

The Assembly met at 1:30 p.m.

Prayers

**ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS**

**PRESENTING PETITIONS**

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

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

And the signators on this petition, Mr. Speaker, are from Bruno, from Prud'homme, from Saskatoon, and I guess that's it, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

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

The people who have signed this petition are all from Allan, Mr. Speaker.

**Mr. Gantefoer:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too rise on behalf of citizens concerned about the future of rural hospitals. The prayer reads as follows:

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

Signatures on this petition, Mr. Speaker, come from the communities of Jansen, Govan, Viscount, Saskatoon, and Regina.

I so present.

**Mr. Yates:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I stand today to present a petition on behalf of Saskatchewan people requesting that smoking be banned in all public places. The prayer reads as follows:

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

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

These petitions were collected by the youth of Saskatchewan,

Mr. Speaker.

I so present.

**Mr. Peters:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition in regards to the closure of the Lanigan and Watrous hospitals. 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, Mr. Speaker, the petition is signed by folks from Lanigan, Drake, Lockwood, and Watrous.

I so present.

**Ms. Eagles:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I too have a petition from Saskatchewan citizens gravely concerned about our health care. 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 folks in Lanigan, Drake, and Guernsey.

I so present. Thank you.

**Mr. Wall:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise on behalf of people from Cupar concerned about health care services in their area:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the provincial government to take necessary steps to ensure the Cupar Health Care Centre remains open and that physician services are retained.

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

And this petition, Mr. Speaker, is signed by the people from the great community of Cupar.

I so present.

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

**Mr. Weekes:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also would like to read a petition from 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 is duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

From the citizens of Drake, Lanigan, and Guernsey. Thank you.

**Mr. Brkich:** —Mr. Speaker, I have a petition here 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 have a petition of citizens concerned about hospital closures. And the petition reads:

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

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

The petitioners, Mr. Speaker, are from the town of Young.

I so present.

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

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

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

Mr. Speaker, these petitions are from the city of Prince Albert, and are also signed by residents from Nipawin and Tisdale and Melfort and Carrot River, Mr. Speaker. They've been collected by the youth of Saskatchewan.

I so present.

**Mr. Wiberg:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, this afternoon I have a petition in regards to improving the Paddockwood access road and the prayer reads as follows:

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.

Mr. Speaker, this petition is signed by the good people of Paddockwood, Christopher Lake, and Martensville.

I so present.

**Mr. Hart:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition to present dealing with health services in rural Saskatchewan. The prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the provincial government to take the necessary steps to ensure that the Cupar Health Centre remains open, and physician services are retained in the community of Cupar.

And the signatures to the petition come from the community of Cupar and Dysart.

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 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.

And the signatures on this petition are from Lanigan and Viscount.

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.

The petition is signed by individuals from the communities of Lanigan, Humboldt, and Drake.

I so present, Mr. Speaker.

**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 in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

This petition is signed by the good citizens of Jansen, Watrous, and Plunkett, Mr. Speaker.

I so present.

**Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to present a petition requesting that children be protected from tobacco use. The prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioner humbly prays that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to pass comprehensive legislation to protect children from tobacco use.

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

These petitions, Mr. Speaker, are signed by students and staff at Balfour Collegiate in Regina.

### 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 on the following matters:

To restore the Paddockwood access road;

To not proceed with the amalgamation of municipalities;

To ensure the Lanigan and Watrous hospitals remain open; and

To legislate a ban of smoking in public places and workplaces.

### NOTICES OF MOTIONS AND QUESTIONS

**Ms. Eagles:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I give notice that I shall on day no. 63 ask the government the following question:

To the minister responsible for the Liquor and Gaming Authority: how much profit was generated through horse racing in the last fiscal year?

Thank you.

**Mr. McMorris:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I give notice that I shall on day 63 ask the government the following question:

To the Minister of Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Affairs: how many urban reserves are there in Saskatchewan and how many applicants are currently applying for urban reserve status?

**Mr. Brkich:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a notice of a written question. I give notice I shall on day no. 63 ask the government the following question:

To the Minister of Highways and Transportation: how much money did your department spend in this fiscal on purchasing road-building equipment; provide detailed information of what was purchased and the cost.

### INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

**Hon. Ms. Crofford:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well today you notice there's an exceptionally good looking bunch of students up in the west gallery there. And there's 23 students from Sacred Heart Community School, accompanied by their

teacher Carry Dziaduck and chaperone Allison Norbeck.

And I'll just mention I was at Sacred Heart school about two weeks ago visiting in their community room there, and I was so impressed by the artwork in the school and how well everybody was behaved. I don't think they did it just because I was there, Mr. Speaker. I think they're like that all the time.

So I want you to join me in welcoming these people from Sacred Heart Community School.

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

**Mr. Harper:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, to you and to all the members of the Assembly, I'd like to introduce a long-time friend and acquaintance of mine, Mr. Orest Mysak who is sitting in your gallery, Mr. Speaker. Orest and his wife Mary I believe are in Regina for two days doing some babysitting for their grandchildren. And Orest has taken some time out to come down and view the goings-on of the House here.

So I would ask all the members to offer Orest a very warm welcome.

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

### STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

#### Duke of Edinburgh Awards

**Mr. McMorris:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, on Saturday the hon. member from Regina Sherwood and I had the opportunity to attend an award ceremony. It was called the Duke of Edinburgh Awards. This program was founded by Prince Philip in 1956 in England and was introduced into Saskatchewan in 1970.

This year more than 40 youth from all the corners of the province were presented with the Duke of Edinburgh Awards. This award recognizes initiative, achievement, and excellent of youth persons between the ages of 14 and 25. After accomplishing high goals and voluntary public service and personal development activities, the participants are presented with either a bronze, silver, or gold award.

This year the award winners were presented with their awards, by the Lieutenant Governor of Saskatchewan, Ms. Lynda Haverstock. I would like to congratulate all the award winners on behalf of the member from Regina Sherwood, and also a strong recognition of the mentors and the leaders of this organization. Thank you.

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

#### Rainfall Helps Farmers' Crops

**Mr. Yates:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. More good news for Saskatchewan. As the member from Regina South said on Friday and as *The StarPhoenix* said today, quote:

"We've got jobs all over the place . . . They are all full-time jobs and a lot are for youth . . ."

*The StarPhoenix* headline said, "Saskatchewan job market sizzling hot." And it is.

But there is even more good news, Mr. Speaker, this time courtesy of the Almighty. It rained this weekend. It rained all weekend. It rained everywhere in Saskatchewan all weekend. It rained in the west and the northwest where it was desperately needed. It even rained in Kindersley, proving the old saying that the rain falls on the just and the unjust.

This is more than good news, Mr. Speaker, as the old saying goes, it was a million dollar good news. We've all heard the joke: what follows two days of rain in Saskatchewan? The answer is Monday.

But this Monday no one is complaining, not even we so-called citified folk over here who don't understand rural life, according to the member from Watrous. We know that rain makes a seeded crop grow. We know as well that there are miles to go before the crop is in the bin, but the first major hurdle has been cleared.

Good news, Mr. Speaker, for those who want Saskatchewan to succeed but bad news for those who depend on failure. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

### Fox Valley Sports Stories

**Mr. Elhard:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Sports success stories abound in the town of Fox Valley, Mr. Speaker.

The road to success started back in February when Fox Valley was featured in a CBC (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation) production entitled *Hockey Day — Grassroots Hockey in Canada*. As a result of the documentary, Larry Kielo and the Fox Valley arena committee were made aware of funding available to grass roots hockey projects through the NHL (National Hockey League) Players' Association.

The committee received word in April that their rink would be receiving over \$48,000 to help defray costs incurred with the ice plant and Zamboni room project there. A grand opening for their upgraded hockey arena is slated for November 4, 2000.

Stefan Meyer, also of Fox Valley, recently experienced what many bantam hockey players can only dream of. Stefan was selected second overall by the Medicine Hat Tigers in the first round of the bantam hockey draft. Stefan has been playing bantam hockey at Notre Dame, Mr. Speaker, and intends to continue his midjet career there.

From the Fox Valley high school, Nancy and Nicholas Garrecht, a brother/sister team were gold medalists in mixed doubles at the provincial badminton championships held in Melville last month. The boys doubles team of Justin Schmaltz and Chad Reinboldt were also successful in their quest for gold. Congratulations to these students and their coach, Mr. Dennis Franz, on a job well done.

And finally, Mr. Speaker, six young ladies, age 7 to 9, from Fox Valley were awarded honours at the provincial dance competitions and recipients of the prestigious Sweetheart Award for the entire competition.

We got more to tell you, Mr. Speaker, but it will have to wait for another member's statement.

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

### Garment Manufacturing Plant Opens in Saskatoon

**Mr. Addley:** — Mr. Speaker, I hate to be the bearer of bad news for the Saskatchewan Party, but there's even more good news for the people of Saskatchewan today. More good news, more jobs, and more confidence in Saskatchewan's economy.

Today in Saskatoon, a new garment manufacturing plant officially opened its doors. AGM-Sask Ltd. is an expansion plant of the Calgary-based Alberta Garment Manufacturing Co. Ltd.. They produce uniforms, workwear, and casual wear. Among its Canadian clientele are Mark's Work Wearhouse, Air Canada, Canada Safeway, and Levi Strauss and Company.

And more good news. AGM is committed to expanding its unionized labour force in Saskatoon and will likely double its number of employees by the end of the year, meaning more new jobs for the people of Saskatchewan. In fact, Uwe Schiffke who is the president of AGM noted the many benefits of having a unionized shop.

The government has worked very hard to promote the apparel and textiles industry. Last year we provided the apparel and textile association with funding to train skilled and qualified workers for the apparel and textile industry. This training program was one of the reasons AGM decided to locate here.

A company committed to expanding in Saskatchewan and a government committed to creating opportunities for all the citizens of Saskatchewan. This is good news for all of us, Mr. Speaker.

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

### ORAL QUESTIONS

#### Political Tax Credit System

**Mr. Hermanson:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today my question is for the Premier.

Mr. Speaker, for three years the Saskatchewan Party has been calling on the government to create a level playing field when it comes to political donations. The NDP and the Liberals are able to offer tax credits for political donations while the Saskatchewan Party is not. This is grossly unfair to the thousands of Saskatchewan voters who chose to support the Saskatchewan Party.

Mr. Speaker, in recent days we have been in contact with the government on this issue. It now appears the Premier is ready to do the right thing. So I would ask the Premier, what steps are you taking to ensure a level playing field for political donations?

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

**Hon. Mr. Romanow:** — Mr. Speaker, I believe the Leader of the Saskatchewan Party, the Leader of the Official Opposition in this

House, will acknowledge the fact that on June 12 of this year, 2000, I wrote to him advising him, in his capacity as Leader of the Official Opposition, of the government's commitment to implement a political tax credit system effective January 1, 2001.

Thereafter, later that day, the Leader of the Opposition enjoined me with a response welcoming this decision and promising the co-operation of the Saskatchewan Party and the co-operation of the entire House in putting together the appropriate amendments to the Saskatchewan Income Tax Act, Revenue Canada forms, and the like. And I am pleased to confirm the contents of that letter and the decision in this answer today.

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

**Mr. Hermanson:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier and I did exchange correspondence on this matter this morning, and I am very pleased with the commitment that the Premier has made.

Now being a bit of a pessimist, I have one nagging concern. The necessary legislation will not likely be introduced until next year, and no one really knows if the Premier is going to be around at that time.

So, Mr. Premier, will you still be there to see this through, and if not, is your commitment also binding on those people on that side of the House who are eagerly eyeing-up your chair?

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

**Hon. Mr. Romanow:** — Mr. Speaker, I know that I give the Leader of the Opposition a lot of heartburn in view of the fact that there have been so many predictions about my departure, imminent departure. But as Twain says, they're all premature. And I expect to be here on or about January 1, 2001, but if under some circumstances I'm not, this is a commitment being made on behalf of the coalition government to the official opposition in this legislature.

I just hope that you're not gone anywhere on January 1.

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

#### Funding for Highway Maintenance

**Mr. Hermanson:** — Well thank you, Mr. Speaker. I assure the Premier that I intend to be here as well.

Mr. Speaker, I have a few more questions for the Premier. But these questions are about Saskatchewan Highways. Mr. Speaker, it is now clear that the NDP (New Democratic Party) has no plans for fixing Saskatchewan highways. So instead, the NDP is reverting to its divide-and-conquer strategy — trying to pit urban voters against rural voters.

The NDP member for Saskatoon Southeast is trying to convince people that no one's driving on these highways. She says they get less traffic than the alley behind her house so why bother fixing them?

Mr. Premier, do you support the statements made by your member? Do you think her back alley is more important than

Saskatchewan highways?

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

**Hon. Mr. Romanow:** — Mr. Speaker, I had the privilege of reading carefully the statement made by the member from Saskatoon, and I've spoken to her on this on many occasions.

The reality is, the reality is, the reality is — when I say this matter — the reality is that everybody on this side of the House, as I would hope on the other side of the House, believes that we have to have the best possible road system that this province can afford for obvious reasons — economic reasons, tourist reasons, and the like. But as every member in this House also knows, the question of where the road construction is located depends in some measure on the utilization of roads, trading patterns, traffic, and the like.

What the member was trying to illustrate was that fact. It's not a question of saying that the back streets of Saskatoon are more important than the streets in the Wood River constituency or any other part of the constituency. It simply is a recognition of the fact that in advancing a record number of dollars for highways construction, together we make the most effective use of it for everybody — rural and urban.

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

**Mr. Hermanson:** — Mr. Speaker, the Premier didn't answer my question, and that's certainly not very pleasing in light of the fact that the NDP member from Saskatoon Southeast was so ill-informed the other day in the House and on the radio.

Mr. Speaker, this kind of politics is the ugliest kind of NDP politics one can image — trying to convince urban voters that rural concerns just don't matter. Well, Mr. Premier, it's not going to work.

Mr. Premier, we know that people in the city pay a lot of taxes and they deserve high-quality government services, but so do people in rural Saskatchewan. Saskatchewan is one community and Saskatchewan people are not going to tolerate this ugly, divisive type of politics from your government.

Mr. Premier, why are you treating Saskatchewan people like first-class taxpayers, but second-class citizens?

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

**Hon. Mr. Romanow:** — Well, Mr. Speaker, the obvious answer is that the government does not practise the politics that the member prefaced his question by. The principle of this government is very simple: we are, as the Leader of the Opposition described it, one community.

We're a large community geographically, but we're small. And we have to have a strong rural infrastructure, a strong rural economy. We have to help our farmers at the farm gate. We have to have strong villages, towns, and cities. That's not the issue. We're *ad idem* here.

And we're not the ones who get up every other day in the House and say look at all the farm people who are on this side,

and all the city people on that side. We don't seek to divide. That happened to be the electoral result.

We have to work harder as a party to get back into rural Saskatchewan; they have to work harder to get into urban Saskatchewan because we believe in community.

So my answer, Mr. Speaker, as I wrap up this question is: nobody on this side of the House believes or practises in the politics of conquer and rule and divide by conquering through the division of rural and urban. We believe in building a community as best as we can.

And as far as roads are concerned, as one example, the largest budget for highways ever — that's what our commitment is.

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

**Mr. Hermanson:** — Well, Mr. Speaker . . . Mr. Speaker, it's fine for the Premier to lecture on being gracious and considerate, but his own member has not apologized for the statement she made the other day. Mr. Speaker, as far as we know the NDP still thinks Saskatchewan highways have a lower traffic count than back alleys in Saskatoon, and that's simply not true.

