

The Assembly met at 1:30 p.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRESENTING PETITIONS

Ms. Draude: — Mr. Speaker, I have a petition today to retain 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.

The people that have signed this petition are from Viscount and Watrous.

Thank you.

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

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

And this is presented on behalf of citizens from Viscount and Saskatoon.

I so present.

Mr. Gantefoer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise as well on behalf of the citizens concerned about the future of their 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, are from the communities of Viscount and Saskatoon.

I so present.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also have petitions to present to do with the possible closures of hospitals. The prayer reads, Mr. Speaker:

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

The signatures, Mr. Speaker, are all from Viscount, Saskatchewan.

I so present.

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also rise 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 in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

From the good citizens of Langham, Nokomis, and Jansen.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to read a petition of citizens concerned about hospital closures. The prayer reads:

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

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

The petitioners are from the communities of Colonsay and Viscount.

I so present.

Mr. Allchurch: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I have also a petition regarding the closure of hospitals in Saskatchewan:

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 good citizens of Viscount have signed this petition.

I so present.

Mr. Stewart: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to present a petition signed by citizens concerned with possible forced amalgamation of municipalities in this province. The prayer reads:

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

And this petition is signed by individuals from the communities of Moose Jaw, Regina, Rouleau, Caron, and Tuxford.

I so present.

READING AND RECEIVING PETITIONS

Clerk: — According to order the following petitions have been

reviewed and pursuant to rule 12(7) they are hereby read and received.

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

Not proceeding with the amalgamation of municipalities;
and

To ensure the Lanigan and Watrous hospitals remain open.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to introduce a couple of guests that are seated with us this afternoon — a gentleman from the area of Rocanville. And maybe many of the members have already read about Mr. Dennis Hack and his trip across the country to actually to raise funds for the Moosomin health care centre, and he's joined by his son Aaron.

Mr. Speaker, I think it would be very appropriate for this Assembly to welcome Mr. Dennis Hack and his son Aaron to this Assembly this morning. I invite the members of this Assembly to extend a warm welcome.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Thank you very much. I want to join the member from Moosomin in welcoming Dennis Hack and his son to the Legislative Assembly. As the member indicated, Mr. Hack is bicycling from one end of Canada, starting in Vancouver, to the other end of Canada ending in Newfoundland, to raise funds for the Moosomin integrated health facility.

Tomorrow as I understand it, there's going to be a big welcome in Moosomin and a barbecue in order to increase the profile of the fundraising endeavour. I also want to say, Mr. Speaker, that Mr. Hack is 60 years old. He's a farmer. He's been in training all winter. He's travelled from Vancouver to here in I think 10 days. He got through the mountains, no sweat; he got across Alberta, no sweat; and I understand that he even is making it across Saskatchewan with no difficulty. So that does say something about some things.

Anyway, I want to welcome you very much to the legislature and I wish you all the best on behalf of the government in your fundraising endeavours.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to stand before you on behalf of the member from Last Mountain-Touchwood to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly, a group of 11 grade 4 to 6 students who are seated in the east gallery. They are from Carl Frederickson School at Govan, Saskatchewan.

They are accompanied by their teacher Dawn Hassman, and chaperones, Karen Hancock and Colleen Mitchell. I hope you enjoy your visit here. And I want everyone to welcome them.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Addley: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I very enthusiastically would like to introduce some special guests in the west gallery, for a number of reasons. One, it's my first school visit as an MLA (Member of the Legislative Assembly). Second, my niece and nephew, Matthew and Sarah attend the school. And it's 43 grade 8 students from Forest Grove School, and they are accompanied by a former neighbour of the Minister of Economic Development, Mr. Tranborg, as well as Mr. Wilson, Mr. Hernberg, and Mrs. Vizsko.

They have a fine group of students, very good teachers — it's a very progressive school — and I'm very much looking forward to meeting them. It's the best school in the best city in the province in the best country in all of the world.

Would you please welcome the members from Forest Grove School.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Hillson: — Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly, members of the gay and lesbian community association who are in the west gallery. I'd ask them to please stand. They are going to observe the first province-wide celebration of Gay and Lesbian Pride Week.

I met with them earlier and I'm pleased to report that they have agreed to participate in my department's review of the province's guidelines for issuance of proclamations. Thank you.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Prebble: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to introduce to you today and to you through all members of the House, two guests who are seated in your gallery, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Randy Pritchard, who is at the present time serving as the technical adviser to the Special Committee to Stop the Sexual Exploitation of Children Through the Sex Trade and his daughter, Jennifer, is also visiting — if Jennifer would stand up. Jennifer has just completed her school term in the Saskatoon Catholic system and she's visiting with her father for the day.

So we're very happy to have them both here in the gallery and I hope all members will join me in welcoming them. Thank you.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wartman: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to be able to introduce to you today and through you to the rest of this Chamber our special guest, Tanner James Vanin and Tanner's brought his mom and dad along as he's one of the millennium babies — one of the first born in the province.

And I'd ask all of you to stand, please. There's Tanner, looking after his dad up there. His dad's name is Darren Vanin — Darren works for Smurfit-MBI, it's a box factory — and mom, Luisa. And Luisa is a plant maintenance person, works out of

her home, looking . . . and I believe that's like petunias and flowers. Right? And we're very happy to have them here today.

Many of you will know that the millennium babies receive a number of gifts from the province. One of those gifts is a bond that's issued in the baby's name and Tanner will be a recipient of that bond. I'm looking forward to going out and presenting the bond and the certificate to them following question period today.

And so I'd ask everybody to join in welcoming Tanner and his parents who are here for this session.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wartman: — Sorry, Mr. Speaker, I would also like to complete the introductions by introducing my constituency assistant who is invaluable and just a warm and graceful person, Donna From, who has brought them here. And I'd ask you to join me in welcoming Donna as well.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Toth: — Thank you as well, Mr. Speaker. To you and through you I'd like to as well introduce to the members of the Assembly a former member who has joined us behind the bar, Mr. Rick Swenson, the member who served this Assembly very well and distinguishedly for a number of years. And we welcome him to the Assembly.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Increased Sales of New Vehicles

Ms. Lorje: — Thank you. For those who doubt that the economy is on a roll, here is another quick snapshot of Saskatchewan's booming economy. The number of new vehicles sold in Saskatchewan this year is up. The number of new vehicles bought by Saskatchewan citizens has increased by 10.1 per cent over last year at this time. And sales in April have increased 6.9 per cent over those in March of this year.

Clearly what we're seeing from the spring budget is not the doom and gloom that the opposition was predicting. We're seeing more jobs, more confidence in the economy, and more new car sales.

Just imagine, Mr. Speaker, how great things will be on July 1 when the first of our planned income tax reductions kicks in. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Gun Registry Legislation

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Earlier today the Supreme Court threw out the challenge to the federal Liberal's ridiculous gun legislation, Bill C-68. Mr. Speaker, we were all disappointed by this ruling. And for the record I want to state once again that the Saskatchewan Party was opposed to this law. We are opposed to this law, and we will remain opposed to

this law in the future. I hope all members of the House can say the same thing, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, this Bill was pushed forward by the federal Liberals and the federal NDP (New Democratic Party). And I think the voters of Saskatchewan should remember that when the next federal election rolls around, Mr. Speaker.

This law will do nothing to fight crime. It will only punish law-abiding citizens throughout this country, and do it with their own money, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, when I am asked by people what we do next to get rid of this asinine law, I believe the best response is this, Mr. Speaker. We have to change the federal government. That is the only way we can bring some common sense to this issue.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

New Lottery Agreement Signed

Mr. Kasperski: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Tuesday there was good news for the volunteer organizations that provide sport, culture, and recreation opportunities for the citizens of our province.

The minister responsible for culture has signed a new three-year lottery licence agreement with representatives of Sask Sport. This agreement ensures that Saskatchewan citizens will be able to continue accessing recreation programs that they might not otherwise have access to.

The opportunities that the proceeds from ticket sales are indispensable to Saskatchewan citizens. These are opportunities that contribute to the well-being of individuals and the economic and social viability of our communities.

Children who did not previously take part in sport, recreation, and cultural programs are now able to through programs such as the northern community school program, KidSport, and Youth with Challenges dance program. Other programs, such as the Trans Canada Trail, are examples of programs that benefit all citizens of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, over 12,000 sport, recreation, and cultural groups and organizations make up the Sask Sport system and continue to be fundamental to the quality of life in all our communities. The opportunities for people of all ages to access their programs must continually be encouraged and developed, and this new agreement attempts to do just that.

On behalf of all my colleagues, Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate all of the partners involved in signing this agreement. Thank you.

Saskatchewan Party's Vision for the Future

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I want to take this opportunity to report on a very important luncheon I attended in Saskatoon yesterday.

Nearly 400 people, mostly from the business community, turned out yesterday to hear the Leader of the Opposition lay out his vision — our vision — for the future in Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Krawetz: — Mr. Speaker, that vision is one of hope for the future and a belief that things can be better here in Saskatchewan, and that we don't have to simply accept the notion perpetuated by the NDP that Saskatchewan shouldn't reach for the top.

Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition's speech laid out a four-point plan for Saskatchewan's future that will put us on the road to prosperity. Those points were: lower taxes in the context of a smaller government; fair labour laws; the development of a strong and positive relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples that works for the betterment of all; and a serious examination of the future of Crown-owned businesses.

Mr. Speaker, this is by no means a complete list of everything that must be done in order to put Saskatchewan on the right track. But it is a solid plan that was well received by the business community in Saskatoon, and one that is being applauded around this province everyday as it becomes more and more and more obvious each and everyday that the NDP alongside their Liberal puppets haven't got a clue which way this province is to head.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

SIAST Aboriginal Employment Development Program

Mr. Trew: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, our excellent post-secondary education system continues to improve. As a supporter of fair and equitable employment, I'm delighted to announce that a third institution has become a partner with the Aboriginal Employment Development Program.

Yesterday at a ceremony at the Wascana Campus in Regina, SIAST (Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology) agreed to, according to the mandate of the program, prepare its workplaces for the Aboriginal workforce and to promote education within the Aboriginal community.

SIAST now joins the U of R (University of Regina), and the U of S (University of Saskatoon) as partners in this program. I regret even having to mention this, Mr. Speaker, but this employment development program is not a program of racial preference as some would have us believe.

Quite the contrary. The Aboriginal Employment Development Program identifies employment needs and opportunities which then allows Aboriginal people to focus their training and compete for these jobs on an equal footing. This partnership is a perfect fit for SIAST — of its nearly 8,200 students, Mr. Speaker, 15 per cent are First Nations and Metis.

Mr. Speaker, the aims of this program are to foster fairness and equity, consistency of approach, mutual respect and dignity, open communication, and trust. I am proud of this program and congratulate SIAST.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Rocanville Farmer Cycling Across Canada

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, as was earlier indicated, Dennis Hack, a farmer from the Rocanville area is cycling across this country. And, Mr. Speaker, on June 4, he dipped the back tire of his bicycle into the Pacific Ocean at Vancouver Stanley Park. Today he is here with us in the Assembly, and tomorrow at 11:30 he plans on being in the community of Moosomin for a special welcoming ceremony and encouragement as he continues his journey.

Mr. Speaker, I would have to suggest that being . . . I hope at 60 years of age I have the same abilities and am able to bike along at that clip that Mr. Hack has been certainly biking along. He plans on being on the road for about 55 days, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, for example, he left Swift Current yesterday at 8 a.m., arriving in Regina — after having had a couple stops — at 9:15. I'm not sure if I'd have quite made it to Herbert myself.

But, Mr. Speaker, I think it's important for us to recognize the reason he's bicycling across this country is because he's doing something he feels very strongly about. He's thankful for the way the health care system has met his need. This is his contribution to health care, not only in this province but certainly for his community and the integrated health facility in the community of Moosomin.

So, Mr. Speaker, we want to say thank you to Mr. Hack and all the residents of Saskatchewan who are so proud of the health care system and so willing to give of themselves to help meet the needs so that residents of the future can enjoy quality health care.

Thank you very much.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Legends of the Road in Moose Jaw

Hon. Mr. Hagel: — Mr. Speaker, a group of Seattle high school students will help re-establish Moose Jaw's place in baseball history this summer. Students from Chief Sealth High School will leave Seattle on bicycle on June 21, embarking on a 4,444 mile journey through Western Canada and the United States. This is all part of the Legends of the Road Journey, an event used to help recognize and celebrate the 100th anniversary of baseball barnstorming.

Barnstorming was a phenomenon which occurred in the first half of the 20th century due to the segregation of black baseball players. The barnstorming circuit allowed Negro League teams to compete against a broad array of white professional and semi-professional baseball teams throughout Canada and the United States.

The Legends of the Road event is both a research project and fundraising venture for the Negro Leagues Museum. Students from Moose Jaw's Peacock Collegiate are helping in the event by researching and documenting local barnstorming history.

Moose Jaw is one of just four communities the students will

visit in Saskatchewan — Swift Current, Indian Head, and Moosomin being the others. Moose Jaw will also be one of the few cities which will feature in a documentary of the event being put together by the History Channel. Festivities in Moose Jaw will include as well a baseball game at Ross Wells Park on July 12.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to congratulate the students of Seattle's Chief Sealth High School, Moose Jaw's Peacock Collegiate, and all other participants in the Legends of the Road Journey.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ORAL QUESTIONS

Highway Maintenance

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Minister of Highways.

Mr. Speaker, on May 31, Rebecca Ellis of Hazlet was driving east on Highway 332 just east of Hazlet when an oncoming vehicle sent a large chunk of asphalt flying into her windshield. The impact was so great that it sent broken glass flying into the vehicle, including some pieces of glass that wound up in her eye.

Mr. Minister, shouldn't people be able to drive down Saskatchewan highways without having this . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. I'd ask the hon. member to kindly recognize the rules of the Assembly as far as exhibits are concerned. Kindly go directly to your question.

Mr. Wall: — Mr. Minister, the question is pretty simple. Shouldn't Rebecca Ellis and the rest of Saskatchewan motorists have the assurance and the confidence that they can drive down your highways without chunks of asphalt flying up in their windshield?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. First of all, of course we're very concerned about public safety, and it's obvious we would be concerned when a situation like that occurs.

But I want to say, Mr. Speaker . . . I want to talk about the facts, Mr. Speaker. Day after day the opposition comes in here with petitions for us to cut the fuel tax — 5 cents a litre they say, Mr. Speaker. That's 30 per cent of the revenue that this province raises for fuel tax, Mr. Speaker. And I looked through the paper yesterday, Mr. Speaker, and I see a headline that says, Hermanson calls for further tax cuts, Mr. Speaker.

Now if the opposition would explain to me, Mr. Speaker, how you can day after day ask for tax cuts, Mr. Speaker, and at the same time, Mr. Speaker, improve the infrastructure in the province of Saskatchewan — it's absolutely impossible, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — I think the minister's missing the point. The people of Saskatchewan would like you to do something — either fix their roads, use the fuel tax to fix the roads, or cut the fuel tax. Do something, Minister. I think that's what people are saying.

Mr. Minister, Rebecca sent us a letter asking a number of questions, and I'd like to ask the minister those questions on her behalf. Her letter says, and I quote:

This is ridiculous, don't you think?

We all pay our taxes out here so why should we have to suffer?

What is it going to take to make you people realize what needs to be done out here (she writes)?

Does someone need to be terribly injured before you take notice?

Mr. Minister, what is it going to take? Does someone have to be seriously injured or worse before you'll give them more than NDP excuses and fix the highways?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Order. Just before the minister answers, I would just like to remind all hon. members to kindly address their questions through the Chair. I thank you for that.

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Mr. Speaker, as I've said many times in the House, this government has determined and believes that the infrastructure on our highway system is very important, and that's why we have committed \$250 million this year, Mr. Speaker, the highest Highways budget ever and 6.6 per cent increase, well above the rate of inflation, Mr. Speaker.

I say, Mr. Speaker, and they don't like to hear this, Mr. Speaker, but those members opposite voted in favour . . . spoke in favour, I should say, of the abolition of the Crow benefit — \$320 million a year, Mr. Speaker. Much of that money, Mr. Speaker, went back to the producers of Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker.

We had rail-line abandonment, and as a result of rail-line abandonment, Mr. Speaker, we've got heavy trucks that are now travelling on our highways and causing severe damage on the roads that the member brought into the legislature today, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — You know, Mr. Minister, in most places when someone decides to go for a drive they say that it's time to hit the road. Unfortunately in NDP Saskatchewan, the roads hit back, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Minister, if Saskatchewan highways were a workplace, occupational health and safety would have shut most of them down long ago. And the fact is, Minister . . . Mr. Speaker, the highways are a workplace in the province of Saskatchewan — for freight companies, for truckers, ambulance drivers, bus drivers,

and farmers hauling grain, Mr. Speaker.

All of these people face unsafe working conditions at their workplace, the Saskatchewan highways, each and every day because of the neglect and improper maintenance of highways of this government.

Mr. Minister, this piece of asphalt hit Rebecca's car right in front of her face. If it had come through the windshield she might have been very seriously injured. Is that what it's going to take for you to fix Saskatchewan highways?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Well, Mr. Speaker, again I say you can't have a huge debt that was created by those members opposite and paying \$2 million a day interest, Mr. Speaker. You can't come in here every day asking for us to cut the fuel tax, Mr. Speaker.

But I want to tell you . . . I want to read to the members opposite and to the members of the legislature, a article . . . an article I should say, out of *The Leader-Post* of June 15, today. And it goes as follows:

Berthelot congratulated the provincial highways department for making do in a bad situation. Many of its engineers have been burning the midnight oil trying to come up with a solution for a problem that wasn't of their making . . . (Mr. Speaker).

The problem was created by those folks opposite, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — Mr. Speaker, excuses aren't cutting it anymore. You've had nine years of collecting fuel tax from Saskatchewan people. This government's had nine years of collecting the second-highest income tax in the dominion from Saskatchewan people; nine years of utility rate hikes. Nine years, Mr. Speaker, of auto insurance rate increases. It's now time for them to stand up, suck it up, and take nine years worth of responsibility for broken-down highways, Mr. Speaker.

