345)

If I could just switch topics briefly here, Mr. Minister, as I understand it, the department has had some difficulty in provincial parks in the last couple of years in collecting their fees from the private operators and some private — not all private but some — private operators and businesses within the park boundaries. Now I think we all know and understand that the vast majority of businesses and operators within park boundaries are very, very responsible people and do a very good job.

But I understand that there has been some difficulty in collecting these fees. Can you tell me, in the province, how far in arrears are some of the private operators and businesses within the boundaries of the provincial parks?

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Just to respond to the member that in terms of the collection of fees from all the private businesses in the provincial parks, we have in excess of 100 businesses in the provincial parks that are

responsible for paying fees.

There are about a dozen that are in arrears. There are only two of those dozen that are in serious problems. But since then the two of the twelve that are in arrears have made some significant payments on their arrears, and the other ten that are remaining do have a payment plan in place.

So we're running about 12 per cent in terms of the overall businesses in the park that are in arrears, but there are some serious contributions and commitments that they have made for repayment to complement some of the significant payments that they have made immediately to certainly alleviate this particular problem.

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Thank you, Mr. Chair, Mr. Minister. Can you indicate to me the total amount that those . . . that is represented by those in arrears that you just discussed?

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair. Just to point out the fact that we can't be very, very forthcoming with the names or the amounts that some of these individuals owe because obviously there's some business interests at play here and we are always very cognizant of the fact that there are some legal issues at stake here.

So what I want to point to the member is that we will provide you with as much information as we can without compromising some of the confidentiality that we have with some of the lessors in the park . . . or the lessees. And I can assure you that it is our intention to work very, very hard on collecting as many of the arrears that we have out there.

But again, as I stated, this is not something that we want out there in public, primarily because this is a contract with some of these folks. And to assure the people of Saskatchewan that we're going to be diligent in ensuring that the 98 per cent of the people out there that are good with this whole system continue being good. The 2 per cent that are in arrears, that we come down fairly hard on them to make sure they continue paying their arrears, all the time kind of respecting some of the fact that they are running a business and some information certainly needs to be kept from public.

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Minister. Would one of the reasons that park fees went up this year be because of the department's inability to collect these delinquent fees?

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — The bottom line here in terms of the increase in fees, the obvious answer is no. That has not contributed to the overall problem in terms of the arrears situation.

What I will point out though in terms of the Victoria Day weekend, May 18 to 22, compared to last year and in reference to this year, in spite of some of the increases, we've had a 38 per cent increase in the revenues from the park that are certainly a good contribution to the park system as a whole in terms of use, in terms of some of the revenue that they use to develop the parks and protect the parks.

So in reference to the challenge associated with the increases, as

I mentioned before, it's always tough to make some of these choices, but I think the people of Saskatchewan appreciate the fact that some of these increases have to occur. But frankly I think overall from this year to last year we're seeing a 30 per cent increase, and quite frankly that's good news for all the camping industry throughout the province.

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Chair, just a couple of other questions in a couple of areas, hopefully fairly quickly here as time is moving on.

Can you tell me what the total amount of environmental handling charges collected this year will be? What amount of that will be paid out to SARCAN for recycling? And where the balance, the difference, of the funds goes in the department budget?

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair. Just to point out that there has been incredible success in the SARCAN movement in terms of getting some of the containers returned.

For 1998 and 1999, the overall return rate was 94 per cent, and that's an incredible testament to some of the efforts of folks being involved with SARCAN and SARC.

For the 1998-99 fiscal year, approximately \$38.2 million in revenues for environmental handling charge and deposit was collected by the provincial government: 25.8 million deposit was returned to the public, the people that brought the bottles in, and 8.1 million was paid to SARCAN.

And the balance which is a small . . . I'm not sure of the exact difference here, but the balance was put in the general revenues, and those general revenues of course are also used to protect the wide environmental interests for the people of Saskatchewan and certainly that has been submitted to the General Revenue Fund. Thank you.

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Chair, just a couple of other issues very quickly. Mr. Minister, recently a Prince Albert resident sent my office extensive documentation outlining her concern surrounding Woodland Campus in the city of Prince Albert.

Mr. Minister, are you familiar with sick building syndrome? Has your department investigated some of the environmental concerns at Woodland Campus, and what were the results of those investigations?

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Chair. Just to report again that in terms of this particular challenge, we are working with SERM, SIAST, and the city of Prince Albert are working to look at the thing and investigate the problems that you speak about here very thoroughly.

So I can report to you today that all three organizations are looking at this. They're going through a thorough evaluation so see what the problems are. So again I can assure people of Saskatchewan and certainly Prince Albert that SIAST, the city of P.A. (Prince Albert) and SERM are working very hard on this particular challenge and we'll be looking forward to continue that work until we're able to resolve the problem.

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Thank you, Mr. Chair, Mr. Minister. So has your department conducted any tests? Have they looked at the surrounding area at all? What kinds of activity has your department been directly involved with in terms of attempting to ascertain what it is that is happening in this particular area in Prince Albert?

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair. Just to report again that these . . . of course we have ongoing meetings on a regular basis. And SERM's role right now at this stage of the game is we're looking at groundwater quality and the monitoring, as well as we're sampling some of the soil in the area. So SERM continues to gladly work with both the city and SIAST and we're doing our particular part at this stage of the game and again, as I mentioned, looking at the groundwater and certainly looking at the soil.

So we're taking this work very seriously and we'll continue working with all the three partners to try and come up with a good resolution to the problem.

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Thank you, Mr. Minister, Mr. Chair. I know that there are many other things that we could go on discussing, including representative area networks. I know that there are a lot more concerns that I have around this particular issue of sick building syndrome.

But given the time, I would like to take this opportunity to thank you and thank your officials for coming today.

The committee reported progress.

The Speaker: — Have a very pleasant weekend.

The Assembly adjourned at 2:02 p.m.