At the same time, we have seen . . . yes, we have seen some decrease in traffic because people can't drive down these roads anymore. They're in such bad shape people are taking grid roads instead.

Mr. Speaker, there's also a lot less people going to the Plains hospital than there was a few years ago — since the NDP closed it. That doesn't mean that more people don't need hospital services.

And if the traffic count has fallen on some highways, it's simply because the NDP aren't taking care of those highways. They're not keeping them in good shape. The NDP neglects the highway, it falls apart; and then they use that as an excuse to turn it back to gravel.

My question to the Premier: why have you abandoned your responsibility to maintain Saskatchewan highways?

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

**Hon. Mr. Romanow:** — Well, Mr. Speaker, in answer to the Leader of the Opposition, the exact opposite is the truth.

There's not been an abandonment. There has been the highest dedication of tax dollars for highways in the province of Saskatchewan ever. And that is the case. And we do it, by the way, in the absence of any kind of federal government support.

I'm hoping . . . I noticed the Prime Minister on television last night saying that there'll be a first ministers' meeting in September where highways and infrastructure will be on the table. I'm hoping it'll be Ottawa money, but our money is there. It's there at \$250 million or more, and we're going to continue that commitment.

But the fact of the matter is — and he used Plains as an

example — anything and everything in our society is undergoing change now. Health care's undergoing change. Rural Saskatchewan's undergoing change. Everybody is undergoing change. That is a fact of life.

Our job is to make sure that we deliver the best highways system for the people of Saskatchewan consistent with those patterns of change. And by golly, Mr. Speaker, we are doing it. And we're committed to doing it by the largest amount of money for highways ever in the history of the province of Saskatchewan.

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

**Mr. Hermanson:** — Mr. Speaker, the Premier says he's spending more money on highways. He may be spending more money in the department but he's actually spending fewer dollars on highways and road repair, less dollars than last year.

Mr. Speaker, the Deputy Premier says he wants people to fix their own highways, the Highways minister says he wants people to gravel the highways, and the member from Saskatoon Southeast says abandon highways altogether because she says nobody's using them anyway.

Mr. Premier, which one of these dead-end roads are you headed down? Are you going to gravel the highways? Are you going to abandon the highways? Or are you going to let people fix the highways themselves?

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

**Hon. Mr. Romanow:** — Mr. Speaker, I thought I'd given the answer earlier but I'll give it again. We're going down neither of those roads that you outline . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . No, we're not. We're going to the high road. We're going the high road of building the best highway system the province of Saskatchewan can afford.

We have enough roads, Mr. Speaker, if you can imagine putting them end to end, roughly speaking, which would go around the centre of the earth four and a half times, built up at a period when Saskatchewan was growing . . .

Everybody knows the change. Everybody knows what happened when the Crow rate was abandoned. Everybody knows that with the abandonment of the Crow rate there was movement from rail onto truck and chewing up the highway system.

The reality is, of that record amount of money dedicated to highways, the vast majority of the money is being spent in rural Saskatchewan. It's not being spent in urban Saskatchewan. It's not being spent in any constituencies that we represent. It's being spent in the rural parts of Saskatchewan and we continue on our commitment by having the highest budget ever committed for highways in the province of Saskatchewan.

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

### Sex Offender Registry

**Ms. Julé:** — Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of

Justice. Last week, Mr. Minister, I introduced Bill No. 235, An Act to establish and maintain a Registry of Persons and Convicted Sexual Offences in order to protect Saskatchewan Children and Communities.

Mr. Minister, you would not tell us whether or not you would support that Bill, but instead you repeatedly stated that our current national police information program also known as CPIC is all that is necessary.

But, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Minister, CPIC is not perfect, and in fact is lacking in many areas key to monitoring the whereabouts of convicted sexual offenders.

Mr. Minister, I will assume that you have had a good look at my Bill by now and I'm wanting to know will you be supporting this legislation?

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

**Hon. Mr. Axworthy:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, Mr. Speaker, let me thank the member for her question and let me reiterate, our commitment, both her part and my part of our commitment, to address the serious concern of the abuse of children. Our dispute is over how that should be done.

I've looked at her Bill. I looked at it before; I've looked at it again. I've contacted police chiefs across the province and I've contacted others, Mr. Speaker, and, Mr. Speaker, we will not be supporting her Bill.

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

**Ms. Julé:** — Mr. Speaker, the minister last week said that Justice ministers and police forces across the country believe that CPIC is a system that is good enough. But I would suggest to the minister that you should go back to your counterparts and those police services, because police services of forces all across the country in all provinces are speaking up in support of a nationwide sexual offender registry.

In fact at the 1997, annual conference of the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police, a resolution was passed calling on the federal government to pass registration legislation and to create a national registry of sex offenders.

Now, Mr. Minister, the province of Ontario has followed through with their own provincial legislation to allow for the establishment of such a registry. Mr. Minister, will you do the same?

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

**Hon. Mr. Axworthy:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, Mr. Speaker, the Canadian association of police chiefs is also on record as having supported a beefed-up CPIC.

And let me just read to the member the decision by the ministers of Justice, all ministers of Justice across the country. The ministers endorse the CPIC data system with enhancements as a sound basis for screening systems to better . . . to protect children and other vulnerable groups from convicted sex offenders.

Mr. Speaker, as I've said, the ministers of Justice are supportive of the beefed-up CPIC system. That is receiving \$115 million of commitment and investment from the federal government this year. That beefing up is under the supervision of Deputy Chief Weighill from here in Regina.

And, Mr. Speaker, let me also say that from our analysis, from the analysis of Justice officials, the legislation she is proposing will simply not withstand any challenge. It is outside the powers of the provincial government and constitutionally . . . consequently unenforceable.

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

**Ms. Julé:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, to the minister. The beefed-up CPIC system as is proposed will take at least two to three years, I have been told, to be completed. In the meantime we have children at risk.

Mr. Speaker, last week the minister told the media that Saskatchewan police agencies supported the view that a specific registry to track sexual offenders was not necessary. But, Mr. Minister, I have a letter here dated June 9 from Saskatoon Police Chief Dave Scott. He says, and I quote:

The Saskatoon Police Service does support a provincial registry for known sex offenders. We believe a provincial registry would better enhance our capability as police to monitor the activities of offenders more quickly and effectively. As well, a provincial registry would monitor offenders after their sentence is completed.

Chief Scott goes on to say that many sex offenders are released in their community from the regional psych centre and he sees this registry as a better . . .

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

**Ms. Julé:** — Mr. Minister, do you intend to dismiss the support for this legislation from provincial police agencies?

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

**Hon. Mr. Axworthy:** — Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, what I intend to do is listen to my officials who said that this legislation is unenforceable. I intend to listen to the facts, Mr. Speaker, that one . . . only one in four of convicted sex offenders in the United States where these registries the member is proposing register their names, Mr. Speaker — three out of four don't comply.

Mr. Speaker, I . . . having spoken with Chief Scott and other chiefs, it's clear that the statement he made was made without any in-depth analysis and, Mr. Speaker, the fact remains that this is not the best system the member is proposing. The best system is an enhanced, beefed-up CPIC process which, Mr. Speaker, we're supporting on this side of the House.

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

**Ms. Julé:** — Mr. Speaker, Mr. Minister. Mr. Minister, if this is unenforceable, I would like to know why Ontario is doing it.

The fact is that each province, each province must set up their registry in order for it to work in sync with the federal registry.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the Saskatchewan Federation of Police Officers will be meeting this week. They will be discussing this issue during their meetings. President Bernie Eisworth does not agree with the minister that CPIC works just fine for tracking sexual offenders. He says, and I quote:

The fact is that the CPIC doesn't quite do what they're asking for in the registry. A registry would make sex offenders register and be easier to track.

Mr. Minister, you told the media last week that police agencies did not support this registry. You are dead wrong. Mr. Minister, now that the truth is out, will you support the establishment of a sex offender registry in this province?

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

**Hon. Mr. Axworthy:** — Mr. Speaker, my consultations with the police services last week confirmed that they were not in fact in favour of the member's registry. It so happens that Chief Scott said something rather different on Friday or Saturday.

The point remains, Mr. Speaker, the point remains that this legislation is unenforceable according to our officials. Only one-quarter of those offenders register. Mr. Speaker, CPIC, an enhanced CPIC, is more than a sex registry . . . sex offender registry. Mr. Speaker, it is a registry of sex offenders and more — in fact all offenders who might adversely affect children.

That's why it's a better system, Mr. Speaker.

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

### Construction Industry Union Legislation

**Mr. Weekes:** — Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Labour. This morning the Saskatchewan Alliance for Economic Growth had a press conference in Regina. This group represents three-quarters of all businesses in Saskatchewan, and the main focus is the development of labour policies that will help foster rather than hinder positive relationships between employers and employees.

The Alliance for Economic Growth is very concerned about The Construction Industry Labour Relations Amendment Act, 2000 you are trying to bulldoze through this session. As they say, it sends a very negative message to businesses both in and outside Saskatchewan. They re-enforce that there's only been consultation with the unions on this issue, not the business community.

Madam Minister, will you listen to the majority of businesses in this province? Will you put this regressive legislation on hold and carry out full and complete consultation with all stakeholders in this province?

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

**Hon. Ms. Crofford:** — Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to put one bit of information in front of the House and

that's, according to *The StarPhoenix* there, that the Saskatchewan — and *The Leader-Post* — the Saskatchewan job market is sizzling hot.

And the fact of the matter is during the '70s, that would have been the case as well. And certainly we have never found that good and fair labour legislation is an impediment to good employers in the province.

I would have to say that we've got the lowest unemployment rate in Canada. And we certainly are concerned that the business community understand that we welcome all the efforts to develop Saskatchewan's economy, but we also very much support laws that are the same as the laws in every other province.

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

**Mr. Weekes:** — I'd like to remind the minister that the alliance represents three-quarters of all businesses in Saskatchewan. They are all job creators. Why don't you pick the phone up and talk to them instead of your union leader friends who are job killers.

Mr. Speaker, one of the minister's main arguments in favour of the legislation is that it will put us on a level playing field . . .

**The Speaker:** — Order.

**Mr. Weekes:** — Well the Alliance for Economic Growth says the minister is either out to lunch, misinformed, or she is deliberately attempting to adjust the facts. They say the minister, and I quote, "seems hesitant to bring all the facts forward."

The alliance distributed a fact sheet comparing labour laws in every province, confirming that the minister's claims to the media and to the public have been false.

My question is for the Premier. Under this legislation, sir, you will become the economic development minister of Alberta. Mr. Premier, will you listen to the business community; will you put the brakes on this legislation and deal with your Minister of Labour who insists on paying back her union friends?

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

**Hon. Ms. Crofford:** — Now, Mr. Speaker, the basic premise of this question is economic development. And I'm just going to remind the members opposite that May 2000 versus May 1999 — 14, 600 new jobs.

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

**Hon. Ms. Crofford:** — May 2000 versus April 2000, 18,000 new jobs.

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

**Hon. Ms. Crofford:** — And if you look at young people, because the folks are apparently concerned that young people are leaving, May over May, year to year, 7,800 new jobs.

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

**Hon. Ms. Crofford:** — So I basically say, Mr. Speaker, that there's no province in Canada that allows spin-off companies to exist. And the fact of the matter is we certainly want to work as co-operatively as we can with the industry. But there's no evidence to suggest that we aren't working hard on job creation and economic development.

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

**Mr. Weekes:** — There's jobs to be created in this province, Mr. Speaker, despite this government, not because of this government's labour policies.

Mr. Speaker, these business leaders from across the province would like the minister to take a good look around. Very different, very progressive changes are being made in other provinces to develop labour legislation which fosters a business-friendly environment. They agree that these amendments being proposed by your minister are a throwback to the old days of confrontation. As a province, Mr. Speaker, we can't afford that.

The alliance said it's time for the Premier to step in and consider the negative effects this will have on our economy. They call these amendments undemocratic and anti-business.

Mr. Premier, will you do that? Will you agree to revisit this legislation your government is proposing? And will you meet with these business leaders and hear their side of the story?

**Hon. Ms. Crofford:** — Well thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now I know pretzel logic is popular on the other side of the House, but the fact of the matter is we have the lowest unemployment rate in Canada. Please to tell me how that demonstrates that our labour laws don't work. And perhaps what every other province in Canada should do is pass the same labour laws that we have and then their economies would be in good shape as well.

The other comment I would make, Mr. Speaker, is the biggest outflow of people there's ever been from this province, record numbers leaving the province, was during the years when the members of the party opposite and their friends removed this law. So I rest my case, Mr. Speaker.

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

**Mr. Weekes:** — Mr. Speaker, the alliance which represents three-quarters of the businesses in this province want a voice at the table. Why are you unwilling just to sit down with them and hear their side of the story, talk to the people that create the jobs in this province. Will you talk to them?

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

**Hon. Ms. Crofford:** — Again, Mr. Speaker, I reiterate that our job numbers speak for themselves. But I will also say that over a hundred meetings were held and we would have loved nothing better than to have consensus within the industry.

And I just continue to say that we'll do everything we can to work co-operatively together with both the union and the

non-union sector, but it seems to be working well in Saskatchewan. Today we have the lowest unemployment in Canada.

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

## ORDERS OF THE DAY

### WRITTEN QUESTIONS

**Mr. Yates:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of an open and accountable government, we're very pleased and happy to table our response to question no. 170, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** — The answer to question no. 170 is tabled.

**Mr. Yates:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again on behalf of an open and accountable government, we're extremely happy to table the response to this question, Mr. Speaker. This question's definitely good news for the people of Saskatchewan.

**The Speaker:** — The answer to question 171 is tabled.

**Mr. Yates:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again I'm very pleased to stand up and, on behalf of a very open and accountable government, respond to question no. 172, Mr. Speaker. It's more good news for the people of Saskatchewan.

**The Speaker:** — The answer to question 172 is tabled.

## GOVERNMENT ORDERS

### ADJOURNED DEBATES

#### SECOND READINGS

##### Bill No. 62

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Axworthy that **Bill No. 62 — The Miscellaneous Statutes Repeal (Regulatory Reform) Act, 2000** be now read a second time.

**Mr. Wall:** — Thank you, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege to enter the debate regarding Bill No. 62, The Miscellaneous Statutes Repeal (Regulatory Reform) Act, 2000.

And, Mr. Speaker, there are ... Clearly in terms of this particular Bill, it's basically housekeeping in nature. It repeals several Acts that aren't needed on the books anymore, Mr. Speaker.

Some of those Acts include The Grain and Fodder Conservation Act which dates back to 1946. There's an Industrial Development Act, Mr. Speaker, which empowered an agency called SEDCO (Saskatchewan Economic Development Corporation) which no longer exists. There is The Road Allowances Crown Oil Act from 1959, Mr. Speaker, and The Seed Grain Advances Act which was passed as far back, 1908, only three years after the birth of our province.

So this is certainly housekeeping in nature.

And other than the very general comment, Mr. Speaker, that the need for this Bill speaks to the need on the part I think of all governments to look at sunset clauses in their legislation so we don't have all of these outdated Bills on our books necessarily. It's something that we would like to talk a little bit more about in Committee of the Whole.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

#### Bill No. 70

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Serby that **Bill No. 70 — The Education (Elimination of Business Tax) Amendment Act, 2000/Loi de 2000 modifiant la Loi sur l'éducation (élimination de la taxe professionnelle** be now read a second time.