On behalf of Rebecca Ellis and everyone else who must travel dangerous Saskatchewan highways, will this minister now stand in his place and take some responsibility for the sad state of Saskatchewan roads?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — I'll tell you who should take some responsibility, Mr. Speaker. It's that member who worked in the premier's office in the last government who contributed to much of the problems that we have today, Mr. Speaker. That's who should take some responsibility.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Mr. Speaker, I'll tell you what we're fighting, Mr. Speaker. This government is fighting the fact that we have to pay \$2 million a day interest on the debt, Mr. Speaker. Eight kilometres a day, Mr. Speaker, of structural pavement at \$250,000 a kilometre, Mr. Speaker — that's what

we could construct if we didn't have that amount of debt that those members created.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Stewart: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also have some questions for the Minister of Highways.

Mr. Minister, this morning in Climax about 200 people showed up to fix Highway 18. Unfortunately they were rained out, but they plan to reschedule their work crew for another day.

Mr. Minister, more and more Saskatchewan communities are saying no to your plan to gravel highways.

This morning you received a letter from the village of Briercrest voicing their strong opposition to your plan to gravel Highway 339.

Mr. Minister, when are you going to start listening to the growing list of communities opposed to your plan to turn highways back to gravel?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well I think that the members opposite should get together in caucus over what their real view is on roads.

Mr. Speaker, I want to read an article or a clipping, I should say, out of the *Southwest Booster* from June 10. Here we are. It goes as follows:

"There is no doubt the highways were never designed to meet the kind of traffic loads (as) . . . they are (having to carry) . . . now," says Wayne Elhard.

Mr. Speaker, also the member from Saltcoats said:

Maybe there is a point that we would be better off having them back in gravel and I don't think I'd probably have many of my constituents agree with me on that . . . point, but I honestly feel there must be some point there where we (will) have to give up.

Well, Mr. Speaker, as I've said often, we . . .

The Speaker: — Order, please.

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In case they didn't hear it, the member from Saltcoats says:

Maybe there is a point that we would be better off having them back in gravel and I don't think I'd probably have many of my constituents agree with me (he says) on . . . this point, but I honestly feel there must be some point . . . where we have to give up.

Mr. Speaker, our government will not give up even though we are having to pay \$2 million a day interest on their debt.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Stewart: — Mr. Speaker, another question for the Minister of Highways. Mr. Minister, the village of Briercrest says they have been told for the last two years that you were going to fix their highway. However this hasn't happened, so now they plan to fix their own highway and they're asking for your help.

They want to know if you, the Department of Highways, will assist them by supplying asphalt and equipment? They are also providing the assurance that they will observe all safety measures.

Mr. Minister, are you going to help the people of Briercrest fix Highway 339 or, better yet, will your government live up to its responsibility and fix it yourself?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Well, Mr. Speaker, I don't know if the members opposite understand. But when they voted and spoke in favour of, when they voted and spoke in favour, Mr. Speaker, of the abolition of the Crow rate, that cost us \$320 million a year, Mr. Speaker — \$320 million. And when they created the \$15 billion debt, Mr. Speaker, that cost . . .

The Speaker: — Order. Order. Hon. members, I would ask members on both sides to kindly respect your rules and the decorum of this venerable institution. Allow members to be heard, both when asking the question and when giving the answer. I ask for your co-operation, please.

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — And, Mr. Speaker, if I could conclude, when they created the \$15 billion debt, Mr. Speaker, that cost us \$700 million a year in interest, Mr. Speaker.

I don't know how you can create that kind of situation, call for tax cuts day after day, Mr. Speaker, and for improved services and infrastructure. It absolutely is impossible; it does not add up, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Red Coat Trail

Ms. Bakken: — Mr. Speaker, my question is also for the Minister of Highways. Mr. Minister, I have received a letter from the RM (rural municipality) of Key West. They are very upset about the NDP government's plan to revert sections of the historic Red Coat Trail, Highway 13, to gravel.

And I quote:

This truly is an outrage and this government needs to be stopped. This is another form of downloading to the municipalities. We are very afraid of what the future of this highway holds. We project that in the future they will turn this highway back to the RM and we will be responsible for this highway.

And I further quote:

We the people of Saskatchewan are definitely saying we've had enough. Stop all of this erosion of services and let's get back to running this province the way it should be.

Mr. Minister, can you commit to the RM of Key West that you will listen to their ratepayers and not convert the Red Coat Trail to gravel?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm particularly glad to get a question from the member from Weyburn because I want to read a quote from the *Weyburn Review* of October 20, 1999 that said . . . where she says, Mr. Speaker:

Why are we not looking at having privatized care in Saskatchewan and keeping the money here if that's what we're going to do (Mr. Speaker).

Well I would say to that member, and I would say to the public of Saskatchewan and to the employees, especially in the Department of Highways, if that member is in favour of privatized health care, I can only guess and surmise that she might well be in favour of privatizing roads and in favour of privatizing the Department of Highways as well, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Bakken: — Another question to the Minister of Highways. One RM after another is expressing . . .

The Speaker: — Order, please!

Ms. Bakken: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, another question for the Minister of Highways. One RM after another is expressing serious concerns about your move to turn provincial highways back to gravel. People of this province are very upset that the highways they rely on have only been neglected by your department for years and are now being converted to gravel.

The RM of Laurier met in Radville last night. They too are planning to protest your plans to turn sections of Highway 28 to gravel. They are distributing a petition to area residents who will urge you not to take this action and they will be asking to meet with you.

Mr. Minister, no one is buying your phoney budget numbers. They know administration costs have increased and actual spending on maintenance and construction has decreased.

Mr. Minister, when will you begin to listen to the concerns of people in these communities and stop the plans to revert their highways back to gravel?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Mr. Speaker, I would say if that member's concerned — really genuinely concerned — about roads being reverted back to gravel, she should talk to the member beside her from Saltcoats who says, "Maybe there is a point that we would be better off having them back in gravel," Mr. Speaker. He says, "and I don't think I'd probably have many . . . constituents agree with me on that . . . point, but I honestly feel there must be some point there where we have to give up," Mr. Speaker. She should talk to that member, Mr. Speaker.

Also, Mr. Speaker, I would be especially concerned, as I've said before, that member who speaks in favour of privatizing health care, would she also be in favour — and I wish she would answer the question, Mr. Speaker — would she also be in favour of privatizing the Department of Highways and/or privatizing the highways, Mr. Speaker?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Construction Industry Labour Legislation

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Minister of Labour. Madam Minister, I have received a letter from the Saskatchewan Alliance for Economic Growth. They have invited me to attend a debate on The Construction Industry Labour Relations Amendment Act, 2000 on Thursday, June 29. The organization believes this debate will help Saskatchewan businesses understand the changes to the Act and determine what effect it may have on them.

Madam Minister, I believe that the business community and indeed the industries who will be most affected by this regressive legislation need to have all of the information and all the effects known and I intend to take this opportunity.

Madam Minister, will you accept this invitation to this debate?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think we already have a place for this debate and that's right here in this House. And I'm happy to go toe to toe with the member any day, and he can ask whoever he wishes to tune in and hear the debate.

But the fact of the matter is is this legislation . . . any of the people he's talking about would operate under essentially the same rules in any other province. There's no place in Canada that allows double-breasting of unionized companies. And he knows that and I don't know why he keeps asking this question.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Weekes: — Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure what the minister's scared of, but why will the minister not commit to this today?

Mr. Speaker, the Saskatchewan Alliance for Economic Growth represents three-quarters of all businesses in Saskatchewan. They have expressed their concerns with this legislation and believe that economic development in this province will be hindered by this legislation.

They have publicly stated that they believe you have not been forthcoming with all the facts. And they have requested that this legislation be removed from the government's agenda until there has been a province-wide consultation with business and industry on this issue.

They've requested a meeting with you and they've asked the Premier to step in to the forefront of this issue. Madam Minister, why are you afraid to face the business community to discuss this legislation?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Well, Mr. Speaker, as I've said before, we greatly value the business community and we had a hundred meetings trying to resolve this issue in some kind of friendly and co-operative way.

But I ask the member opposite, what his true motives are. When he gets up in the House and he says that unions are job killers, I guess I have to ask him, is he talking about public-sector unions, is he talking about private-sector unions, or is he just generally against the right of workers to a democratic workplace?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Licensed Practical Nurses' Legislation

Mr. Gantefoer: — Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Health.

Madam Minister, later today the legislature will consider Bill 73, The Licensed Practical Nurses Act, 2000. The Saskatchewan Party will be proposing an amendment to address a major concern of both registered nurses and licensed practical nurses.

As you are aware, Madam Minister, The Registered Nurses Act, 1988 holds the RNs (registered nurse) accountable for the overall provision, coordination, and evaluation of nursing care. However, LPNs (licensed practical nurses) rightly argue that there are many circumstances in which the training and experience they have to provide for personal nursing care on an independent basis. Mr. Speaker, the SRNA (Saskatchewan Registered Nurses' Association) also acknowledges this case.

Madam Minister, in order to clarify this whole issue, we're proposing this amendment this afternoon. Madam Minister, will you support the amendment, and if not, why not?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Mr. Speaker, right after question period, I understand that we're going to Committee of the Whole. We'll have an opportunity to go through the Bill clause by clause and I can give a much more detailed response to the member at that time.