**Mr. McMorris:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to talk on The Education (Elimination — elimination is the key word here — of Business Tax) Amendment Act, 2000.

This consequential amendment has to be made as a result of the decision to remove business assessment and tax from rural, urban, and northern municipal Acts. A number of changes have been made to the municipal Act which will be debated when those Bills come back to the agenda.

This change however is being made as part of the recommendations made by the 1977 Reassessment Review Committee. The government says these changes will further acknowledge the autonomy of local governments of having to implement their own property tax policies.

This change doesn't mean that business taxes are not to be imposed on either the municipal or education side of the municipalities. However it acknowledges that it is up to each municipality to decide if it will impose such a business tax. And I think that's where the decision really is to be made, and most important at the municipal level, as to whether they want to charge this business tax.

It is becoming more common across this province to eliminate business tax as communities seek to become more competitive — not only with other communities in Saskatchewan, but cities and towns across the country. Regina saw the light recently when it decided to phase out its business tax, mainly to compete with Saskatoon, its sister or brother to the north, which has been far more successful and aggressive in recent years in attracting business to that city.

Smaller communities are also reassessing the worth of imposing a business tax. While some continue to oppose the concept of eliminating the business tax because they say it may simply shift the tax burden from business to homeowners, many more generally accept the fact that getting rid of the business tax does make cities and towns with a much stronger, more competitive business core. When a community's business section is prospering and strong, that is good for everyone in the community.

In Saskatchewan we must get away from this ongoing mentality that anyone who is successful, particularly the business community, must be punished through taxation, our taxation system.

A strong business centre in any town or city means more jobs. More jobs means more wealth is created for everyone. Stronger business means direct jobs and many more spinoff jobs.

If we can build a stronger business base in our Saskatchewan towns and cities, it is up to those of us who sit here and all those who serve on local councils to do everything in their power to do so. We believe that getting rid of the business tax does that very thing. However, we recognize that it should be up to each individual community and the councils that govern those communities to decide what is or what is not best for their interests. And this Bill does that.

We have some technical questions for the minister which we will be pursuing in Committee of the Whole, so we look forward to moving this forward.

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

#### Bill No. 71

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Ms. Atkinson that **Bill No. 71 — The Health Districts Amendment Act, 2000** be now read a second time.

**Mr. Gantefer:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it's with pleasure that I rise to speak on Bill No. 71, The Health Districts Amendment Act, 2000.

Mr. Speaker, it seems to me in looking at this Bill that it attempts to plug a hole that the Department of Health has allowed to exist for the last two years. And I was really quite . . . I didn't know if I should be amused or absolutely terrified by what's going on over at the Department of Health, that I looked at what the minister said when she introduced the legislation, and she said, and I quote:

Mr. Speaker, due to an error that we only recently discovered, the Keewatin Yathe and Mamawetan Churchill River District Health Boards were never formally established as health districts.

You know, we just sort of overlooked this very important item of business and for two years these districts were operating without legislative authority or the ability, really, in law to function appropriately. And of course, Mr. Speaker, we will support that this be done properly at this time.

But the question begs, why wasn't it done right in the initial instance and what happens to all the decisions that were made in the last two years?

Mr. Speaker, in question period over the last days, we asked questions about what was happening at Uranium City Hospital. Who's in charge of this outfit and who is making all these horrendous decisions?

Well it seems as if the answer, Mr. Minister, is quite clear: no one was. And the department didn't seem to be able to be bothered to put in place the proper legislative authority in order for it to happen.

Mr. Speaker, this is just another clear example of the kind of things that are piling up day after day after day that are absolutely demanding that there be a proper and complete review of health care in this province.

How many other things are sitting there that the Health department has not discovered recently that need attending to? How many more instances are there where there is not the proper legislative authority in order for district health boards, or any other people in this province in regard to health care are functioning in a vacuum?

Mr. Speaker, we certainly do believe that the proper legislative framework should be in place in order for the northern health districts to function and we certainly do appreciate the opportunity to hear from people in the health system that confirmed the fact that this was an essential thing that needed to be done.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I certainly have to wonder and hope that there are no more outstanding issues that the Health department may recently discover.

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

#### **Bill No. 74**

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Ms. Hamilton that **Bill No. 74 — The Alcohol and Gaming Regulation Amendment Act, 2000** be now read a second time.

**Ms. Eagles:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it's a pleasure for me to speak on Bill 74, The Alcohol and Gaming Regulation Amendment Act.

Mr. Speaker, as the minister mentioned in her opening comments on the Bill, these pieces of legislation deal with the expansion of off-sale in Regina, Saskatoon, Moose Jaw, and Prince Albert.

This currently happens throughout rural Saskatchewan and what it looks like this NDP government is doing is expanding things in the major cities as well. What this Bill also proposes is the elimination of mandatory hearings under the Liquor and Gaming Licensing Commission. It will give the commission the discretion to determine whether a hearing is required when an objection is filed against a permit or endorsement.

Mr. Speaker, we are somewhat concerned about this. While it may seem well-intentioned, we would have questions if the government of this commission would maybe be trying to sweep something under the rug if someone brings forward a complaint and the commission deems it frivolous. We would like to know what rules are going to be set up in conjunction with this Bill — rules that will determine what guideline the commission will follow, how they will know what is a frivolous

complaint and what isn't.

Mr. Speaker, our office has also received some calls from concerned people about this piece of legislation. While they do say at first glance that it does seem to be a good step forward, some concerns have been raised.

They include: who will be allowed to set up off-sale? Will it be a wide-ranging free-for-all or will there be some sort of process set up — some way to determine who will apply for off-sale expansion; what procedure they will have to follow; how much red tape they'll have to cut through, because as we all know, Mr. Speaker, this NDP administration is infamous for its red tape and layers of bureaucracy.

There are also a lot of social implications involved in this legislation. The long-term effects of alcohol abuse are well-documented and are measurable. We would want to make sure that this government has a look at the social bottom line — something they forgot to do when establishing VLTs (video lottery terminal) and casinos. We need to know the social impact such a move would have on our larger centres.

Other questions surrounding this Bill involves liquor industry regulations. As I mentioned earlier, who will be involved in off sale expansion? Will some be left out altogether or will small store, mom-and-pop operations or corner convenience stores be allowed to or not? These are all some important questions that need answering, Mr. Speaker.

So while we have been getting some calls to our office on these Bills, we have some concern, and these will be better answered in committee, which we look forward to doing at the next opportunity.

So at this point, Mr. Speaker, I see no reason why this Bill cannot proceed to committee. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

#### **Bill No. 75**

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Ms. Hamilton that **Bill No. 75 — The Alcohol and Gaming Regulation Amendment Act, 2000 (No. 2)/Loi n° 2 de 2000 modifiant la Loi de 1997 sur la réglementation des boissons alcoolisées et des jeux de hasard** be now read a second time.

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

#### **Bill No. 76**

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Lautermilch that **Bill No. 76 — The Research Council Amendment Act, 2000** be now read a second time.

**Mr. Stewart:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I understand it, the amendments, this amending Bill, The Research Council Amendment Act, expands the mandate of the Saskatchewan

Research Council to include commercialization of new technology which will allow the SRC (Saskatchewan Research Council) to make loans to or invest in certain types of enterprises having to do with new technologies.

It will make it — the SRC that is — much like SOCO, Saskatchewan Opportunities Corporation, in that SOCO invests in companies throughout Saskatchewan as a job creation scheme.

(1430)

This amending legislation will allow the SRC to go beyond its traditional mandate of offering technical support to those enterprises developing new technologies and will allow it to directly invest in or to provide loans to those creating innovations in technology.

The exact words in the legislation are as follows:

... directly or through any of its subsidiaries, buy, invest in, underwrite, subscribe for or acquire by any other means, and hold shares of, and bonds and debentures and other securities issued by, any corporation, partnership, firm or business, where the acquisition of the shares, bonds, debentures, or securities is, in the opinion of the minister, consistent with the duties of the council;

Now, Mr. Speaker, without cabinet approval, the SRC will, under this legislation, be able to provide financial assistance of up to \$1 million to any one particular entity. And the SRC will be able to make up to \$2 million of equity investments in a single entity without cabinet approval. The Act is vague as to any limits that may be in place with cabinet approval, but we assume there are none.

Other changes outlined in this legislation would allow the SRC to engage auditors other than the Provincial Auditor to look at its books. This may be a good thing as it will provide SRC the ability to be more flexible and may enable it to react quicker in a business environment in some circumstances. However we insist that the Provincial Auditor must be able to trace every nickel of taxpayers' money that flows through SRC and the Act is vague on this.

We're dealing with quite a large change for SRC and one that we're not totally ... (inaudible) ... the importance of research and development, and we appreciate that, Mr. Speaker, to our province and everyone wants to encourage the growth of research and development here in Saskatchewan.

However, while we'd like to say that this change appears to be turning SRC into another SOCO, there are some major differences as well. SOCO gets most of its money straight from the public purse, and therefore much of this money it puts into business is public money at risk. However, a majority of the \$19 million that SRC generates in revenue is self-generated through private contracts.

So while we're not totally comfortable with government once again getting directly involved in other places — would-be investments made by the private sector — we do recognize the difference between this and what the Saskatchewan

Opportunities Corporation is involved in.

That's not to say we're happy with the thought of another government agency — even one that does generate revenue — being bought in to make investments to enable certain research and development projects to go ahead. Our hope is that one day soon, Mr. Speaker, we'll live in a province where the government does not feel it necessary to invest in projects to make them succeed. We hope to see a province where government doesn't have to coax and cajole the private sector to invest in projects and to build them with taxpayers' money.

We hope to see a province where the private sector will take these initiatives and risks themselves and do so in their own self-interest in a province where they think investment is in their interest. The key to success in this province is to have a private sector and investors investing totally private money in important business or research projects because they want to in their own self-interest, not because they're cajoled or bribed with taxpayers' money to do so.

However, in order to create such an atmosphere, we believe it's going to take a change in government. Something that I suppose we'll have to wait for.

We do have a great deal of respect for the work of the Saskatchewan Research Council and we understand the importance of research and development in this province. And in a former life, as the director of a corporation that worked very closely with the SRC at one time, I can say that I have nothing but respect for their research capabilities and their business acumen in judging how to link their research efforts with the business community.

We do have some reservations with this Bill, just as we have with anything that appears to be a further direct government investment in what well could — and should — be the affairs of private enterprise.

After the work we've seen the government do in other investment projects such as SPUDCO (Saskatchewan Potato Utility Development Company), I'm sure most residents of Saskatchewan and, hopefully, all members of this House will have some reservations as well.

However, Mr. Speaker, I believe that most of these questions can be answered in committee and I move that this matter move to committee.

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

#### Bill No. 77

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Axworthy that **Bill No. 77 — The Saskatchewan Human Rights Code Amendment Act, 2000** be now read a second time.

**Mr. Wall:** — Thank you, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise in the Assembly today to speak to Bill 77, An Act to amend The Saskatchewan Human Rights Code.

Mr. Speaker, it is my understanding that a lot of the amendments that are proposed in Bill 77 stem from a report that was released by the Human Rights Commission in 1996. Basically the gist of that report was a strong indication that the code needed to be updated, that it had become outdated in fact since the volume of complaints had reached overwhelming numbers.

And I think we all agree, Mr. Speaker, that the number of complaints and inquiries to the Human Rights Commission clearly has been going up in recent years. And the need for it to be current and updated is clear to all members of this Assembly, including members of the official opposition.

Mr. Speaker, as elected representatives for the taxpayers in our respective communities, and for people, families in our home areas, I think it's our duties to . . . our duty to ensure that all of our citizens, all the citizens of Saskatchewan, are treated equally and have every opportunity to have the kind of life . . . the best, the absolute best possible quality of life that's possible here in Saskatchewan.

And a part of that equation, a part of the challenge of ensuring that, I think, is to have bodies like the Human Rights Commission in place to provide protection for people and redress for people who perhaps have suffered in terms of their quality of life through discrimination or some other area that the Human Rights Commission can look into on their behalf.

And so you'll notice in the Bill, Mr. Speaker, in Bill 77, that the amendments that are proposed to The Saskatchewan Human Rights Code are fairly wide-sweeping and they involve a number of different areas from clarification of the duties of the Chief Commissioner, Mr. Speaker. In addition to that . . . And I think the minister in his speech summarized it perhaps best when he said the amendments streamline and add flexibility to the complaint process, create a human rights tribunal, and make changes respecting some of the grounds of discrimination, and enhance the remedy and enforcement provisions.

And as innocuous and positive as that sounds, Mr. Speaker, I think we also should be . . . we should be very concerned when we look at any particular piece of legislation as it relates to the Human Rights Commission in our province. We should be concerned, Mr. Speaker, that the regulations that we pass in this body . . . that the amendments that we pass in this body and regulations that may be passed by cabinet don't fly in the face also of common sense and the common sense application, I think of what is fair and neat and right for people who deserve to have their human rights protected.

There have been some specific instances, Mr. Speaker, that people across the province are aware of. And I'll even touch on one particular instance in my community. And I think to the extent . . . and we'll be interested to ask questions in committee on this Bill, Mr. Speaker, because to the extent that we can determine whether these amendments might address some of these concerns will go a long way towards helping those of us on this side of the House support this Bill.

Mr. Speaker, the case of local Regina entrepreneur, Mr. Ripplinger, certainly comes to mind. There is an instance where someone had, in the course of renovating their particular

establishment, had done absolutely everything within their power and everything according, by the way, to legislation to comply with accessibility regulations that we have in the province in terms of making sure that his business was accessible to disabled people in our community.

He had complied with all the legislation and regulations pertaining to the construction to his art gallery and restaurant. But in that case, Mr. Speaker, the Human Rights Commission demanded that he make further renovations that weren't required by legislation that could jeopardize the viability of his business in terms of the costs of those renovations.

And I think any time a quasi-judicial organization like the Human Rights Commission, or any other for that matter — we had some debate earlier this session about the Film Classification Board — makes decisions that can affect people's lives in a very direct way, and also frankly, that make decisions that really are . . . should be the sole purview of the legislators of the province of Saskatchewan — for example, the laws of our province — any time an organization can do that, we ought all to be concerned; because it infringes on this venerable institution to be the duly elected legislators of the province of Saskatchewan and, Mr. Speaker, to expend tax dollars on behalf of the people of Saskatchewan.

On a cursory look initially, and then more recently on a more detailed look at this Bill, I don't see any of the amendments in The Saskatchewan Human Rights Code Amendment Act, 2000 that address that particular concern, Mr. Speaker.

I'll point out one more example and it occurs in my constituency of Swift Current. There is only one year-round, stand-alone restaurant on the south side of Swift Current where I grew up and where I currently live, Mr. Speaker. It's called the Golden Garden Restaurant, and it has been there for many, many, many years. It's been operated successfully as well, Mr. Speaker. It's a valued part of the entire city, and certainly a very valued part of the fabric of the south part of our community.

It's currently operated by an extremely hard-working family of Chinese Canadians with a long history of contribution to our community. They have an excellent restaurant and they do their very best to offer great food and good customer service.

Not long ago, Mr. Speaker, I believe it was due to an inquiry by someone who wanted to frequent the restaurant but couldn't access it, the Human Rights Commission took action. And in fact throughout that process, throughout the inquiry to the Human Rights Commission, the restaurant went to a great expense, one arguably — and I don't know, I'm not privy to their financial statements, Mr. Speaker — but one you could argue that they couldn't afford, to build an excellent wheelchair ramp into their restaurant.

And subsequent to that, because of the very stringent rules that are in the Act, they were also required to make some major renovations to their washroom facility. And this particular renovation, the latter . . .

**The Speaker:** — Order, please. Why is the member on her feet?

**Ms. Harpauer:** — To introduce guests, please.

Leave granted.

#### INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

**Ms. Harpauer:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to introduce, on behalf of the member from Last Mountain-Touchwood, a classroom from Raymore School. It's a class of 20 grade 4 students who have come to visit us from Raymore School.

They're accompanied with their teacher, and some chaperones, Lorraine Hordos, Randy Fidler, Marty and Yolanda Hachkewich, Blair Bentz, and Brenda Thomas.

And they neglected to give me the name of the teacher, but I welcome them all here, including the teacher. So thank you so very much for coming.

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

#### ADJOURNED DEBATES

#### SECOND READINGS

#### **Bill No. 77 — The Saskatchewan Human Rights Code Amendment Act, 2000 (continued)**

**Mr. Wall:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If the restaurant is forced, if this small family-run enterprise is forced to complete the latter part of the renovations, they're very truly concerned about whether they can continue in business.

And I guess that's my point, Mr. Speaker, about this Bill. We need to ensure that common sense is at work with respect to the Human Rights . . . the Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission. They do have provisions, I know, that will help sort of ameliorate their requirements of businesses and of individuals if it would cause undue financial duress.

But that does not apply to washrooms for example in this case, Mr. Speaker. And I guess the point is this: what good is it if this restaurant is unable to survive? Nobody will be able to access it then.

And I guess that underscores my concern and our concern about this particular Bill, the amendments we're making to the Human Rights Commission that as far as we can tell don't address some of these practical, common sense concerns.

(1445)

But with that, Mr. Speaker, we will have some very specific questions for this Bill in Committee of the Whole.

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

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

**Hon. Mr. Goulet:** — Leave to introduce guests as well, Mr.

Speaker.

Leave granted.

#### INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

**Hon. Mr. Goulet:** — Yes, I would like to join the member in regards to welcoming the teachers and particularly to Randy Fidler. Randy's from Green Lake. He was part of the northern teacher education program and it's good to see him back here. I think I'll go upstairs and have a little visit with him.

With that, Mr. Speaker, please welcome the teachers again.

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

#### ADJOURNED DEBATES

#### SECOND READINGS

#### **Bill No. 9**

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen that **Bill No. 9 — The Child and Family Services Amendment Act, 1999 (No. 2)** be now read a second time.

**Ms. Eagles:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise again today and this time to speak on Bill No. 9, An Act to amend The Child and Family Services Act (No. 2).

Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest to the minister's second reading speech to this Bill where he pointed out that the main point for these amendments is to help children out that are in foster care.

When a child turns the age of 18 they have reached adulthood. But as every parent knows, the job of parenting is still not complete because they still need support, either financially or emotionally, from their parents.

Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, this is not necessarily all the case for . . . always the case for those in foster care. As I understand, the amendments are there to assist those in foster care that are planning to continue their education, those that are not furthering their education immediately but need interim support, and those with intellectual challenges.

Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to see that this government is taking steps to ensure that all of the children in our province have an equal opportunity to further their education and become active participants in our society, as everyone knows in this Assembly the importance of higher education in this day and age.

Mr. Speaker, there are some questions that I have regarding this Bill but those will be best addressed in committee.

So, Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 9 be now moved to the Committee of the Whole. Thank you.

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

**Bill No. 6**

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Axworthy that **Bill No. 6 — The Mentally Disordered Persons Amendment Act, 1999**, be now read a second time.

**Mr. Wall:** — Well thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to speak to Bill No. 6, The Act to amend The Mentally Disordered Persons Act. And several of my colleagues have spoke to the Bill; I'll keep my remarks fairly brief. We do have some specific questions when it . . . when we get into the Committee of the Whole process.

Mr. Speaker, we recognize, I think, that this Act is an attempt to streamline the process for families and for those involved in applications to certify incompetence, or competence, as the case may be, Mr. Speaker. And there is some specific changes in this Act that are proposed to do that.

I guess a couple of things we want to make sure. One of the reasons for the changes in this Bill was to allow the process to be sped up, to move more quickly through the process.

One of the problems in the current system is an application can be made, it can be ruled on by a panel, and an appeal can then go to the Court of Queens Bench, but if they don't make a ruling, it has . . . the process has to start again. And that process can take quite a bit of time, Mr. Speaker. And so the intent of this Bill is to speed that up by allowing that appeal to the Court of Queen . . . or to the Court of Appeal rather.

However, I guess our concern is that, is that process going to be longer than restarting the application for the certification in the first place. So that's one of the questions we have, and we'll certainly have more for this Bill when it gets into the Committee of the Whole.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**Bill No. 5**

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Belanger that **Bill No 5 — The Parks Amendment Act, 1999** be now read a second time.

**Mr. Kwiatkowski:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to enter into debate on Bill No. 5, The Parks Amendment Act, 1999, and as we indicated in our original response to this Bill, we were going to be consulting with a number of the stakeholders involved with the development of a couple of protected areas that are defined in this Bill.

And, Mr. Speaker, I'm glad to report that in this case, the government maybe, just maybe, they got it right. The input that we have received so far indicates that, for all intents and purposes, there is a fairly broad degree of support for the development and establishments of these protected areas. And the definitions — the land descriptions — appear to be for the most part accurate and in order with what those affected

understand they were to be.

There are a couple of other smaller changes, some corrections, to legal boundaries here where some errors are being corrected, and some boundary changes to allow for some smaller-scale development such as road improvement and that kind of thing.

So at this point, Mr. Speaker, it appears that we have a fairly good broad base of support for some of the changes that are being proposed in this Bill. And we feel that any further clarification that we require can be done through Committee of the Whole. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**Bill No. 17**

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen that **Bill No. 17 — The Child Care Amendment Act, 2000** be now read a second time.

**Ms. Eagles:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure for me to speak on Bill No. 17, The Child Care Amendment Act. For the most part, Mr. Speaker, these amendments are housekeeping in nature, but it is important to look at these amendments very carefully since they will affect the care of children by those outside their home.

We are pleased to see that this government is amending portions to the Act that restrict those from providing child care services other their primary residence. In the minister's second reading speech he brought up a very good point of farm families; that they are extremely busy during seeding time, making it very difficult to provide adequate child care.

These amendments will take some of the pressure off the parents so that they will not be concerned with the well-being of their children while they are out farming.

These amendments are also looking at the number of children being cared for in group family child care homes and I understand that this legislation will continue to enforce the limit of eight children with further limits by age. Although we do not disagree with any of these changes in principle, we certainly have concern with this government's ability to care for our children, particularly with the tabling of the Child Advocate report.

There's much to be said about the NDP's track record on child care; unfortunately they are not positive things, Mr. Speaker. As legislators and parents it is our duty to ensure that the most vulnerable members in our society are protected and that, Mr. Speaker, of course is our children.

Since the budget was released we have heard this government talk about their renewed commitment to children and the future of our province. And that all sounds well and good, but it is one thing to be providing for our children with a safe environment in which to grow up and foster, but it is another thing to be giving them any hope for the future. I have seen too many of our youth who were born and raised in Saskatchewan leaving for the greener pastures west of this province.

I find it rather disconcerting that the members opposite talk about this commitment to our youth as if they are doing something wonderful by acknowledging the needs of children. Over the years we have heard some horror stories of how children have been treated in care homes. I am pleased to see that this legislation recognizes this and will ensure that none of the children being cared for in a group home will be neglected.

There are some concerns regarding the licensing aspect of this legislation. For example, section 3.2, paragraph states that a person may operate a family child care home either with or without a child . . . or pardon me, family child care licence. This concerns me in light of the fact, as I mentioned earlier, that some of the children have been abused in some of these homes, and if the operators of these facilities are not permitted to carry a licence, there may be some difficulty in holding them accountable.

But those are questions that I have no doubt the minister will be more than happy to respond to in Committee of the Whole. And all in all, Mr. Speaker, this is a good piece of legislation.

As the official opposition that represent a majority of rural communities across Saskatchewan, I am pleased to see that this government is finally acknowledging the needs of farm families and has some of the constraints that they have.

Mr. Speaker, there are some questions that I have regarding this Bill, so at this time I would move that Bill 17 be now moved to Committee of the Whole. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

#### Bill No. 59

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Ms. Crofford that **Bill No. 59 — The Construction Industry Labour Relations Amendment Act, 2000** be now read a second time.

**Mr. McMorris:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to enter into the debate on the Bill No. 58, the construction labour relations Act, and there's been much talk on this Bill and much controversy when it comes to this legislation, and it is a privilege to enter into it.

You know, when we were campaigning, and we were talking . . . many times when I got to talk about the CCTA (Crown Construction Tendering Agreement) and things like that, and I talked to people in the construction industry, in the small towns that were doing construction, and everything else, they had some real concerns about the CCTA, and as I did too.

And it is really interesting to watch. You better watch what you hope for because you just might get it. And they're talking about eliminating the CCTA, which is what I was hoping for, not realizing that they put in some legislation that is far worse than the CCTA ever imagined about being.

The point of really forcing — and this is coming from the construction companies — forcing them into unionization, know that members in the open shop won't be forced in right

away but as soon as they're laid off and have to enter back in, they have no option but to enter in, if its with a company that they are working for before, in through the union process.

And there's some real concerns. And especially over the last number of days, quite a few days, we've been asking questions on this very Bill. And listening to government's answers, it just really didn't answer any of the questions that I really wanted. Where is this going to be better for our province? How is it going to improve our province, throughout the province.

You know, we've talked to a number of farm manufacturers and you know, I just think back of a couple of meetings that we had with some of the city organizations that were going to be affected by it. And not one of them were saying where this is going to improve things from their perspective.

You know, the government will argue that it will need to promote labour harmony in the province. And so I ask, where was the disharmony? Where was the problems in labour before? We haven't . . . especially in this industry, there hasn't been a strike for decades. And so you really question whether there is a need for increasing labour harmony. When you talk to a number of the companies that are going to be directly affected by this, they feel that there will be much less labour harmony once this law is put into place.

And so there's some, you know, real questions with the answers that we've been getting day in and day out asking questions on this labour Bill.

The government will state that these changes are needed to promote fair wage policy. That's an argument that they have, and that's not necessarily, doesn't necessarily hold water either. You know, there are many situations where, depending on the position, whether it's an apprenticeship or not, that one will be higher than the other or vice versa. So I think there is a large majority of fair wage policy out there and letting the private industry look after it.

(1500)

I think a lot of times when you look at some of the companies that are going to be involved, that are working; they feel that it's going to affect, perhaps their efficiency and a number of other things — their amount of business that they're going to be doing.

And when you start eliminating and limiting the amount of efficiencies the companies try and achieve and the amount of business that companies are trying to increase on, it's going to affect the workers because there isn't enough money coming into the company to maybe bring the wages up.

And so, I really think that a fair labour policy is letting the market take care of itself, letting the people increase the efficiencies, and letting the people, the companies, increase their business. And that takes care of a lot of the problems when it comes to a fair wage policy.

Certainly many, many years ago when unions and movements like that came into the province there was a huge need for it and a demand for it many, many years ago. But I think it's like a lot

of things, when the pendulum is moving perhaps it was way too far one side many, many years ago. But this legislation puts it extremely too far the other way. It's just unfair and really uncalled for.

And I think when we talked to the questions today that were asked in the House today regarding this very thing, the answers again really didn't justify why we are doing it. They talked about all the jobs that are going to be created and have been created in the province. And I, you know, compliment the government for that. It's not all government but if we have job creation that's great.

This does nothing for job creation, absolutely nothing. And if they're hanging their hat on that, why then the next statement they're using is to where they're hanging their hat to promote this legislation. And the two can't be connected at all.

The government will state that these changes are necessary to stop companies from getting around the spirit of the rules. You know and in reality there are very few of these companies, or none of these companies, that have had any grievances filed for the Labour Relations Board, alleging these . . . you know, whatever the problems that these companies are . . .

So a lot of the reasoning behind this Bill and a lot of the excuses for why this Bill must go forward can be disputed and disputed very, very well. We really question the whole fact of why you have to force people that . . . employees that could join the union very, very easily if they want to. They could even stay with the same company and join the union if they wanted to.

If all those employees wanted to start their own union they could if there was an agreement. But they are working in an open shop because they choose to work in an open shop. And if they choose to work in an open shop and that's being taken away from them, what's the point of it. It's really taking a number of steps backwards.

So I really . . . it really looks, you know, when I look at the reasons why this legislation would be put in place as when you look at why the CCTA legislation was put in place, it really looks like a bit of a pat on the back from union to government or government to union.

You know, last year the NDP brought in about \$300,000 from union contributions, and you know I think it's more than a coincidence that you would get legislation like this. Now I don't know how much, whether the legislation would have been put in prior to the contributions or after the contributions, but it really is more than a coincidence that the NDP . . . and there's different answers that the minister has given.

She said we are affiliated . . . we are connected directly with union. Well that's very obvious. When she asks the questions . . . tries to answer the questions on why this is put in place, she said well we've had hundreds of meetings around the province. How many meetings did they have with Bourgeault and Doepker and Degelman, and whatever, Doepker, and whatever company out there. I would bet that very few of those hundred meetings that have been held around the province were with the people that it's going to affect the most — the manufacturers, the construction people, and that type of thing.

So it really takes a step back. And I think when you look at building our province and you look at small business and construction people and manufacturers, that they will say that one of the hardest things to keep business going and improving in our province is some of the labour legislation that we have in our province, and this is just one step that is going to make it even that much harder.

So I would like to adjourn debate on this Bill right now until we have a chance to debate it with more time. Thank you.

Debate adjourned.

## COMMITTEE OF FINANCE

### General Revenue Fund Health Vote 32

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

**Hon. Ms. Junor:** — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Right behind me is Steven Pillar, the associate deputy minister. To my left is Carol Klassen, assistant deputy minister. To my right is Marlene Smadu, assistant deputy minister.

Behind we have Kimberley Wihnan, assistant to the deputy minister; Kevin Wilson, director of pharmaceutical services, drug plan and extended benefits; Bert Linklater, acting executive director of district management services branch; Jim Simmons, executive director of community care branch; and Lauren Donnelley, acting executive director, acute and emergency services branch. And Rod Wiley, executive director, finance and management services.

#### Subvote (HE01)

**Mr. Gantfoer:** — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And welcome, Ministers, and officials who, as the Deputy Speaker said, this is our third session in Health estimates.

Ministers, I would like to try to stay focused one area at a time, but as you can appreciate there's a number of topics that I think are important that we touch on, so it will probably be a little less focused on one issue than we've been, or two, as we have in the past.

First of all, Ministers, I would like to start on administration which I believe is the department administration. I notice by the full-time equivalents of your department staff component that it's exactly the same number of people as what you had in last year's budget, but there is a noticeable increase in the actual expenditures.

Minister, can you please outline and explain that fact.

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** — What I can tell the member is that this represents a 3.3 per cent increase. It is for salary increases, benefit increases. As well, I can tell the member that over half of the amount for administration is directed to programs that benefit all of Saskatchewan people.

And let me give you an example. The Provincial Laboratory would benefit all Saskatchewan people and immunization programs. So it's not as though we have a number of officials in the Department of Health that are purely administrative in function. We actually do deliver direct services to the public in the Department of Health.

**Mr. Gantefer:** — Thank you, Minister. Out of your . . . The budget increase then is in some measure at least across-the-board salary and benefit increase for department members.