I can assure the public that the legislation that we've introduced is going to allow licensed practical nurses in this province to work to their education and training as they should be able to do, as other professional groups are able to do in this province.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Gantefoer: — Mr. Speaker, another question to the minister. Madam Minister, while nobody is going to be surprised that you're going to put politics ahead of really understanding and considering important health care motions, Madam Minister, if you won't consider our amendment appropriately, Madam Minister, will you at least consider another option?

You, yourself, have initiated a mediation process between the Saskatchewan Registered Nurses' Association and the licensed practical nurses. And as well, you've also initiated a health care review yesterday. Madam Minister, will you consider at least postponing this legislation until either of these processes have a chance to address these issues appropriately?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Mr. Speaker, this is what I will say to the member. Mr. Speaker, every day in this Legislative Assembly and sometimes on occasion outside of this Legislative Assembly — we have people that are appointed and involved in health care in this province — and far too often, I hear from the members opposite, a real besmirching of people's reputations. And I think that that . . . the time to talk about other people in this Legislative Assembly and what they do in health care, those days are over.

What we want to develop in this province is a health care system that is citizen-focused, that allows health providers to come together and work in a team way. Mr. Speaker, the registered nurses in this province, the licensed practical nurses in this province, and the psychiatric nurses in this province, along with nursing assistants, want to move forward in having a team approach to health delivery. And that's the way it should be, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Health Care Review

Mr. Gantefoer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well again the minister has missed a question entirely, so I'll direct my next question to the Premier.

Mr. Premier, yesterday morning you refused to assure reporters in your press conference that there would be no further hospital closures until after the royal . . . or the health care commission has reported. But later in question period, you said hospitals would not be closed at all.

It's just like your position on the Canada Health Act. When you're in Ottawa, you say it's almost irrelevant; and when you're back home, you consider it gospel. Why always the different versions of what's going to happen?

So, Mr. Premier, I want to give you the opportunity to set the record straight. Will you assure this province, the communities in this province, that hospitals and health care facilities will not be closed while this review is happening?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, the hon. member asked me this question yesterday, and I said to the hon. member then that there will be no hospital closures pending the review, and we expect few major disruptions during the course of the review.

But while we're on the question of hospital closures, I want to draw to the attention of you, Mr. Speaker, and the members of the House, a *Leader-Post* article of March 3, 1999, headlined,

"More hospitals changing," quote:

Saskatchewan Party Leader Elwin Hermanson couldn't guarantee his party would keep the doors open at all 36 hospitals with low average daily bed usage rates. An evaluation would be done first (he said) to decide how to best serve the communities, he added.

My question to you is what is your position and your leader's position on those 36 hospitals?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Gantefoer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is again for the Premier. Mr. Premier, you keep doing that. After nine years you keep shirking your own responsibility. After nine years, and all the years you've served in this legislature, Mr. Premier, surely you can stand in this House and be . . .

The Speaker: — Order.

Mr. Gantefoer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Premier, surely after all of these years you can stand up in this House and be responsible and accountable for the mess your wellness adventure has put this province's health care system in.

Mr. Premier, will you refer the wellness model to this commission, to get a report card from this independent commissioner to see what he thinks of your system?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, the commissioner, Mr. Fyke who is respected nationally, and I would even in many quarters, internationally, on health care, has a carte blanche to examine the health care system, including the wellness concept which has been inserted within the context of the five principles of the Canada Health Act and medicare.

I've given that answer, and I've given the answer on hospitals. But what you have not done, sir, and I would ask that the journalists ask you, and more particularly, the Leader of the Opposition, is why you have failed to give us your answer on his statement that 36 hospitals are likely to be closed if the Saskatchewan money-for-value audit is going to be established.

You, sir — and you, sir, — and the Saskatchewan Party are the enemies of medicare, and the people in Saskatchewan know this.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Order.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

WRITTEN QUESTIONS

Mr. Yates: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the government being both open and accountable, we are very pleased and happy to table a response to question 177. And we hope the opposition understands it, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: — The answer to question no. 177 is tabled.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

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

The Chair: — Before I call clause 1, I'll invite the Minister of Health to introduce her officials.

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Yes, beside me today is Marlene Smadu, who is the primary nursing advisor to the Department of Health, and is presently the assistant deputy minister for the department.

Clause 1

The Chair: — Why is the hon. member for Yorkton on his feet?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Chair, with leave to introduce guests.

Leave granted.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank the member from Melfort for the leave. I want to introduce, Mr. Chair, seated in the west gallery, a young man by the name of Aaron Nagy who is from the small little community of Rhein and attends school at the Regional High School in Yorkton.

This morning and today he's with me. He's shadowing a minister is how it's called, and this morning we were at Buchanan where we addressed the SUMA (Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association) regional meeting of which Mr. Nagy was a part of. This afternoon he observed the proceedings in the House and later today will accompany me to another meeting that I have and then return back to Yorkton.

So I ask members of the Assembly to join with me today in welcoming Aaron to the House. I know that soon he will be making his presence to the floor of this Assembly, I'm sure. He hasn't yet told me on which side of the House he prefers to sit on but I expect it's going to be over here.

Mr. Speaker, I want to . . . Mr. Chair, ask all members of the House to join with me in welcoming him to the House.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — With leave to introduce some guests.

Leave granted.

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I want to introduce members of the licensed practical nurses' association who are here this afternoon. In particular I want to recognize Gloria Miller who is the past president of SALPN (Saskatchewan Association of Licensed Practical Nurses); Judy Zawyrucka, who is the Regina chapter president. Heather Cuguat, works in Weyburn. Gord Campbell, who is the

president of the Regina CUPE (Canadian Union of Public Employees) local; Andrew Huculak, who is the staff member at CUPE; Cathy Ogle, who is from the Estevan LPN chapter; along with Sherry Schindel, who works here in Regina and Doug Ferris, who works here in Regina.

And all of these people are here this afternoon to see the workings of the legislature. As well, Ede Leeson, the executive director of SALPN is attending as well this afternoon.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

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

Clause 1

Mr. Gantfoer: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would like to welcome the various LPNs that are in the galleries, as well, this afternoon to observe this. It's sort of difficult sitting where I am because I can't usually see people, because the clock is in the road. So welcome all of you that are here.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, as we get into a clause by clause discussion of this important legislation, I don't want to go into depth in terms of repeating the speech and the comments that I made in second reading, because I think that's the time to debate the principles of this legislation.

But I do want to repeat one important fact, that as a matter of principle and direction, the official opposition is fully supportive of the licensed practical nurses having their own independent association and the professional set-up of that legislation to allow them to function appropriately and completely within the general nursing profession, and more generally in the health care field in broader terms.

Mr. Speaker, or Mr. Deputy Speaker, we certainly have had a great deal of opportunity to consult with licensed practical nurses. I have had . . . We've had, as a caucus, a couple of meetings with the association. I've had individual meetings and discussions. I've had written communications and I've had meetings with individual groups of licensed practical nurses most recently in my own constituency. And I do appreciate the comments that I've heard on all those occasions.

I also want to say that I have to say that I'm very impressed by the absolute dedication and commitment that these individuals have to the practice of nursing. And I certainly do commend them for that and do believe that the legislation that we're considering today is an important step in a long progress or a long journey really not only for licensed practical nurses but for what I think is a changing atmosphere in the nursing profession in general.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in order to clarify that we have said and we continue to say . . . and on Friday we faxed copies of this proposed amendment to both the LPN association and the registered nurses' association. Also, I gave copies of the proposed amendment to the minister for her consideration. So I have to say for the record, and I think it would be agreed, this is

nothing that's coming as a huge surprise at the last moment. We have expressed our concern about the wording of this issue and we would like to explore some of those issues in more detail.

(1430)

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I've had a number of communications from registered nurses, both individually and from the Saskatchewan Registered Nurses' Association officially. And as in our conversations and from these discussions — and as well I've even had a letter from the Alberta registered nurses' association expressing their concerns about this legislation — Mr. Deputy Speaker, while I have to say that I do understand the concern, I'm hopeful that we can address some of the concerns in our questions to the minister today. And that may go some distance in alleviating concerns that have been expressed by the registered nurses association in particular.

And, Madam Minister, if I could direct this comment and question to you then in specific. One of the issues and concerns, and it's a serious one . . . And I really appreciate Ms. Smadu being with you because I do recognize the great amount of experience that she does have and I welcome her here today. And I do appreciate the fact that she is on board with the department to try to bring a real professional perspective about the nursing issues to the department.

And so I'm particularly pleased that she's here today to advise you in terms — and maybe you don't need it — but the issue is very important from the RN standpoint. And they say that — and I'll just quote a paragraph of a letter I received dated June 12 from Rivie Seaberg; I was just looking to whose signature was on it — that says this, it says there is a concern that has to do with the fact that, and I quote:

. . . while the LPN is responsible for his/her actions by virtue of being self-regulated, the RN legislation holds the RN accountable for the overall provision, coordination and evaluation of nursing care.

Madam Minister, I believe that this philosophically is a great concern of RNs in terms of interpretation of their responsibility as being pretty comprehensive.