I'm interested as well, you mentioned that the department directly is involved with the immunization program and things of that nature. Minister, could you break that down a little more detailed. Do you provide the vaccines for the school immunization process? I believe the districts supply the public health nurse personnel that actually would administer the immunization. Can you break that down in terms of how it's done?

And I'm also interested in the fact that I believe that some of your immunization program requires a bit of looking forward in terms of anticipating how many people — students or children — are going to be immunized; that you have to purchase certain batches or numbers or doses of vaccine and things of that nature. I'd like a little more clarification on that program.

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** — Let me give you an example. Eight million dollars is for the Provincial Lab; \$4 million is for the provincial immunization program which includes vaccines; \$4 million is for contracts with physicians to provide services for northern Saskatchewan; \$6 million supports medical services programs, including physician fee negotiations, maintenance of the central registry which indicates which Saskatchewan residents that are eligible for health care benefits; \$5 million to administer the prescription drug plan and extended benefit program; a million dollars for tuberculosis screening, diagnosis, contact facing, treatment, training, prevention programs; 800,000 for the provincial registration of vital statistics or vital events like births, marriages, deaths.

As well we have money that's being spent on research and analysis into the pharmaco-epidemiology unit. We have \$600,000 going to the regional psychiatric centre and other mental health and addictions related contracts for the direct provisions of services to Saskatchewan people.

**Mr. Gantefer:** — Thank you, Minister. Minister, maybe you can help me then? Where in the line budget things would be, where would it be accounted for — for example, out-of-country or out-of-province medical services? For example, when there was a labour problems, we were flying people out and those kind of things. Where do those types of expenditures be accounted for?

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** — It's under medical services in the blue book.

**Mr. Gantefer:** — Thank you, Madam Minister. Madam Minister, moving on then . . . Oh, before we leave this area, I believe you said in the list, and would it be possible to have that detailed list of that breakdown of specific subclauses, if you

like, of the department's spending?

But I believe you had a category that said, physician services or the administration of physician contracts or negotiating physician contracts. I believe there is a process that also tracks physician utilization of the system, etc. Is that out of this or would it be out of the general fees for physicians?

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** — No, that's out of that amount of money. It's \$6 million, and it supports physician services. And there's a group of people that work in the Department of Health that send remuneration to physicians out of the fee-for-service schedule under the medical services commission.

**Mr. Gantefer:** — Thank you, Madam Minister. Madam Minister, that department then would sort of be the guardians, if you like, to see if there was patterns of inappropriate billing or repetitive billing and things of that nature. Can you, do you have a report from that type of activity? Can you outline to us, have there been incidents of what the department has felt are inappropriate billing procedures? What they would break down to being? There might be errors and that sort of thing happen. What are errors, and what things other than that that might cause you concern?

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** — We'll send you a summary of all of the activities in this area. Obviously there is . . . we regularly look at those kinds of things, and there is a joint professional medical review committee that looks at utilization and whether people are billing appropriately.

**Mr. Gantefer:** — I understand then that this department looks at it and would flag what they see as maybe irregularities, etc. Is there then, from your answer, a committee that looks at them to break it down further to understand the details and to determine if this is errors or confusion or analyzes it in terms of what the problem may be?

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** — There is a joint medical review committee that looks at this, plus there are a number of other audit processes in place, and we'll outline that for you.

**Mr. Gantefer:** — Thank you very much, Minister. Moving on to accommodations and central services, I see as well that that amount has not increased very significantly.

Would you please outline what in general that these services cover? Are they for department facilities? Are there facilities that the department has ownership that actually provide the delivery of front-line health care?

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** — It includes things like accommodations. We pay a fee to Saskatchewan Property Management Corporation which runs the building down here on Albert, as well as we have accommodations in various, you know, places across the province, and we would pay almost like a lease fee or a fee to SPMC (Saskatchewan Property Management Corporation).

As well, we have things like postage and that comes out of that area as well. So any kinds of mail outs to the public would come under the accommodation fee.

**Mr. Gantefer:** — Thank you very much, Minister. Madam Minister, I would like to move on to the district health services and support category if I may. And I see that there's, you know, a fairly large breakdown there or somewhat of a breakdown already.

I would like to look at them in a little bit of detail in each line. The acute and rehabilitation services that are listed there, would this be the payments to district health boards? Or what does this general category entail? And would you please give us an overview of it?

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** — Yes, I can give you that. That would include payments to district health boards for acute and rehabilitation, long-term care, home-based services, community services, emergency response services, health facilities, capital, as well as . . . like last year there was the millennium fund, those kinds of things.

And then there's the district support branch in the Department of Health which are a group of people that work to support the districts in terms of their relationship with the Department of Health.

**Mr. Gantefer:** — Thank you, Minister. Perhaps it was my fault in asking the question; I realize the sub-programs that are there. I was focusing firstly on acute and rehabilitative services, proposed amount of \$701 million.

Is that the direct transfers to the district health boards for their provision of acute care? Is that all it is? Is that the total or are there other services that are provided and would you outline them please?

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** — That is transfers to the health district for acute and rehab and what could be included in there would be targeted initiatives like the waiting time reduction fund, where we had monies allocated last year and they'll be allocated again this year.

As well, we're transferring some money to the districts for the kidney program, kidney transplant program in Saskatoon. That's money that would be included in there. As well as there are some specialized programs like renal dialysis units, and we anticipate that we're going to announce two additional sites in the province that money allocated for that would be under acute and rehabilitation.

**Mr. Gantefer:** — Thank you, Minister. Minister, in a general sense, could you outline of the \$700 million, how much is going to . . . Is it all going to the health districts in one way or another, either by way of the special programs, etc.?

I see you nodding, so I'll move on to the second part of it. Over and above the special programs that you outlined in terms of renal dialysis and the kidney initiatives and things of that nature, how do you establish how much money goes to the health districts? What is the system in terms of saying there's so much goes to district A or B or C and on?

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** — Okay, this is a population needs-based funding formula, which means that we look at the most recent district populations. And the district populations are usually

available June 30 of the previous year.

Then we have an age-gender adjustment because we know that older people require health services. So it's based on a provincial age-sex curve which uses institutional supportive care data, because you look at your long-term care, your home care, your acute care.

Then there's a needs adjustment which looks at census material. This is very complicated but it's . . . we use census material.

And then there's the service flow adjustment. Because some people don't necessarily get their health services from . . . even . . . or health providers inside their district. They may go to other districts. And then those . . . the actual service flow data is adjusted as well.

So I guess basically if you stay in your own district and use the services in your own district, that is recognized by your district in terms of funding from the Department of Health.

**Mr. Gantefer:** — Thank you, Minister. So there would be some statistical analysis that sits down and starts off and says that there is, you know, there is a population demographic profile of a health district. And on the basis of having so many people of different age categories, etc., there would be that base formula that would be established.

Is that then applied to all of the districts based on their particular data, is my first question. I understand that if that's skewed by having a higher percentage than the average in terms of age or gender or high cost, or at least potentially high cost population groupings, that that would be changed.

You also said that there would be institutional, I believe, data. And I assume by that would be the levels of people staying in hospital long term or acute care or whatever, home care, whatever, that gets adjusted by the fact that there might be particular anomalies within a population group.

In terms of the service flow, I understand that the concept there is an adjustment that recognizes that the dollars should follow the procedures, if you like, to some extent. And I think that that's one of the arguments that the larger centres, if you like, in the province identify as part of, at least part of their financial difficulties, and in many instances more and more people are moving to the larger health centres, rural and urban, but primarily you know, our tertiary centres.

Does that adjustment fully recognize the extra costs for services that are provided or is it a mathematical kind of a thing that attempts to provide some kind of adjustment? Or does it correspond pretty accurately to actual service cost . . . service delivery cost figures?

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** — It's not a procedure-based funding formula where you look at each procedure that was provided to a citizen from outside of the district and then they pay for those procedures, the funding formula. It's based on the population of the people who are using that service. And there are a number of assumptions that are made.

So it's based . . . let me give you an example. If you were acute

care — and it's needs-based — so you would look at mortality, you might look at low birth weights, you might look at the fertility rate data for the previous five years, and then you would adjust your funding based on all of that information to that particular health district.

I guess the other point I would make is that when I was the Minister of Education, we had a funding formula called the foundation operating grant and it was a fairly simple formula to understand. I think part of the confusion, and I know what you're talking about, you're talking about, Saskatoon for instance, saying the money doesn't follow the people that we serve.

Part of the difficulty is that you almost have to be an economist working with formulas to understand the age-adjusted criteria, the sex of the population criteria, and all of the factors that are taken into consideration. And I think part of the difficulty is we all don't have a collective understanding because it's so complex. And you have to almost be a, I don't want to use the word rocket scientist to understand it, but practically.

(1530)

But if you look at who's being served, it does seem to make sense, and the kinds of services that are being delivered.

**Mr. Gantefer:** — I'm a little nervous but by your definition that may exclude 90 per cent of your own department from understanding it. And then you have to ask yourself, who really knows what's going on.

Madam Minister, there was a case that we raised in the House some time ago where an individual was being sent to the Mayo Clinic in Rochester from Codette for a condition of T-cell lymphoma and that we indicated, and we had the paper documentation, if you like, that this procedure was costly, it was repetitive, occurring over an extended period of time, and was indeed in this client's best interests.

And I would assume that the fees or the costs of that kind of out-of-province service would be covered under . . . would it be covered under this allocation . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . It isn't. Okay. Then I would ask you clearly where would that be covered then?

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** — It comes out of the medical services branch.

**Mr. Gantefer:** — Okay, thank you. I see a category there where it says out of province, 40-million-odd dollars. I'm assuming that that's where it's covered.

Anyway, you know the rest of the story, Madam Minister. We made you aware of the issue, and part of the dilemma was that for a relatively small amount of capital purchase at the University Hospital in Saskatoon the actual equipment that was needed in order to provide this service, which currently is not available in our province, could be installed in Saskatoon.

And the reply to the letter that was written said that while this may make sense on the surface of it, that's not how the things work in the real world. I'm assuming then that the cost of this

equipment comes out of another part of your budget and that one part doesn't talk to the other part. Could you please explain that anomaly?

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** — One of the things that you should know is that we have not, we have not historically paid for equipment in health districts. We have not bought provincial equipment. There are allocations within the health district budgets which is some recognition that they should be able to buy equipment.

We began to change the process somewhat last year. We bought a provincial CAT (computerized axial tomography) scan that is being used between Moose Jaw and Swift Current. And we indicated that we would pay for equipment for a second bone density testing centre here in Regina. But if you look at, for instance, renal dialysis clinics that are being set up, the communities are raising the money for the actual equipment and then we provide the operating funds.

In the case of . . . the case that you're talking about, there are two cases and what we have done is when there are very low-volume cases or not many people that have a particular ailment or disease, we have been prepared to send those people out of province for treatment because of the operating costs that might be associated with purchasing a piece of equipment that may be utilized very rarely.

But we're always analyzing things. And I'll give you an example. We were sending cancer patients, breast cancer patients, to I believe it was Edmonton for stem cell transplants. We are now funding that program at the Saskatoon Cancer Centre, and women who have breast cancer who require stem cell transplants can now get that service in Saskatchewan. But initially because it was a new treatment for breast cancer, we were sending people I believe to Edmonton, and now we're providing that service here in Saskatchewan.

So you always . . . with the new technologies you always track, track it to see whether or not it makes sense to provide that service here. And the breast . . . the stem cell transplant is one example of that.

**Mr. Gantefer:** — Well thank you, Madam Minister. Madam Minister, as you recall . . . and by confirming that there's not only one individual with this critical condition, there's two, makes the situation twice as obvious in terms of a solution.

The costs — and again from the top of my memory I don't want to quote the exact costs — but they were pretty significant in Canadian dollars. And the treatment for the one individual where we had the documentation on had gone on over a period of some 20 months. So certainly not exactly a one- or a two-term time treatment allocation.

And in addition to that, the cost of the machine was also identified as being the equivalent of about three or four months treatment cost that could have been provided. And what you're saying now is if there is two individuals, that just cuts the cost in half, and that the disposables were something like \$1,000 a month. Again, a very minute amount in comparison to what was being paid.

And the letter from your official that came back and said, well

this does make sense; however, it's not the way things work. Is that because you don't have enough rocket scientists in your department? Or is it actually because you have no ability to look at things as the bigger picture, and that capital projects are something looked entirely in a different mindset than operational expenditures?

It seems to me to just be logical if you could save a huge amount of money, that would make sense on its own. But you also have the physical problem of these families going to the Mayo Clinic, or I believe in your answers in question period you said, well now the good news is we're sending them to Calgary. There's also a physical disruption that goes on in terms of where the families have to go and their own personal expenses to do it.

Madam Minister, it sounds to me as if you're saying that there's no way of doing it. Certainly as well, if the Saskatoon District Health Board made application to you through their budget process for the machine that's required, you would have the ability in your review of their budgets to say this is a good idea and make sure that it's funded. Is that not correct, Minister?

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** — What I can say to the member, and if you . . . just in order that we get our story . . . we're both operating under the same set of facts.

This province was the only province that was sending people outside of the country for that treatment. No other province was; nor was . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . It does matter . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Well just a moment; it does matter because this was a new technology, a new procedure. No other province was sending anybody anywhere. People with the same condition were not being sent anywhere outside of Canada. And the equipment was not available in this country. And it's still not available in this country.

Calgary — we're working with Calgary — is in the process of perhaps getting this equipment into their health authority.

You know, I just have to say this to the House and to the public that might be watching this, that this was the only province and is the only province that was paying for that kind of new and enhanced treatment. And we were prepared as citizens of this province to send this particular individual that you're talking about, outside of this country for treatment. If this individual was located in Alberta or Manitoba or Ontario, they would not have been sent anywhere for treatment, because we were the only province that was sending people outside of Canada for this treatment.

So I think that we should be thankful for that. We should be thankful for that. Now you can say this is a waste of money. This is a new procedure; it's a new treatment; it's a new technology. No one else in Canada has brought this technology to their health region.

Calgary is in the process of considering that, and we're going to work with them in order that our people can have access to that treatment. And it's not . . . you know, people say, well set up a program, set up a program. But when you set up a program there's not only the cost of the capital equipment, but there's also the ongoing cost associated with running the day-to-day

operation of that equipment.

Let me give you just . . . I want to make one other comment. We provide pediatric cardiac care in the province of Saskatchewan. And there are little babies that require that kind of treatment, that come from other provinces to the University of Saskatchewan because they don't have that treatment in their provinces. There's a lot more co-operation and collaboration that's going on between provinces, because not only are there specialists, but there are sub specialists within those specialty categories.

And if you want to provide the very best care to your citizens, then we need to be prepared as provinces in this country, to share human resources, because we can't all attract the same people to our particular region.

**Mr. Gantefer:** — Thank you, Minister. Well I would also like to say I do support the fact that these individuals are getting required treatment. That's not the argument. The argument is, is could we provide that treatment in Saskatoon in the University Hospital as per the letter of the head of the department who said that his department was not only capable of doing it, they could do it without an increase in manpower and personnel. That was in the letter that I gave you a copy of, and I'm sure that you had anyway, Minister.

The point is not about do we provide the service for our citizens or not. The point is, can we provide it at a more reasonable cost in this instance. And in this instance clearly we could have. And we could certainly provide it in Saskatchewan at a much reduced cost to what we were doing in the Mayo Clinic, and we were doing it over an extended 20-month period in time, and the doctor in Saskatoon had written the department. It isn't as if it was some idea that was being put from the department down onto these individuals. They had looked at it.

And the fact that Alberta funds it or doesn't is not the point, in addition. They don't fund it. But yet all of a sudden they're the ones putting the machine in their hospital because that they can . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Well why not put it in here, Madam Minister, so the people that are requiring this procedure here can be here.

It just is an indication of the fact that I think that your department's budgetary system does not allow for that innovative, logical thinking, because if it did, something different would have happened.

Madam Minister, I want to move on to another topic as well in this subprogram category — long-term care services. Madam Minister, as I'm sure that you're aware, the demographics you spoke of in terms of the way funding is going to district health boards, those same demographics are pointing to the fact that there is an increase in our aging population if you like. And unfortunately, we are all part of that process, and as we get closer to it, it becomes more and more something we're all needing to be sensitive about.

Minister, do you have a long-term projection as to the estimated requirements for long-term care beds and facilities?

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** — While the minister responsible answers

that question, there's some people in the gallery that I want to acknowledge. I'm supposed to meeting them right now, but we changed the times, I guess, that we're doing estimates. I'd like to introduce . . .

**The Chair** — Order, order, order. Is this . . .

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson**: — I'm sorry. Can you ask for leave?

Leave granted.

### INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson**: — Representatives of the Saskatchewan Emergency Medical Services association are in your gallery. They are Dennis Nelson, president of the Saskatchewan Emergency Medical Services association; Gerry Shriemer, vice-president; Ron Dufresne, secretary treasurer; and Mike Androsoff, who is an emergency medical services consultant.

So I'd welcome these four gentlemen to our Health estimates.

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

### COMMITTEE OF FINANCE

#### General Revenue Fund Health Vote 32

#### Subvote (HE01)

**Hon. Ms. Junor**: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The provincial average right now in long-term care beds is, for people over 75, per thousand, it's 118 beds now. The national average is 108 per thousand, over 75. When the district health plans have come in, we've looked at all of them and individually looked at their projections for their demographics. Like is their population over 75 going to peak in a certain amount of years? And each district has done that and put their projections forward.

So we do have a district-by-district look at how they're reaching those targets and the national average, and watching how we actually plan where we build and if we build, and those sorts of things.

**Mr. Gantefer**: — Thank you, Minister. When we're on the topic, can I ask you how many years forward these projections go? Are they three-year, five-year, ten-year? What timeline are you looking forward into?

**Hon. Ms. Junor**: — We've done some work up to 20, 40. So that's 40 years out.

**Mr. Gantefer**: — Thank you, Minister. And I appreciate that the information that's coming from the districts, while you've looked at it, I don't expect that you'd have it analyzed in any detail at this relatively short notice. But I wonder in general if you can tell me, is there any difference in terms of the number of beds allocated per thousand between urban centres and rural centres?

And I'm thinking that it might be possible, at least theoretically, that people in an urban centre may have more family support groups or things of that nature. I wondered if the statistics would indicate any differences at all.

**Hon. Ms. Junor**: — In general, there are more beds per thousand over age 75 in rural Saskatchewan, in the whole province.

**Mr. Gantefer**: — Could you give me a bit of an indication — you gave the statistics in terms of what the average is — could you give me, you know, the urban numbers and the rural numbers in general that lead you to give that comment? How much difference is there?

**Hon. Ms. Junor**: — I'll get it for you.

**Mr. Gantefer**: — Thank you very much, Minister.

Madam Minister, in terms of when you do make commitments to replace facilities or add facilities based on the needs that would be identified, on the capital side, what is the process in terms of identifying the project that's needed, outlining exactly how much expenditure there's going to be per bed?

I'm always mindful, it seems to me in the past when facilities came up, it would sometimes seem that each one was an attempt by the architectural firm to outdo the previous project.

And I also always look back to the days when I was a kid, when we looked at the CNR (Canadian National Railways) model of building facilities, you sort of had the same basic one no matter where it was, and then you added on one or two modules, and that's the way the system worked.

How does the system work, and is there an effort made or guideline set by the department in terms of, you know, how grandiose do these facilities need to be?

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson**: — One of the things that you should know about our capital, how we do capital, we have moved to have a capital process that's very similar to what we did in education in that all projects were rated based on, you know, fire safety, the needs of the people in the community.

There's a technical tool that we used to determine whether or not a project goes ahead, and then they're put on a list so that it's transparent. So everybody sees where their project stands in relationship to other projects, so that there's no political interference in the process and so that every health district knows where their project is, relative to other projects in the province.

And that was very important. Because we are dealing with some situations where projects may have gone ahead in the late '80s or whatever, that weren't really . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . No, I wouldn't say that at all, that didn't need to necessarily go ahead. I mean let's face it, there were a lot of political projects in the 1980s and those days are over. And we have a transparent . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . No there hasn't been any since, and there certainly hasn't been in Education.

And it's based on a tool; it's a technical rating tool. And then

it's transparent so those districts can see where their, where their project stands relative to other projects . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Well you shouldn't be too concerned about it, given that you don't . . . you're not former Conservatives. I'm just talking about the former Conservative Party and what they did in terms of projects. And they were political projects, and that's recognized.

**Mr. Gantefoer:** — Thank you, Madam Minister. Madam Minister, I appreciate the comments and the commitment to a capital replacement process that's based on identified need by an independent set of criteria. And I think that that is indeed the way to go and we're very supportive of that.

Madam Minister, one of the other issues out there of course are the funding ratios or the contribution ratios, if you like, between the province and individual health districts. And I believe, if I could speak in generalities at least, it would strike me there could be indeed projects that your independent criteria methodology has identified as an important project. And in order for the health district to implement that project, under the current funding ratio on capital funding, it could actually be very onerous and very difficult for an individual district to come out with the 65/35 ratio that I believe is in effect.

Are there circumstances that could be entertained whereby the need of the project takes more priority than the ability of a small district necessarily to fund as much of it as in other cases? I could see in a situation that if you stick very strictly to the ratios, that the projects could get skewed by the ability to pay rather than the actual need.

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** — I would say this: that when the district is offering a provincial service, 100 per cent of the costs of that capital construction project is funded by the province. And when the districts have an inability to raise local shares, like in northern Saskatchewan, those projects are funded 100 per cent by the province.

But when the service is for people in the local area or the region, that district is expected to come up with about 35 per cent of the cost of that capital construction project, and the province puts up 65 per cent.

**Mr. Gantefoer:** — Thank you, Madam Minister. I know that you're aware that there were some districts that ended up assuming provincial facilities. And I'm thinking of the regional hospitals in particular where they actually moved from what was a regional care provision system in the district and the facilities were and I believe might even still be owned by SPMC in terms of the current facilities.

And now as replacement and/or major upgrading of those facilities are required, the magnitude of the project could be larger than that individual district to cope with, given the fact that this facility was there serving a larger population, if you like, because of the nature of it.

Do those kinds of projects warrant individual consideration in terms of the funding ratios because of the nature of the way they originated?

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** — What I can assure the member is that

we did do a study of who actually is in the four regional care centres that you're referring to, and the information that we have indicates that basically the people in those facilities come from the district that those facilities are located in, or from the . . . Yes, the individuals who are in those facilities come from the districts that those regional care facilities are located in.

**Mr. Gantefoer:** — So I take it that they no longer serve a regional service delivery need as they did when they were owned and operated I guess under the provincial Department of Health per se.

The other issue with it of course is that the facilities because of their nature, the way they were, were pretty expensive and probably pretty expensive to renovate. I think there's an argument being made by those districts where these regional facilities are in for a modified funding contribution ratio. And I wondered if because of the nature of the way this all evolved, if that is something you'd consider or that you have everything sort of written in stone — north, south, and that sort of issue.

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** — No. I think that the four districts of which the four regional care centres are located in have given a reasonable argument — the argument that you make. And it's an argument that we're considering.

**Mr. Gantefoer:** — Thank you, Madam Minister. I would like to continue on this topic, but I have some colleagues that would like to put some questions to your department. So on my behalf, thank you to you, Ministers, and to your officials.

**Mr. Bjornerud:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Madam Minister, just a couple of short questions to do with the ambulance services out there. I'm not sure . . . I guess my first question is, are you aware about the Canora Ambulance service and the Duck Mountain Ambulance service in Kamsack? The suggestion has been made by the CEO (chief executive officer) of the Assiniboine Valley Health District at a meeting that we were present at and has been followed up with more suggestions like that; that the health district may be in the position, in order to save money, to take over these two ambulance services. Were you aware of that, Madam Minister? And would you care to comment on that?

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** — I'm aware of this suggestion, but it's not something that we have given any consideration to.

**Mr. Bjornerud:** — Thank you, Madam Minister. I guess I can only ask you a couple of questions because of the time.

Madam Minister, there's great concern out there from both of these ambulance services, and I would think from actually ambulance services from all over the province if they get wind of what may happen there, is this a trend that may happen down the line all over the province? And I guess not being an expert in this field at all but sharing the concern that these people have, that these private businesses are running as efficiently as I think they possibly can. And I think the CEO at the time at the meeting that we were at said they're in the neighbourhood of \$200,000 they thought they could save.

And I wonder, Madam Minister, has there been any work done in your department or has anybody in your department done any

work to back up that kind of numbers and see if that saving is there? Because I think the people involved, the private business out there, would really question where this kind of dollars could be saved for the Assiniboine Valley Health District because of I believe it's Meadow Lake has already possibly gone that route and that the savings they don't think was there, that was supposed to be there.

So, Madam Minister, that would be my last question in the essence of time, but would you care to comment on that?

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** — One of the things that we need to do, and I've said this to certainly people in the ambulance industry and also people in the EMS (emergency medical services) industry, is that we need to develop a provincial emergency medical service.

And if you look at how we structure our EMS in the province, we have 32 districts who have various arrangements across the piece and what we have is — because there are many, many private operators — we have varying kilometre rates, varying wait-time rates, and varying basic service rates, and we also have, I would say, varying levels of service. And what we need to do is to create a provincial EMS service that has, you know, consistent rates, consistent wait times, consistent kilometre rates, consistent inter-facility transfers.

And we need to make sure — and I've also said this publicly as well — we need to make sure that we have district coverage because a lot of the ambulance services are used to transport people who . . . not necessarily in an emergency situation, but transport them to get diagnostic services provided or whatever.

So we're looking at the notion of a provincial dispatch system so that we know where all of our ambulances are in the province and to make sure that areas are covered. We also need to make sure — and this is another thing that we're discussing — there's a lot of downtime in EMS and is there a way to integrate some of those people into our health facilities to provide extra hands to people in the health centres or in the long-term care home or in the hospitals. And we've had some experience using paramedics through M D Ambulance Care Ltd. in Saskatoon on our air ambulances and it has worked very nicely.

We also had some experience during the nurses' strikes . . . strike, with paramedics in our emergency rooms, so there's a whole . . . there's a whole undertaking that we need to engage in with the EMS services in the province to move towards a provincial EMS system.

**Ms. Harpauer:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Madam Minister, it won't be a surprise to you most of my questions are concerning Living Sky Health District. The questions being asked of me the most is why was Living Sky Health District required to submit their budget two weeks prior to any other health district.

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** — There are three health districts in the province that have undergone huge financial stresses and strains. The East Central Health District, of which we now have a public administrator; the Regina Health District, of which we appointed some additional board members with some business and financial and union resource backgrounds, as well as a

special advisor to myself on that district; and Living Sky.

I think it's fair to say — and I've certainly shared this with the board of Living Sky — that their district, relative to other districts in the province, have some serious financial difficulties, and those financial difficulties need to be addressed in order that services can continue to be provided in that district.

**Ms. Harpauer:** — Thank you, Madam Minister. Madam Minister, in light of the fact that in question period on May 16, you stated that you would not approve the Living Sky Health District budget — proposed budget — because you would not allow the closure of all the hospitals on Highway 16 from Saskatoon to Yorkton.

Would you also not have the same concerns with the closure of the Watrous Hospital due to the fact that this hospital . . . if this hospital's closed that there'll be no hospitals on Highway No. 2 from Moose Jaw to P.A. (Prince Albert)?

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** — Well, for the member, I mean this is . . . I gather this is now public information because a letter did show up. My understanding is that Living Sky, as part of phase two and phase three, would look at closing Wynyard and Watrous, should they not be able to get their financial house in order.

I don't think that . . . That's not something they're considering. It's something that they've had to look at given the level of debt and deficit that they have. But my sense is that this is something that would be done only in the worst case scenario. It's not something that they're going to be doing. And I think that's important to say to you — that it's not something they're going to be doing unless they're in the worst case scenario and I don't think they have to be.

**Ms. Harpauer:** — Thank you, Madam Minister. Another question that has come to me and mostly from the Watrous area because of course the proposal is to change that to a health centre, is they would like a criteria or a definition of what is a health centre.

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** — Health centres, first of all, still provide acute care services. There are health centres that are 24-hour health centres across this province that provide acute care, observation care, respite, rehabilitation care, and palliative care. So they are 24-hour, in essence, hospitals, and they tend to be associated with a nursing home. So it's an integrated facility that has a long-term care facility and a health centre. And it's a way of structuring services.

As well they have X-ray, they have lab services, they have physio services — all of the other services that one would find in a hospital. But they're called health centres because they are not separate and apart from the long-term care facilities.

**Ms. Harpauer:** — Thank you, Madam Minister. My next question sort of deals with something the member from Melfort was talking about, just clarification for myself. If a doctor is on the edge of a health district and his patients or the majority of them are outside of the health district, is the health district receiving funding for those patients?

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** — What's important to understand here is that in essence most physicians in the province are almost like private contractors. They don't work for the health districts. They are private individual physicians that bill the Medical Care Insurance Commission on a fee-for-service basis. It does not . . . Their billings do not come out of the health district budgets.

Now if their patients receive services like acute care or rehab or palliative care at the local health centre, or lab services or X-ray services, those kinds of things, there would be some acknowledgement from the Department of Health in terms of the funding that there are people from outside of the district that are receiving services in that district, if those services are provided by the health district.

But if you go to see a physician, and you come from another district and you don't use any of the services of the health district, then that would not be acknowledged in the funding that's sent to the health district by the Department of Health.

Do you understand what I'm saying?

**Ms. Harpauer:** — Thank you, Madam Minister. So in this particular case, we'll get particular because I know you also received a letter from this doctor, and it's Dr. Lim from Nokomis. And he is probably the ideal doctor for the wellness model that we're trying to achieve in this province.

He does a total study of his patients. And he wants to hopefully pinpoint any problems that may arise and have them corrected prior to that patient becoming an acute care patient. He's a very conscientious doctor and he's brought to me attention by phoning me, and through the letter that you also received, that if the lab services are cut back, then he can no longer carry on his practice. And he is dedicated enough that he feels that if he can't do his job well, he will move on.

So the concern is that these patients, he has now approximately 2,500 patients, and so the majority of those would be outside of the district, coming into the district to use the lab facilities. But they're proposing to cut his lab facilities and that is in phase one of their budget.

So here's a doctor who is doing everything that we have encouraged the health system to do to go into a wellness model of health care. And yet he won't have the facilities to do exactly that.

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** — Well first of all, I have not indicated whether or not we're going to accept the health plan put forward by the district that you speak of. We obviously need to take into consideration the impacts of any change to that district and the impact it might have on other health providers in that district.

So I certainly understand his point. And it's something that we certainly will consider as we review all the health plans in the province.