Will you state for the record, for the comfort of registered nurses, that with the passing of this legislation, the proposed LPN legislation, that it would then limit the responsibility of the registered nurses under their legislation to actions and conduct conducted by their members, and the LPNs as a professional autonomous association would be responsible solely and independently for the action of their members.

Would you comment and give comfort on the record of the issue that the registered nurses raise?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — What I can tell the member is that each of the nursing groups or each of the practitioner groups are responsible for their own level of competency, and therefore their associations are responsible for ensuring that people are not practising beyond their level of education and training or beyond their competency levels. That's point number one.

The second point I want to make is that the entire discipline of

nursing has you know three different nursing groups: the LPNs, the RPNs (registered practical nurse), and also the RNs. And one of the things that's become so apparent in the various discussions that have taken place over the last two years is that you can't solve problems per se in legislation. What you can do is to provide the legislative framework and then the three, in this case, three nursing groups need to get together.

And the three nursing groups have gotten together through a mediation process. The three nursing groups are working towards what we will call a nursing articulation document which will clearly outline to employers and to the public, levels of expectation and responsibilities for the three nursing groups.

The three nursing groups will then, once they've agreed to this document, they will then take the document out to the public and the employers and the other people in the workplace, and they're going to implement this document together.

What we're trying to do is get to the whole notion of team nursing. And this is happening in other parts of Canada.

I also note that you said that the Alberta registered nurses association has written you, and I also received a copy of that letter. But I do note that in the province of Alberta, licensed practical nurses do have their own legislation and do practise not under the direction of another medical provider.

Mr. Gantfoer: — Thank you, Madam Minister. They are good comments but they still beg an answer to the question specifically that I asked. And that is specifically, Madam Minister — and I'm not trying to trap you; I'm trying to be very clear — the registered nurses are concerned that their legislation holds them responsible and accountable as RNs for the overall provision and coordination and evaluation — assessment, if you like — of nursing care.

And what they want I think clearly to understand is that if this legislation is passed, that sets up the LPNs as a clearly autonomous professional association, that registered nurses should clearly have your assurance, Madam Minister, that the interpretation of their legislation of this overall responsibility does not overlap to being responsible for conduct or scope of practise that licensed practical nurses would have as an autonomous association.

I think they want you to say clearly and specifically that that would be the case, that they would not be held responsible for anything other than the actions of their members within their professional association.

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Each of the nursing groups is responsible for their own competency or skill sets. Registered nurses will continue to be responsible for the coordination of care. They are not going to be liable for the actions of people who practise beyond their skill sets.

They are responsible for the coordination of care in our various health facilities. And that's not going to change.

Mr. Gantfoer: — Well, Madam Minister, if they're responsible for the coordination of care, does that responsibility then extend to . . . and it moves into why the amendment. The

amendment and part of the vagueness of definition is where it is appropriate under scope of practise for LPNs to operate autonomously, if you like.

And the general consensus taken right out of the SALPN documents and their own association documents, and I don't have the exact wording in front of me, but basically says where the situation and the . . . of a client is stable and predictable — I think are the words — then it's appropriate for LPNs to operate autonomously and without direction. Where that situation changes, where it's unpredictable or unstable, then it is something that we would ask that LPNs would then do collaboratively with registered nurses or doctors or other health care professionals. That's the thrust of our amendment.

In the legislation, as you've written it, that is very vague. And as such, I think it is that issue that's creating a concern by registered nurses if, as you say, they're responsible for the overall coordination, then where is the responsibility on the other side to then work co-operatively. Because it is pretty moot on that point in the legislation as you provided, Madam Minister.

And as I see it, you either got to sort of isolate the registered nurses from responsibility in this regard of overall coordination, because there needs to be some authority that goes with overall coordination. Or you've got to come out with the proper scope that says we've got to have then some definition that brings comfort not only to the registered nurses, but in many licensed practical nurses in the workplace that I've talked to are also concerned about the vagueness of the wording and were quite supportive of the wording that came on the basis of their own scope of practise wording in their association.

So, Madam Minister, that's the dilemma. And I didn't hear the words of comfort that we needed here in terms of where the responsibility of the RNs end and the responsibility picks up under this legislation.

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — I'm getting lots of advice so I'm going to try and synthesize the advice that I've been given.

What I will say is this: I think what you're trying to get me to say is that registered nurses will only be responsible for their own competence and conduct, and LPNs will only be responsible for their own conduct and competence, and registered psychiatric nurses and physicians and so on and so forth.

What I can say is this: that the licensed practical nurses association and the registered nurses are responsible for their competency and their conduct. But there is this other notion of team — that you work together and that the health system is a . . . It's not just a stovepipe. People work together in teams, and there is this thing called the health districts, which is the employer, and then there are people who direct the work within the workplace.

And I have to work — if I was a registered nurse — I have to work with other people in the workplace, as do LPNs, and we need to work together. Now if I, as a licensed practical nurse, go beyond my scope of practice, do something I'm not supposed to be doing, I can be disciplined. And the same goes

for a registered nurse and goes for a physician and so on.

But we need to work together in order for the health system to work. And there are some people who will be in charge of coordinating and integrating the system. And if an individual goes beyond their scope of practice, obviously that individual and her or his regulatory body will deal with that. And that individual could be disciplined for inappropriate conduct moving beyond their education and training.

(1445)

Mr. Gantefer: — Thank you, Madam Minister. And I do want to say in preface towards my next comments that I do recognize this mediation process and the value — and that's going to be valuable and important. Make no mistake. I agree with that.

But we're talking about legislation here that sort of is the underpinning of the whole thing, and so that sort of, I think, does take precedence in a way because that's where you come back to as a foundation, if you like.

And I do appreciate your comments of this notion of team, but the concern is it's sort of a one-way street where the RNs feel because they . . . in their legislation, they feel that the wording in that legislation has them responsible — as I outlined, and I won't go over all the words — but for the overall coordination and these other issues, that that has an onus of responsibility on them that they do not have the comfort in the LPN's legislation makes that a reciprocal team arrangement.

And so they feel while they have the responsibility, there is nothing in the LPN legislation that clearly sets out some framework whereby there is an obligation and responsibility for the LPNs to clearly understand where their scope of practice and competencies are clearly outlined to be independent, where you say . . . you know, where we've said in our amendment where it should be — I have more papers around here than I need — where it says a predictable outcome, you know.

And that issue of course is where we say it's clearly understood by everyone, registered nurses as well — and they should understand this — that where you're in a situation of stable and predictable outcomes, that the LPNs are fully able to function within their scope of practice and competency. I don't think that's an argument.

The problem becomes if you get beyond that, where you end up with an unpredictable situation or an unstable situation, there is nothing in the LPN legislation as you propose it, Madam Minister, that says that the LPN should be part of that notion of team that you just described.

The RNs feel the responsibility in their legislation to be a part of the team, but it's not balanced and reciprocal. And that's the concern.

If you look at the legislation as you propose it, Madam Minister, when you talk about the practice of licensed practical nurse, it means:

. . . to provide services, within the education and training of licensed practical nurses for the purposes of providing

care, promoting health and preventing illness.

It doesn't lay out at all those general terms. And I recognize that LPN association can set bylaws and get very specific — I understand that all. But I think the concern is it's sort of a one-way street. And what our amendment is attempting to do is to provide comfort, not only for the registered nurses, but also an indication of responsibility on the LPN side for something they all acknowledge. Because they're also a part of a team, and when it moves beyond their scope of practice, they should work with other health care providers.

That's what we've tried to do with this amendment, and that's why we're concerned about the way the wording of the legislation is right now. Because I think — this whole thing is important — but I think it leaves an ambiguity that is pretty fundamental, that I think is a real concern, Madam Minister.

So that's why we're asking you, either say look at the registered nurses are not responsible for this coordination and the overall responsibility, or say, let's come up with a better definition here in this legislation which we've proposed that I think is beneficial to both sides, Madam Minister.

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Well I will say to the member, I really do appreciate your effort to try and address the issues that have been raised certainly by the registered nurses' association. What I need you to know is that I have considered the . . . I have considered a number of possibilities in trying to resolve the issue that the registered nurses do have.

Unfortunately, your suggested revision to the legislation raises a number of concerns and questions, and I'll just give you one example. What is a predictable outcome? Now a predictable outcome could be that, you know, I have a stable condition, I go to a health facility, the licensed practical nurse is able to provide me with my medication, and I go home. That could be a predictable outcome.

Another predictable outcome that has been raised by some of my officials is this. I am a patient, I'm in an intensive care unit, I require catheterization, I require a respirator perhaps, and my predictable outcome is that I'm in the process of passing away. Would it be appropriate for a licensed practical nurse, given her or her present education and training, to be providing services in an intensive care unit? And I'm advised it would not be.

So we have . . . what's important here is your education and training. And your education and training determines the kinds of services that you're able to provide to the public. And there are several other examples of some of the difficulties that your amendment . . . I know you have good intentions but your amendment creates a number of difficulties that we just don't think will be helpful as the registered nurses, the licensed practical nurses, and the registered psychiatric nurses go through this mediation process.

And we think that the scope of practice provision should indicate very clearly and we've . . . for all the other professional legislation we haven't even talked about a scope of practice, except for RNs and LPNs. And what we've said in this particular legislation is that we don't believe the scope of practice for a licensed practical nurse should go beyond his or

her level of education and training.