**Ms. Harpauer:** — Thank you, Madam Minister. So we go back to the original question then. These patients are coming in for the large part, if he's serving 2,500 patients, they're coming in

from outside of the district. And he is very reliant on his lab services.

So is Living Sky Health District given extra budget for that or is it just based on the population within Living Sky Health District itself?

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** — What the member should know is that the district does receive money from the Department of Health for the Nokomis Health Centre. And that is recognized that the amount of service that is provided by the health district in the Nokomis Health Centre is recognized by the Department of Health in terms of its transfers of funds to the Living Sky Health District.

**Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter:** — Mr. Chairman, I move that the committee rise and report progress.

**The Chair:** — I believe you want to report progress, not rise.

### General Revenue Fund Agriculture and Food Vote 1

**The Deputy Chair:** — I'd like to invite the Minister of Agriculture to introduce his officials.

**Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter:** — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. My officials with me today: the acting deputy minister of Agriculture and Food, Ernie Spencer, seated to my right; to my left, Hal Cushon, the director in policy program development branch; and seated behind me, Susie Miller, assistant deputy minister of Ag and Food; as well as Jack Zepp, the director, administrative services branch; and a little bit further to my right, Ross Johnson, manager, operational services, administration services branch.

#### Subvote (AG01)

**Mr. Boyd:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Minister, welcome to you and your officials here this afternoon.

Mr. Minister, in Agriculture, your government made a number of commitments to the farm people of this province in your Throne Speech that I would like to discuss with you this afternoon and see what progress you are making on those various areas. And I'll touch on them in general terms and then we can be a little more specific.

They are with respect to a farm input cost monitoring program that you committed to, and I want a little bit of detail on that. Your program that is to be . . . or was put in place to deal with farmers who are facing difficulty with farmland, leasebacks, and any crop insurance arrears that they may have, the development of extended payment terms for those programs and what kind of progress you're making with respect to that.

The other area is with respect to the Provincial Action Committee on the Rural Economy — we would like to talk about that a little bit. And then the last two would be AIDA (Agricultural Income Disaster Assistance) and the farm safety net program.

Maybe we could begin with the introduction of a farm input cost monitoring program. What kind of monitoring are you doing, how extensive is it, how widely reported to the farm community is it, and what kind of reaction are you receiving from both the farm suppliers, and as well, farm people in general?

**Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter:** — The first question, to the member opposite, the member from Kindersley, I just have a briefing note here that basically says the Saskatchewan Ag and Food has implemented the farm input price survey as we have committed in the Throne Speech. And as of today we have approximately 200 producers who have enlisted as data collectors or reporters.

(1615)

This information then goes into a common web site and information is included about 160 different products that have been reported by producers to date. And the first results of the farm input price survey will be released . . . I believe it's in the process of being released at the present time.

**Mr. Boyd:** — Mr. Minister, how well advertised is the information, and what is the intention of the program? Is it to provide farmers with the opportunity to see where your cost monitoring folks have determined is the lowest cost supplier for various farm inputs — fuel or chemical or something of that nature — is that what the nature of the program is to be?

**Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter:** — Well the interesting thing that we found is it works both ways, both for the suppliers as well as for the farmers. There's an advantage for suppliers who are more competitive because it puts their information onto the web site. And also for the consumer or for the farmer, it's their price after discount.

So it gives an opportunity to get I think a much clearer picture of the circumstance related to the actual cost. So it works both ways and we're getting fairly positive comments both from the suppliers as well as from farm families.

**Mr. Boyd:** — Am I to assume, Mr. Minister, that it is being widely advertised to the farm community? Or is it on your Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food web site? Or where is it? I haven't seen anything myself on it. I'm just wanting you to outline where people would be able to access the information on it.

As you know, the spraying season is upon us right now. There'll be large amounts of product being consumed, being purchased right as we speak these days, so it would be helpful if we had knowledge of price information.

**Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter:** — To this point we haven't advertised, and we don't actually have a budget for advertising. But it has been pretty widely circulated through the media, both electronic and print. But we are analyzing now whether or not it would be appropriate and a good exercise in spending some money on advertising of the program.

Because it's a new program, we want to monitor it and make sure everything is working before we get too far out front in what might be perceived to be overpromoting the program. But

to date we are getting, I think, almost total positive response to the program and then we'll see whether or not we . . . what kind of advertising we back it up with.

**Mr. Boyd:** — Well I think you're pretty safe in that regard, Mr. Minister, because I haven't heard of anything, or very few people it seems would be . . . Where is it advertised and what extent of advertising are you pursuing?

The other area that you might want to look at is supplying the information, at least the web site information, through the crop insurance program or various publications that you put out. Agriculture and Food puts out information on it. If it is in that, I'd ask you to please point that out.

As I said, there are farmers that are making large purchase decisions as we speak, about crop inputs, and have to this point already. And I'm sure they'd be interested if their dealer is competitive with dealers elsewhere in the province.

**Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter:** — Yes, the member should know that the Ag review report, for example, that goes out from the department, includes information on the program.

In the first month — well not quite a full month — there have been almost a thousand hits on the web site of people accessing information. So that's not . . . it's not huge, but in terms of sort of a first month program with no advertising . . . And again I say to the member opposite, we want to make sure we have all the systems up and running.

I would expect by this fall you will see some relatively inexpensive advertising program that will go along to back this up as we go into harvest time.

**Mr. Boyd:** — One last question on that. What is the intention of it then? Is it to be very active in terms of price discovery for farmers into the future? Is that the intention of the program?

**Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter:** — I think that's correct. It may turn out to be wildly successful in terms of people having access and lead to more than that in terms of an active Internet site where people can have discussions. But at this point in time it's basically focused on pricing alternatives and options.

**Mr. Boyd:** — Thank you, Mr. Minister. With respect to your government's commitment in the whole area of extending provincially administered farmland leaseback, what areas are you addressing in that program? There are, as you know, many people are working and completing the last year or years of a leaseback program. And I'm wondering the extent of the program, where you're headed with it. Are you looking at further extensions in the future? What is your government's plans with regard to the leaseback programs?

**Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter:** — My understanding is that on ACS (Agricultural Credit Corporation of Saskatchewan), there has been an extension of three years on the leases. And as it would relate to lands branches, it's a year-by-year extension. And over a period of three years, they're expected to catch up on any arrears that they may have.

**Mr. Boyd:** — With respect to crop insurance, you're looking at

extending payment terms as well. I'm wondering what kind of arrangements are being made and the results of those arrangements. Have they been successfully concluded with farmers who are seeking to stay within the crop insurance program?

**Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter:** — Yes, we have a pretty good program for those people who find themselves in arrears in their crop insurance because we're struggling to make sure that the maximum number of farmers who want to have crop insurance are actually able to access the program.

And I might add that in a way surprising I'm sure to yourself and to myself, the number of people in arrears in crop insurance has actually gone down very significantly even as the number insured has gone up by about a thousand. I think this year we have something in the area, and I'm just trying to find the numbers, but a little under 300 people . . . contracts in arrears. And they have been given the opportunity of extending it even though they're in arrears by giving a postdated cheque for the end of June for one-half of the amount in arrears. And I think this has come down, and I'm going off the top of my head here, but something like 5 or 600 last year.

So I think given all of the angst there was last winter and last fall, and concern, we had worried that the number of people in arrears might go up from the 5 or 600, and it's actually come down nicely. And so it's our anticipation that with the increased number of people in crop insurance, there is building some security in that farm economy.

That's not to say that all is well. There are difficulties and problems and issues, but I think as long as our programs are determining that more and more people can buy coverage, we're probably that much better off.

**Mr. Boyd:** — Thank you, Mr. Minister. We are getting a fair amount of inquiries with regard to the forage and seeding land back to grass programs that are being looked at. Now this was something that your government committed to as well I believe for next year. Is that still indeed the plan, and what amount of resources will be dedicated towards that? Could you provide us with some detail as to how the program will work for the farm community?

**Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter:** — Yes, we are committed to spend the next number of months consulting with the various stakeholders that might use a program of permanent cover. I must say at this time it's getting mixed reviews. There are a number of organization groups who think this is a very positive thing and we should be moving forward with it.

But I attended a stock growers meeting, I think two weekends ago, where they actually passed a motion saying this is not the direction they want to go. So this will take some work to make sure that when the program is developed it is actually hitting the mark and meeting a need in rural Saskatchewan.

And I might also add that we would be very receptive to the Ag committee of your caucus taking a look at it in . . . I'm not talking about a public profile way, but if you want to have involvement in taking a look at what we're doing with this

work, it could be helpful as well.

**Mr. Boyd:** — Could you explain what the nature of the concern is with the program? Why there would be . . . for example as you said, the stock growers may or may not be inclined to want to support something of that nature, and what would be the reasons why or why not? We hear generally speaking from a lot of farm people wanting to move in that direction. Perhaps you could help us with an explanation as to why that might not be something that they would agree to.

**Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter:** — Well, I think it's not so much that they don't want us to do it, but having come through the R-CALF (Ranchers-Cattlemen Action Legal Fund) problem, their concern is whether or not anything we do on the side of subsidizing the seeding of a permanent crop might be interpreted by Americans or others as being an artificial subsidy.

And so it's not so much that they don't like the program. They just want to be absolutely sure that before we make a move in that direction, that we've looked at all the potential trade implications to make sure that we don't get into another round of very costly trade disputes as a result of a program that may be positive at one level, and put a few million dollars into a very good program, but costs tens of millions in terms of a trade dispute. So that was their main concern.

I think it's fair to say that a number of their members also believe that the money that we're looking at putting into a permanent cover crop could be much more ably used in terms of research and development as well as encouraging trade and trade activity.

And so these are the kind of discussions . . . exactly as we wanted them to be before we move into a program where everybody gets a shot at giving their opinion and view on the program.

(1630)

**Mr. Boyd:** — With respect to Crown lands, Mr. Minister, what is the policy of your department in terms of payments for it? Are payments made in advance similar to a cash rental on farm land, or are they after the growing season is complete that farmers and ranchers would make their payments on that? Do they pay first or after the growing season?

**Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter:** — The standard format is that payment is made after the growing season. So unlike I think what would be a more standard policy in, let's say in the private sector, at least the contracts I see where normally you would pay half before the growing season and probably half after, under our policy at the present time it's full payment after the growing season.

**Mr. Boyd:** — Mr. Minister, with respect to the AIDA program, as you know it was a program that started with a fair degree of controversy. I think your government can take a fair bit of blame in that area. You didn't have input into the program because your minister, the minister of the day, Mr. Upshall, didn't want to participate in the program. And as a result of that we really didn't have a lot of input into the start-up of the

program.

And it's been a program that has had a great deal of . . . surrounded by a great deal of controversy and people that feel the program isn't meeting their needs. Now I understand that there has been some changes made within the program. There is still some concern in a number of areas about the program surrounding a whole host of areas.

In general terms, Mr. Minister, can you provide us with detail as to how the '98 program eventually worked out, and what kind of changes are being made in the '99 to ensure that we don't see the same kind of difficulties with the AIDA program that there were in '98?

**Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter:** — I think the AIDA program being brand new in 1998, it was obvious that there would be some pretty serious growing pains with it — not unlike other farm programs that the member opposite would know about and realize when they were starting, like NISA (Net Income Stabilization Account), that there was a lot of concerns and worry in the farming community. But after a number of years I think it's become a pretty well accepted program — that being the NISA program.

And so I expect some of the same changes to . . . or some of the same problems with AIDA will be worked out over this year, and in the subsequent program that will run three years after the 1999 program that has been agreed to.

But you asked about the changes for 1999 year. First of all there's a choice of reference margins, making the preceding three years average or the Olympic average, where the middle three of the last five years are used — that's an option.

Treating family labour as an eligible expense. Previously family labour was not an eligible expense and became part of the producer's margin.

Inventory valuation change. Producers will be allowed to choose on a commodity-by-commodity basis whether they want to value the change in inventory using the end-of-the-year price only, or a two-price system where the beginning inventories are valued using the beginning-year price, and ending inventories are valued using an end-of-year price.

And also, finally, the adjustment for expanding farmers, which was a problem because of the acres and the . . . or the amount of land that was included in their operation. And so where producers expanded their farming operations in either of the reference period or the claim year or both, the AIDA administration will adjust the program margins in the reference periods to take that into consideration.

So those are the main changes that have occurred, and I can send those across to the member, and then you could have them if people are calling about that.

**Mr. Boyd:** — Mr. Minister, there is a tremendous amount of distrust in the program in the farm community. Farmers just don't feel that it has met their needs. I've had occasion to speak with many, many farmers over the last number of months and they basically have given up on the program. A lot of them got

nothing more from the program than a bill from their accountant last time around and they're not going to . . . they feel they're not going to make that mistake again and enter into the program.

Now I understand that '99 applications are beginning to come in. And I'm wondering . . . Well first of all let's back up onto '98 with the negative margins part of the program. Has the negative margins part of the program been addressed?

Now I understand the federal government has made a commitment on that. I don't believe that you've made a commitment in the '98 program yet. Is that something that you're intending to do, or do farmers in Saskatchewan only have access to the federal portion of negative margins in the AIDA program?

**Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter:** — Yes, on the issue of negative margins, you're right. None of the Western provinces have taken part in the negative margin program although it is being provided by the federal government. I think Quebec and one other province are the only ones that are funding the negative margins.

I think you're right about the problems with AIDA. And one of the biggest problems is the comparison that's now being made with the Canada-Saskatchewan's program which paid out money very, very quickly. I think the turnaround time was 10 days, as to AIDA where the turnaround time is five or six months. And this is causing a lot of people to wonder why it could possibly be that long from the time the people doing the analysis would get an application to say yes or no.

I mean it seems to me — and I had this problem in spades — in the office where people would say: look, it took me a few days to fill out; surely once they read it and do the calculation, how can they possibly be studying this for six months? And if they are studying it for six months, how much is that costing the taxpayers?

Why don't they just look at it and a few hours later, if it takes two hours to analyze it, then tell me yes or no and send a letter back?

And so the concept that none of us can understand, farmers or Saskatchewan politicians — I include you in that, sir — is how it could be possible that an application can sit on somebody's desk for six months before they make up their mind whether you're eligible or not?

And I think that one element has done more to discredit the program than anything else. And we have lobbied hard with our federal partners in this program to say: look, you're administering this, isn't there some way to tighten up the timeline?

Here again, it's not even so much of whether you're being told yes or no, but the concept of taking six months to tell us whether we're eligible or not is just absolutely unacceptable.

**Mr. Boyd:** — Well I certainly couldn't agree with you more, Mr. Minister, with respect to that program. Anything you can do to move the time frames along I'm sure would be welcome

in the farm community.

Because there is tremendous numbers of stories out there — and I'm sure you've heard thousands of them yourself — of farmers phoning down, being told one day they're going to get a cheque for \$20,000 and thinking, well that's pretty good, and the next thing you know, they phone back and want additional information. And they're told . . . phoned back again from the AIDA administration and told, no, they've made a miscalculation, it might be only \$10,000. And then they get a letter a few weeks later, or a few months later in a lot of cases, and it's zero.

And it's that kind of complexity that the program . . . and comedy of errors that the program has resulted in, that farmers have basically written the whole thing off in a lot of cases.

Certainly there are pockets — and the southeast part of the province is a very good example of that — where they may stand to benefit pretty well. But there are, as I understand it, at least a finite number of dollars was in the program. And so even though the calculation may show you're going to get a huge amount of money, in the end they may be factored back considerably if applications come in to the point where your program would run over budget. So there certainly are some problems with respect to that.