And now we've got the mediation process. They're going to work through that process. They're going to arrive at a consensus on what the articulation document should look like for nursing, and then they're going to implement it together. And we think that's important.

Mr. Gantfoer: — Thank you, Madam Minister. Madam Minister, I don't know if we're going to get anywhere here in terms of agreeing. I suspect we're not. But I would like to address the issues that you raised.

In terms of predictable income, one of the things that I was impressed by in all my discussions with licensed practical nurses, is their acknowledgement of the fact that they recognize, within their scope of practice and competency based on their education and experience, where things get beyond what they can handle.

And so when you're talking about a predictable outcome, they do understand that if a client's situation changes where it gets into a more critical or emergent situation, or unpredictable, that they know that they have to engage people. I think that that's clearly understood. And in all the discussions I've had, there is very clearly that commitment that's there.

The concern in this issue — and you raised a couple of examples. If the first example you made where you go into a facility, that you are stable and predictable, and that changes, I have every confidence that licensed practical nurses on the scene will engage the assistance and help of other appropriate health people in order to deal appropriately.

The acute care situation, or the palliative care situation that you addressed, I would again say to you in that specific instance, if indeed, that that person's predictable outcome is terminal, and indeed, if the competency and the training of the LPN is clearly sufficient to take care of catheterization or respiratory assistance, then I think it's appropriate for them to deal in that environment.

If it is not, or if the situation changed where it goes beyond their competency, then clearly I think they're going to identify this is beyond their scope of practice.

And, Madam Minister, while you say that what we propose creates those anomalies, I think there are opportunities within the association bylaws, or indeed your ministerial bylaws, that could actually further refine and define specific instances where this should be referred, or where this arrangement could work.

So I don't think that our solution creates more difficulties. I think not having it there at all, and the vagueness of the legislation the way it is, creates far more difficulties than what our amendment does. In fact I think it's a pretty clear concern that we should all have. Because I think LPNs should be concerned about this as well. Because they're going back to a situation where there is no definition, where RNs are clearly going to feel that they have the responsibility for the coordination and the LPNs are saying, well we have our own independent scope of practice. Where does this build that team approach to working?

Our proposed amendment I think goes to the very heart of providing some direction and healing between these two distinct groups of people practising under the broad category of nurses.

And, Madam Minister, I think there's all . . . there's a number of other areas where we can address the issues that you've outlined because I don't think they're real issues. I think not having this . . . (inaudible) . . . is going to create us way more difficulties than not having it.

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Well you lay out very clearly a problem. And the problem is that . . . and this is the problem we've had for a couple of years in trying to work our way through this. In terms of your wording, my understanding is that neither SALPN or the SRNA like your wording . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . No, I know.

Well I should tell you that in terms of my wording no one, no one likes my wording 100 per cent as well. In fact, you know, if the SALPN had their way, I don't think that we would even be talking about scope of practice. But this was a compromise.

In terms of the SRNA, they don't like the wording. And this is the difficulty. And we've been at this for a few years.

I don't think it's . . . we've tried to wordsmith this, we've tried for a couple of years. We think that our words are the simplest, the most simplest — licensed practical nurses cannot function beyond their scope of practice in terms of their education and training. That's really clear; you just cannot do anything you're not educated or trained to provide. That's point number one.

Second point, and I think that this is a good point, that the health districts are the employer and they set direction for employees. When you're talking about the registered nurses' legislation, the practice of nursing indicates that nurses are to coordinate the provision of nursing services. But they are not, under this legislation, to direct "under the direction of". And "under the direction of" has been interpreted in many different ways. And that has created great difficulty, and I guess that is part of the issue. When you have words that aren't properly defined, it can create all kinds of conflicts. And I would suggest, with much respect, that predictable outcomes is very problematic in terms of how do you define that.

And maybe you might have a few people . . . maybe you can have the groups agree what a predictable outcome is. That's not necessarily how a court would define a predictable outcome, and there could be some liability issues.

I continue to maintain this opinion based on the advice I've been given by the people in the department that licensed practical . . . or registered nurses will continue to coordinate the practice of nursing, but they will not be responsible if a licensed practical nurse goes beyond her scope of practice and provides a service that she is not educated or trained to provide.

Mr. Gantefoer: — Thank you, Madam Minister. I think your last two sentences were helpful. And I also then would . . . you indicated, and I don't want to try to wordsmith your words, but as I understood them you said that registered nurses will not be responsible if a licensed practical nurse goes beyond their scope

of practice. That clearly would be a responsibility for the licensed practical nurses association to deal with.

I also would take it that a registered nurse is also not responsible even if a licensed practical nurse is working within their scope of practice. And with that I think is the concern. Do they have overall responsibility? It's one thing to say coordination, but is there overall responsibility? Or does their responsibility end at the coordination level?

And so, you know, things can go wrong even if you're operating within your scope of practice. But clearly then if a licensed practical nurse . . . let me put it this way: are you saying that a registered nurse is not responsible if a licensed practical nurse is or is not operating within their scope of practice? That a registered nurse is not responsible for the licensed practical nurse?

(1500)

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Okay. If a licensed practical nurse does not act responsibly within her scope of practice and provides a service in a way that she shouldn't be providing, obviously she would be responsible as . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . or he, yes, thank you. I'm gender-neutral here. He or she would be responsible for that activity, as would the employer because there is an employee-employer relationship.

Mr. Gantefoer: — Thank you, Madam Minister. And I'm not a lawyer but I clearly heard you saying that registered nurses provide . . . have a responsibility to provide the coordination but they are not responsible for how the licensed practical nurse undertakes their own work, either within or without the scope of practice. And I hear that clearly and I think that that's a very important issue.

I still believe, Madam Minister . . . And we could be here all day discussing the relative merits. I think we've identified the very same issues and I think, as I said to you when we discussed this on Friday, that if we asked a hundred legal opinions about this issue, we'd get a hundred and fifty opinions. If we had a hundred lawyers, we'd have a hundred and fifty opinions. So with all due respect to the legal profession, I think they would tend to agree with that. It's the nature of the legal profession. And you agreed with it as well, Madam Minister.

So I think that's true. We've identified an issue that's there. I think we've registered our concerns. I believe that you have given us a reasonable explanation as to where the definition of responsibility lies and I do appreciate that.

Madam Minister, there's another issue that I would like to address by way of getting your comments. When I did some looking at comparing the nature and not the detailed wording of the 1988 registered nurses Act and this proposed legislation, I noticed that in this licensed practical nurse legislation, under the broad category of bylaws, there were of course the obvious association bylaws in both bits of legislation that dealt with internal association matters, but also dealt with issues like the educational requirements and the things that are prerequisite to licensing.

But I did notice as well in addition to it in this licensed practical

nursing legislation, there were a category of bylaws that were not in the registered nurses' association, and that is ministerial bylaws.

And as I read it — and again I didn't look for a bunch of legal opinions in this — but my wording of that . . . my understanding of the wording of that clearly sort of implied that the ministerial bylaws would be set up in such a way as that they would actually supersede association bylaws. Is that correct?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — This particular provision is consistent with other professional legislation that's been introduced in the province of Saskatchewan and elsewhere in the country. This is not a provision that is peculiar to this province — that's point number one.

Point number two, there could be occasions where the professional association might set in place a bylaw that would not be positive for the province.

And the third thing that I understand, we need to have this type of provision in case a bylaw was set up that would not be positive, that would hinder the internal agreement on trade . . . or the agreement on internal trade.

Mr. Gantefer: — Thank you very much, Madam Minister. Madam Minister, I do appreciate, you know, your commitment to this issue. I do appreciate the advice that you're getting from legal counsel and from Ms. Smadu.

I think that I would like to say on the record that a couple of things are very important. First of all that this mediation process be given a real emphasis, and that there is not any attempt or that you allow any attempt by any of the parties to this to sort of wiggle out of a real commitment to making sure that this workplace definition is going to happen in a practical sense.

And the second thing is, is because of the discussions that I have had with registered nurses and LPNs, there's a great deal of confusion and uncertainty in the workplace, that in each of the areas around it . . . And also I think that there is a fair bit of confusion in terms of the district health boards because they're sitting there sort of wondering what their responsibility is in this whole exercise. And there are certainly some workplaces where there's a fair bit of hard feelings and prejudice or whatever you want to call them.

And so, Madam Minister, I'm hoping that once this agreement happens — and I do hope it happens — that there will be an undertaking that there be a province-wide, and not just sort of a notice in some bulletin, but there actually is an effort for people of both associations or all three associations to go out to every single health district in this province to meet with the director of nursing, to meet with the board if that's appropriate, and clearly outline what's the agreement here. Because the people out there in the field are feeling very much confused about where this is all going. And I think we owe it to all of them to clarify this matter as soon as possible. And I would like your commitment that something of that nature would happen.

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Well I think we've had this discussion before. And yes, I know you want it on the record but it's on the

record through the mediation process.

In fact, it's something that I've directed . . . or requested that the three nursing groups work very co-operatively in the next three months to put together a nursing articulation document. And I've asked them to take that document out to all of the health districts.