Mr. Minister, I want to move on to the C-SAP (Canada-Saskatchewan Adjustment Program) program. We have been getting some inquiries with respect to that about people who have different than what might be considered active or full participatory farming arrangements — crop share, custom farming, and those types of arrangements.

As you know, Mr. Minister, being a farmer yourself, there are literally hundreds of different arrangements that people make to have their farmland either custom farmed, crop shared, all of those kinds of arrangements that are out there, including the member from Regina speaking up from behind you there. So there are all kinds of arrangements.

How are those kinds of differing kinds of arrangements being handled, Mr. Minister, to ensure that there is both fairness in the program but ensure that the maximum number of dollars go to actual producers and not to far-off landlords, Mr. Minister?

**Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter:** — Well first of all before I start, I want to say — and the member opposite may want to consider this — but I just signed a letter off to our Crop Insurance staff congratulating them on what I think everybody in the province thinks is one heck of a job.

I think oftentimes the people who work in our civil service, we're hard on them when they do things poorly. I think this is one example where they deserve a lot of credit and so I just sent off a little note to them thanking them and offering them congratulations because a lot of farmers have used that money to good effect. Now obviously there wasn't enough or it maybe took a few days longer than they thought, but overall these cheques were being turned around in very short order.

The number of appeals we have on the issue that you talk about, where there are different rental arrangements and where there

might be some confusion or dispute, I think so far we have 70. The appeal board has just been established and will start hearing these 70 appeals. I think in total we dealt with more than 43,000 claims, something in that area, over 40,000 claims.

And so when you have 70 in dispute, all the money paid out except for 70 in that short period of time — while I wish there weren't any — I think this is very, very acceptable kind of rate of problems in any program that you establish.

So again, I wish there weren't 70 problems, but we hope when the appeal board gets working that these too will be sorted out in a very efficient manner.

**Mr. Boyd:** — What advice would you give to people out there who have those kinds of arrangements who haven't made application? Because I think the reason why you only have 70 appeals to this point is because they've looked at the application and they've determined on their own whether or not they qualify.

But I think there are many, many extenuating circumstances. I spoke with a farmer just the other day who has . . . largely makes the cropping decisions within their particular operation and then finds that the questions that are asked there, he feels, may exclude him.

So I'm asking what kind of advice would you offer to people out there that find themselves in those types of circumstance?

**Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter:** — Well I would really urge them to . . . I mean they're obviously eligible in one way or the other for something out of the program, I would expect. I would urge them to phone Crop Insurance with the issue as it . . . you know, take it to them, say this is the circumstance, and they will work out what's best . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Well I don't think it would help much. I would just send them to the professionals anyway. So if they don't want to be confused they probably shouldn't talk directly to me.

But the seriousness of the issue is that I think anyone who hasn't already sent in their application, the deadline is the end of June. I would urge them to phone the Crop Insurance and we will be as helpful as can be in making sure that if they are eligible they get the proper attention.

**Mr. Boyd:** — Thank you, Mr. Minister. I'm sure in the future when we hear from people in those areas we'll certainly pass on that bit of advice from your comments here this afternoon. I'm sure that if they have any difficulties further you would want them to contact your office directly with respect to that. And we'll pass that piece of information and advice to them as well.

Mr. Minister, I want some information on the education tax rebate program that is going to be put in place — how that will work and how it will benefit the farm community — because it is indeed a modest benefit for the farm community and we would want to give you opportunity to provide some detail with respect to it.

(1645)

**Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter:** — For the member opposite who

indicates that he'll be flowing problems through my office, I say again, probably best to go directly to the professionals at Crop Insurance.

But on the other hand, I have to say after the period of six months ago when the phone was ringing off the hook, our office feels a little bit like the Maytag man right now — it's pretty quiet so a couple of calls wouldn't hurt. But on the other hand, I think in all seriousness, they would be better off to deal with the professionals at Crop Insurance.

I want to indicate to the member that the program of rebating a portion of the land tax that you refer to will be handled by a unit, which is just being established, which will include some of the ACS people. So we won't be setting up and hiring a whole new operation. It will be trying to use the staff who are very efficient in a number of areas and during a period of time where they may not be as busy as they are at another time.

And my expectations that the forms that they will need to fill out will be as simple, straightforward as possible, and they will be available as people are paying their property tax; application will be made, rebates will come out.

**Mr. Boyd:** — So this is the process — let me get this straight with you — the process will be they will pay their tax and then they will make application for a rebate on that tax? And will it be the landowner themselves that's only eligible?

**Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter:** — Well in general it will be the landowner, except in those cases where you may have a rental agreement where the renter pays the land taxes. In those cases, it will be the renter.

I think the simpler way to put it is whomever pays the land tax will be eligible to get the rebate.

**Mr. Boyd:** — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Having called your office over the years for a number of cases, and I found your staff, frankly, to be very courteous and very professional. And so we would want to pass that along to you.

We also would feel that when people have the kind of concerns that they have, certainly we would want to — I think you would want them as well — to know that your office is available for comment and assistance in these types of situations where they have concerns either with the AIDA program, the CSAP program, education tax rebates, or any of those kind of things. And we will endeavour to help you work your way through those calls that inevitably you'll be getting.

Mr. Minister, with respect to fuel rebates, your government has committed to that as well. And now we've heard it many times that — from the Minister of Finance — that farmers no longer pay fuel tax. Well indeed they do pay fuel tax. There is the commitment from your government that it'll be rebated back a year from now approximately.

Why did you move in that direction in your program rather than striking it at the source, so that farmers had actual lower prices right now rather than having to have it rebated into the future?

**Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter:** — I think the main reason was, is

because, as you know, the diesel portion of a farm operation is just exempt and it's a very simple process and works very well.

But traditionally we have had a rebate program for the gasoline portion. And the reason we went with that this year, it was just the easiest way to continue the program. But I have to say that we will be looking at the options as we go forward into next year as to other ways that might be more straightforward, let's put it that way, where you wouldn't have to have the red tape of a rebate.

Just so we have the amount of cost of the program in 2000 and 2001, like for this fiscal year, the fuel tax rebate or exemption will amount to about \$123 million for the farming community in Saskatchewan. So it's a significant amount.

But as to why it's done that way, as a total exemption on diesel and a rebate on gasoline, that's been the history. But again, we will really want to look seriously if there isn't a simple way of doing it for gasoline the same as we do for diesel.

**Mr. Boyd:** — Mr. Minister, the last two areas that we want to touch on are your government's commitment in terms of a Provincial Action Committee on the Rural Economy that will be made up, reading from your Throne Speech, which:

... will include the rural and farm leaders who made up Saskatchewan's delegation to Ottawa.

What kind of progress are you making on that? I have not heard of a meeting being scheduled or has been scheduled with respect to this. I also understand that they were going to be putting in place a spokesperson or someone to head up the rural action committee.

What kind of progress are you making and how soon can the farm community expect to hear announcements with respect to this area of commitment from your government?

**Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter:** — The member, I believe, attended the farm forum last fall where we ... it was the beginning or the starting point for what's becoming known as ACRE or the Action Committee on Rural Economy.

My thinking is at the present time that the final draft of the proposal for this committee will be approved by our cabinet within the next few days or, let's say, a couple of weeks. So I would expect that there will be an announcement probably by the end of the month. Don't hold me exactly to that, but I would expect in the next few weeks we'll have an announcement and then the initial meeting will be set up.

**Mr. Boyd:** — Thank you, Mr. Minister. The last area is the area of the farm safety net. We've seen nothing to date from your government with respect to this. The crop is in the ground now, farmers have expended large amounts of dollars. They are committing to spending large amounts more to provide a spray ... pesticide protection for their crops.

So we are, I think in the farm community, looking at this as certainly an area of great interest to the farm community, wondering where the discussions are with the federal government at this point. At what point will you be in a position

to make announcements with respect to this? Is it prior to harvest? Is it after harvest? Or is it before the legislative session concludes, Mr. Minister?

**Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter:** — The member will know that we have in place now a three-year agreement with the federal government — that is, after this year, another three years added as a program extension of AIDA. It's not quite clear whether that program name will change or whether it will be simply improvement and changes. But basically for the next three years what we're talking about is AIDA or its replacement — hopefully, much improved — improvements to NISA, which are being talked about; and of course changes to Crop Insurance as well as the changes to cash advance.

So if you talk about the safety nets that will be in place for the next three years, it's basically those four components.

Now some will argue that that isn't enough and that it should be much larger. But the fact of the matter is, I think the seeding that has gone on this year would indicate that farmers have at least enough money to get the seed in the ground. I might add as well that at the ag ministers conference, I believe the first week in July, the structure and framework for the ongoing improvements and extension of these programs and what will follow after the three-year period, hopefully, will be signed off at the meeting in Fredericton sometime in early July.

**Mr. Boyd:** — So that's the extent of it then as far as the farm community is concerned. We've got Crop Insurance, NISA, and AIDA; for a three-year period, the AIDA extension. Would you confirm that that is all that there will be this year and the next two?

**Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter:** — Yes. On an ongoing basis those are the . . . And remember the changes to the cash advance which added to the . . . easing the problem with farmers seeding.

Now I mean obviously some will argue that we needed \$6 billion to get the crop seeded and I think those people, and I think the member opposite would agree, were absolutely wrong. We didn't have to pump \$6 billion of other people's taxpayers' money into agriculture in order to get the crop seeded. The program that we put in place got about 34 million acres seeded in the province.

I think the balance is — in agriculture as in any industry — how much money do you need to put in to make it work and survive in the tough times? And I think for this year and on an average year, these programs are going to work just fine. The problem will come if you have a drought in a large area of the province — touch wood, hopefully not this year or any year — but I have clearly indicated to the Minister of Agriculture, even though we've signed onto this three-year agreement that if we have a disaster of one type or the other we're going to be back in a big way as a province, demanding that a program be set in place to take care of special situations that might come up.

These programs, we have indicated, are good enough to take care of us in an average year, as we know it today. But if there's a disaster of some type in agriculture these programs will simply not be sufficient, and we've made that more than clear to our federal counterparts.

**Mr. Boyd:** — All during the debate, Mr. Chair, Mr. Minister, last fall I think it was clear that the farm community was of the view that there was a need to enhance the safety net program. That there was a need to put in place measures so that farmers had, as I recall people talking, about a bottom line guarantees or looking at ways to ensure that the amount of money being dedicated to agriculture support programs was adequate. Frankly I think that the farm community will look upon what you have said here this afternoon as failing to make the mark in a big, big way.

Your commitment was to enhance the farm safety net program. It was also, and has been over the years, to put in place programs to make sure that the farm communities' support levels were matched with other countries.

You had said that on many, many occasions that if the Americans and the Europeans were going to put support programs in place of that nature that both yourself, in conjunction, yes, with the federal government, would have to certainly be there to make sure that the support levels were of a similar nature. And I think the Premier went as far as to say, match the levels of support with the competitors that we have on a worldwide basis.

And as you know, we are nowhere even close to that, Mr. Minister. So while your, what I would call, your rhetoric during the debate and your rhetoric during . . . in the Throne Speech comes no where close to matching your commitments to date or your program delivery to date, Mr. Minister.

And I think farmers across this province will be very, very disappointed. I think they're looking for something further. I think they thought your commitment in the Throne Speech for an enhanced farm safety net program was indeed that, and was not a further commitment to a son-of-AIDA type program that many of them felt was a huge flop to them; that many of them felt was simply inadequate, many of them felt did not meet their needs. Many of them felt it resulted in only increased cost to them for accounting and filling out applications for them.

So, Mr. Minister, this is not going to meet the needs. This is not going to address the problems that the farm community is faced with at this point, and I don't think meets the commitment that you put forward in your Throne Speech.

Mr. Minister, I can't help but think that the farm community is going to be disappointed today when they hear that the approach of your government is only to add the AIDA . . . to the AIDA program that is already in place that many farmers feel has failed to meet their needs.

**Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter:** — Mr. Chairman, I agree with the member opposite that when we went to Ottawa our hope certainly was that as a federal, national government that there would be more money to meet the expectation that farmers had and still have — I would agree with the member — in terms of subsidies that are being paid in Europe, particularly in the United States. And the federal government is committed to working as fast as they can to get the trade policies of the other countries changed to bring the subsidies down.

(1700)

But having said that, there's a sense in rural Saskatchewan — I know the member opposite will sense this and feel it as well — that it's not a unanimous voice that calls for more taxpayers' money into agriculture. There are many, many farmers and farm communities that I talk to that say very large subsidies of any type are exactly what isn't needed in rural Saskatchewan. They say that putting in more than is needed to get the farm through the next year, those who are in tough shape, that all you're doing is wasting taxpayers' money. You hear that view.

You hear another view that I talked to you earlier about, of those farmers who said we needed \$6 billion, and if we didn't get \$6 billion of taxpayers' money into the hands of farmers, they were predicting that half of the farms in the province would go broke and wouldn't be able to seed the crop.

Well the issue is that I don't think it's an issue of extremes. I don't think you have to and nor do I think that we ever thought that we could match the European subsidies. That was never a commitment by, I think, your caucus or our caucus. Our commitment was to support farmers to see that the crop got seeded in the spring.

And with 34 million acres seeded, something slightly above the 10-year average, I think the commitment that was made by taxpayers in Canada and in the province has been met to support farm families.

And if I could to the committee, report progress, Mr. Chairman.

**The Deputy Chair:** — The Government House Leader is withdrawing his motion? Yes.

**Mr. Wall:** — Mr. Deputy Chair of Committees, Mr. Minister, and officials, just two very quick questions. I noted in one of your responses to the question I think on the property tax rebate, Minister, was your reference that ACS would be administering that program. And I guess I'd just like to clarify that or get an answer from you on that, because of course in Swift Current we're aware that ACS is being wound down.

One element of ACS that appears to be ongoing is the Ag equity fund — agri-food equity fund. That was spun out of the ACS and I think is headquartered, despite the city's protestation, I think it's headquartered in Saskatoon.

And so I'm wondering if you could clarify: what is the status of ACS? Is it still being wound down or will it continue in one form and another? And if it is going to continue, Minister, could you please tell me in what city it will be headquartered and where those jobs will be located?

**Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter:** — Just so you know, the ACS is being wound down, not because of any ill intent but because we're running out of work to do. As that program, the debts are collected and worked through, it simply needs fewer and fewer people.

And while it obviously is a negative thing at one level — for your community — for the people of the province it's a very positive thing as we settle our accounts and get as many people through the . . . farmers through the hoops as we can.

And I think the organization's being very lenient and supportive of farm families. In fact that announcement was made, what — two or three years ago? Four years ago. And so that's just a continuation of that, so you're right.

**Mr. Wall:** — Just one final question to the minister, Mr. Deputy Chair of Committees. Though I thought I heard you say that it's going to have a role to play — ACS or its successor — are going to have a role to play in some other programs not related to its original intent. And we know that it did because the agri-food equity fund, which is a program currently offered by your department, was spun out of ACS, but the headquarters for that program I believe is Saskatoon.

And I guess that would be the concern I'd have as the MLA for Swift Current, and that our community would have. If ACS is continuing in whatever form to do things other than what it was originally set up for, why couldn't it continue to be operated as it has been successfully headquartered in the city of Swift Current?

**Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter:** — Yes, the program won't be administered by ACS. Some of the staff who have previously worked at ACS will be brought into the unit that's doing the rebate.

Mr. Chairman, I would report progress.

The Assembly recessed until 7 p.m.