The other point that I would make, which I think is an important point, is that this confusion has been there for sometime, long before we contemplated introducing the legislation. And there have been real hard feelings — very hard feelings — around this word, "under the direction of." And there has been disputes about the interpretation of those words, "under the direction of" and it really has created problems.

And in fact, I've had many registered nurses say to me, for heaven's sake get "under the direction of" out of the legislation because it just is so problematic because if something happens, they're under my direction, you know what does that mean for me.

And I think that this is trying to clarify, this legislation is trying to clarify that and I'm pleased that you support the notion of removing that particular provision of the old legislation.

So there will be . . . there is a mediation process. The mediation process is being paid for by the Department of Health, the Government of Saskatchewan. The three nursing groups are committed to having these ongoing discussions to develop the articulation document which we believe can be a consensus document. And they're committed to going out and implementing it together, as a team. And we think that this is the beginnings of truly developing the notion of team nursing in the province of Saskatchewan.

There are many examples of it. And I have registered nurses and LPNs tell me that they do work as a team. But there are also many, many, too many examples where that isn't happening in the province. And we think with the mediation process with the document and with the three groups implementing the document, we can get to the notion of co-operation and teamwork.

Mr. Gantefer: — Thank you, Madam Minister. We certainly support those objectives. And as I said, please keep all the parties together and make sure their commitment stays to this whole process and that it comes to a consensus at the end of the day.

The other final question or general direction that I want to address is in the Fyke commission that was announced yesterday. Is there a likelihood, and I know the broad categories that are there and I don't want to get into the commission's mandate specifically other than, is Mr. Fyke going to be addressing the whole issue in general and maybe specific about the changing nature of health care delivery and the role of the nursing profession and categories within that? Do you see that as something that this commission is going to address as well?

And I know I asked you in question period if you'd delay this. I think it's important that we had the clarifications that we did today, for the record. Because I think it's going to provide

comfort to all the parties.

But I also think it's important that there's comment made about where the nursing profession is in terms of the delivery of health care in the province now and where it's going in the long-term future. Is there going to be reference to the Fyke commission?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — That's one of the provisions under the mandate of the Fyke commission. How we deliver health services — they're changing and they're constantly evolving all across Saskatchewan and all across the country, and in fact in various parts of the world. So the Fyke commission obviously will have the ability to comment on this.

And I know that when the Fyke commission meets with the various stakeholder groups, various professional organizations, and the various organizations that represent health workers in the province, I'm sure that they'll have something to say about this. Because there are many, many groups — not just nurses, but other groups — that believe that they can really add to the kinds of services that are provided to the citizens of this province.

Mr. Gantefer: — I'm sorry, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but before I take my place, I would like to thank the minister and her officials for her responses to the issues that we raised in this legislation, and we're prepared now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to proceed.

Clause 1 agreed to.

Clause 2

Mr. Gantefer: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I believe that this is the appropriate time to introduce the amendment, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I would move that:

Clause 2 of the printed Bill be amended by repealing clause (i) and substituting the following:

“(i) ‘practise as a licensed practical nurse’ means to provide professional nursing care and health-care services in accordance with the standards of practice and the guidelines established by the bylaws:

(i) on an independent basis where a person has a defined health condition that has predictable outcome; or

(ii) in partnership with other health-care professionals and providers where a person has a defined health condition that:

(A) does not have a predictable outcome and the complexity of care increases; or

(B) does not have a predictable outcome and an advanced level of knowledge is required to co-ordinate and direct the type and course of care required by a person.”

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I so move, and I believe you have the

original on the table.

The Chair: — I thank the member for Melfort-Tisdale for providing the original copy of the amendment.

The division bells rang from 3:13 p.m. until 3:23 p.m.

Amendment negatived on the following recorded division.

Yeas — 13

Hermanson	Heppner	Krawetz
Draude	Gantefer	Toth
Wall	Bakken	Bjornerud
Weekes	Harpauer	Allchurch
Stewart		

Nays — 28

Romanow	Hagel	Van Mulligen
Lingenfelter	Melenchuk	Atkinson
Goulet	Lautermilch	Thomson
Lorje	Serby	Belanger
Nilson	Crofford	Hillson
Kowalsky	Sonntag	Hamilton
Prebble	Jones	Higgins
Yates	Harper	Axworthy
Junor	Kasperski	Wartman
Addley		

The Chair: — Committee members, this Bill has 55 clauses, which the Chair being unaware of any other amendments, it is broke down into a number of organizations, parts, I'll describe it. For instance, association is clauses 3 through 6 and so on. Is it agreed that we vote that way? By division? Okay.

Clauses 2 to 55 inclusive agreed to.

The committee agreed to report the Bill.

(1530)

THIRD READINGS

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

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

The division bells rang from 3:31 p.m. until 3:40 p.m.

Motion agreed to on the following recorded division.

Yeas — 41

Romanow	Trew	Hagel
Van Mulligen	Lingenfelter	Melenchuk
Atkinson	Goulet	Lautermilch
Thomson	Lorje	Serby
Belanger	Nilson	Crofford
Hillson	Kowalsky	Hamilton
Prebble	Jones	Higgins
Yates	Harper	Axworthy

Junor	Kasperski	Wartman
Addley	Hermanson	Heppner
Krawetz	Draude	Gantefoer
Toth	Wall	Bakken
Bjornerud	Weekes	Harpauer
Allchurch	Stewart	

Nays — nil

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Bill read a third time and passed under its title.

ADJOURNED DEBATES

SECOND READINGS

Bill No. 10

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by Hon. Ms. Atkinson that **Bill No. 10 — The Department of Health Amendment Act, 1999** be now read a second time.

Mr. Gantefoer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to comment briefly on Bill No. 10, an amendment of The Department of Health Act.

Mr. Speaker, this Bill is largely housekeeping in nature and further clarifies the reciprocal nature of funding transfers for health care procedures between provinces in the country. And in review of this legislation in discussion, we see that this is merely a housekeeping Bill and it will further clarify funding transfers between jurisdictions within the country. And we have no difficulty with that and would support it moving 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. 14

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Serby that **Bill No. 14 — The Film Employment Tax Credit Amendment Act, 2000** be now read a second time.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, we've had a number of our members have had an opportunity to talk to this Bill. And I guess the only comments that I might have is that because of the high taxation in this province we have to do things like give credits to the areas like the film industry. Because of the high taxation, they probably wouldn't even look at this province.

Mr. Minister, or Mr. Speaker, we saw in this budget this time where income taxes were lowered to a small degree, and then in the Finance minister's second breath he turned around and expanded the PST (provincial sales tax) to just totally do away with any benefit that the income tax break would have had, and in fact even expanded it to the degree that it turns into nothing but a cash cow for this government.

Mr. Speaker, we've had a number of occasions to speak on this Bill, and at this time we would like to pass this on 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. 22

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Serby that **Bill No. 22 — The Local Improvements Amendment Act, 2000** be now read a second time.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, again we've had a number of occasions to speak to this Bill. And from my understanding and the people that we've checked with on this Bill, they seem to have no big problem with it.

I think it's actually, as the minister's own words said, it's clarifying the appeal system, actually improving the appeal rights of landlords. And I think that's good to see — making appeals boards more accountable — and I think that will be received well out there and actually bringing some consistency to the whole process, Mr. Speaker.

So with that, I would also like to pass this Bill off to committee.

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

(1545)

Bill No. 23

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Serby that **Bill No. 23 — The Planning and Development Amendment Act, 2000** be now read a second time.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And my understanding on this Bill, Mr. Speaker, The Planning and Development Amendment Act, 2000, is mostly of the housekeeping nature. And at this point too, we will have some questions in committee but we would pass it on 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. 19

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Nilson that **Bill No. 19 — The Saskatchewan Telecommunications Amendment Act, 2000** be now read a second time.

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, Mr. Speaker, as we well know, government passes all sorts of legislation, some of it ponderous and some of it of not great weight.

Bill No. 19 has six short sections in it. And there are two sections that I would like to comment on briefly, one is 43.1 and one is 44.1 to 45.

And I think if we just have bit of silence we'll hear a breath of relief across the province because it says it is repealed. And I think it's one thing this government needs to do a whole lot more of — is repeal a lot of the legislation that they have that is little more than red tape. And I suggest we move this one on 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. 20

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Nilson that **Bill No. 20 — The Saskatchewan Telecommunications Holding Corporation Amendment Act, 2000** be now read a second time.

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This Bill, I think, comes as a . . . also creates a breath of fresh air for the people of this particular province.

It recognizes the situation that SaskTel is underneath and has to work in a bit more competitive environment than it's used to. And as I said earlier on, it comes as a breath of fresh air that now in socialist Saskatchewan we do not have to have government telephones and government extension lines — we can actually buy our own.

And I think to the extent that this particular Bill, Bill No. 20, does that I would be prepared to let it go on 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. 35

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Nilson that **Bill No. 35 — The Automobile Accident Insurance Amendment Act, 2000 (No. 2)** be now read a second time.

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This Bill, Mr. Speaker, has a few more things in it than some of the other ones did, and we may want to comment on it in a bit more detail.

One of the things this particular Bill does is that vehicles that have been stolen, it gives SGI (Saskatchewan Government Insurance) the power, Mr. Speaker, to go after those people who have stolen it for recovery of damages. And I think that's a good move that those people who perpetrate some of the crimes in our country are forced to pay for some of the damages they do.

There's also an interesting line in this one, Mr. Speaker, that it says of all the things that could be stolen from your vehicle, lo and behold, radar detectors are not to be covered, Mr. Speaker. Interesting little line, barely takes up a line. But I think it probably is the first step this government is taking in trying to take away radar detectors from the people of this particular province and putting them under the regime that they enjoy so much to do.

It's another socialist attack on private property, and I guess if

they want to start by radar detectors, they are entitled to start where they wish.

But I do think that this particular Bill, Bill No. 35, comes very short, Mr. Speaker, in that it does not address PIPP (personal injury protection plan) or no fault. There are some of the things that need to be taken care of there are not addressed in this one at all.

Government on that particular issue has become a very confused government, Mr. Speaker. First of all they created a committee, and when they had that committee created, those particular individuals looked at it and said, we can't operate underneath this. And a number of key people from that particular committee chose to resign.

It was unfortunate that government members, instead of realizing their weakness, said that we had been saying all kinds of mean and ugly things about those individuals. We hadn't. They just, Mr. Speaker, put them in an untenable situation. And those individuals realized that they couldn't do the work that they had decided to do, would have liked to do, within that.

They've recently revamped that committee again and have some of the same weaknesses in there they had in the first one. And that is that for whatever reason the legal community has chosen not to be part of it at all. And I think that's very unfortunate because in all of SGI's work, the legal community plays a very vital part in that, and they've just decided to let them out on that.

I think they should have met with that community and said what will it take to get you some involvement so that this committee has more credibility?

Also, Mr. Speaker, it seems very strange that when you're going to create a committee that's going to look at the things that need to be done with no fault . . . and there was a five-year commitment that this government made to do a review and they are doing that review. But with the number of people that have come forward with concerns about no-fault insurance, the least that this government could have done was to appoint one or two people onto that committee, Mr. Speaker, one or two people onto that committee to make sure that the hearings are done in such a way that that whole community feels they have some sense of ownership and responsibility in that committee.

It would also have ensured, Mr. Speaker, that the victims of no-fault would not have had the apprehension that somewhere there were meetings taking place behind closed doors, decisions that were being made when the report was written that they would have no input on. And it's very unfortunate that this government chose, when they're looking at amending the insurance Act, that they didn't look at those sorts of things. They should have.

Also unfortunate, Mr. Speaker, is that no one from this government has attended any of the meetings to date, I believe, on either side of the issue — either the meetings that were put on by victims of no fault or this government's own committee. And I think it would have been very good had they been able to be there, or if they would make that commitment to be at some of the meetings that are still taking place to hear first-hand from

the victims some of the concerns that are out there.

And the victims, when they've been asked to go ahead and make recommendations — and I attended some of those meetings that SGI themselves have put on and the victims were given some opportunity to state some of the concerns — that they could have heard from the mouths of those victims themselves some of the pain and the suffering they've endured, and actually some of the physical and verbal abuse by this government's insurance system. And I think it would have cast a substantially different light on the legislation that they're going to bring in, if they will be bringing in any, to correct the shortcomings of that particular system.

We've had situations where diagnosis of individuals has been very inadequate. Treatment on that inadequate diagnosis has taken place. Later on, when proper diagnosis was made, it was found that some of the treatment that had been originally authorized was treatment that was actually dangerous to those individuals.

Presently, we've had SGI already say that there may be not enough money available to some of those people who, in serious accidents, are going to be suffering lifelong, especially some of our younger people involved in accidents, suffering lifelong on that, and that the money that SGI allows is capped and just isn't going to be enough to meet the needs of those individuals to live a reasonable life in our society.

The other one, which is a rather strange one, that in SGI and looking over their situations, they're making a recommendation that seniors have been getting too much when they're hurt in accidents. And it's rather unfortunate that in looking for ways to go ahead and create a better system, that the first group they would go after and say we have to cut back the benefits that seniors are going to get. I would have liked to have seen some evidence on that, Mr. Speaker.

To date, as my years as MLA, I've not heard one concern, one complaint of anyone saying here's a senior involved in an accident, here's the settlement they got, and they really ripped off the system. I haven't heard that once — it's hasn't even been hinted at — and yet SGI seems to have felt that that's the case. And I think that's unfortunate, and personally, Mr. Speaker, I'll want to see some evidence on that before I come onside or anywhere near close to onside with SGI and their ideas on that.

Having said that and had . . . put those particular comments and concerns on the record, Mr. Speaker, I'm prepared to let Bill No. 35, The Automobile Accident Insurance Amendment Act, 2000 move onto committee.

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

Bill No. 36

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Nilson that **Bill No. 36 — The Motor Carrier Amendment Act, 2000** be now read a second time.

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Bill No. 36 — an

interesting Bill. And I think it has some validity to it because what this one does is go a little contrary to where this government generally goes. Because usually they feel they know better than anyone else in the country and they have to do their own unique, quirky little things. That creates a lot of difficulty for business and industry across the country to suddenly say, here's Saskatchewan, and they're on a totally different page than anyone else.

What Bill No. 36, The Motor Carrier Amendment Act does, Mr. Speaker, is it puts into place a safety program for commercial trucks and bus companies, and all carriers will then have to obtain a National Safety Code certificate in order to operate.

Now I think the positive side of this particular piece of legislation, Mr. Speaker, is that it means that all carriers across our country of Canada should be under the same set of rules. Now to the extent that those particular rules are acceptable to the industry in Saskatchewan, I think that's a very good idea so that when motor carriers move from province to province, and that's what they're in the business of doing, they don't find that rules suddenly change as they cross a particular border, as I said earlier on. This is a unique position from an NDP government that usually feels they see the light on every particular issue.

The other thing that needs to be said here, and because this is a safety issue this one's all about, is if this government was really serious about safety, they would have this piece of legislation they do. But they could even go a whole lot further, Mr. Speaker. Because what happens when these motor vehicles hauling material across our province have to drive on our particular roads.

And as was presented in question period earlier on, Mr. Speaker, when some of these vehicles pick up pieces of highway and throw them at passing vehicles — and you saw the piece that was presented here in the House earlier on this afternoon, when that sort of thing happens.

Then we have another safety problem, and that's the roads of this particular province. And I think that's the one place where this particular government refuses to take any responsibility, and that's unfortunate, because this Bill deals with safety, and safety is very important to all of us.

But it's fine to legislate safety for truckers and then say, now your 50- or 60-foot truck is a safe truck. And now we're going to put it onto thousands of miles of Saskatchewan roads that are totally unsafe — roads that are so unsafe, Mr. Speaker, that in a number of places school bus drivers do not travel on provincial highways in order to avoid dangerous areas and dangerous situations.

I think that says a whole lot, Mr. Speaker, because school buses basically drive on dirt roads, gravel roads. They don't drive on the best roads in the country for the most part, with the exception of a few that might be on the Trans-Canada or Highway No. 16.

So when we're dealing with a safety issue, it becomes important, Mr. Speaker, that this government realize that the key thing are the thousands of miles of roads that these trucks, these vehicles, these commercial vehicles have to travel on.

And a true statement of a concern for safety, Mr. Speaker, would have addressed that. And to date this government has done nothing.

Having said that, Mr. Speaker, I'm prepared to let this Bill move on 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. 54

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Nilson that **Bill No. 54 — The Vehicle Administration Amendment Act, 2000 (No. 2)** be now read a second time.

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Bill No. 54, Vehicle Administration Act, has a couple of key things in it that I think are worthwhile commenting on. It brings into place mandatory photo ID (identification) by the year 2003.

And I think that particular item has a couple of positives that come along with it that we probably need to address. And that is if we're going to deal with some of the other issues that have been talked about in this House and in our particular society in Saskatchewan, and that is dealing with access to bars and tobacco and those sorts of things.

(1600)

The problem of proper identification is always one that comes up. How do you identify the people, what pieces of ID can be easily counterfeited, and those sorts of things.

This particular piece of legislation, as I said, brings into play the mandatory photo ID, and to that extent I think it's going to be a benefit that goes further than just the vehicle itself, especially if it makes it virtually impossible to copy, Mr. Speaker.

But having said that, there's a few other things that it does. It sets in place, Mr. Speaker, a mandatory minimum suspension for those convicted of drunk driving for the first time, zero tolerance for alcohol consumption for new drivers, and other restrictions for new drivers.

I think it's a point that needs to be made, Mr. Speaker, that Saskatchewan, unfortunately — and there's a few unfortunate things that we hold records on, Mr. Speaker — is that we have the distinction of having one of the worst records when it comes to impaired driving.

And I know that every member of the House would like to combat that as much as possible, and to the extent, Mr. Speaker, that the photo ID may limit some of that and some of the restrictions that are put in — as I said, the mandatory minimum suspensions and some of those concepts — I think and I hope, Mr. Speaker, will make our highways a safer place to be.

It's just unfortunate that it takes this government nine years to dream up some of these ideas when the concept's been around a long time. It would have been good and probably saved many lives had this government taken its responsibility earlier on in

its mandate and brought some of these things into being.

Having said that, Mr. Speaker, I'm prepared to let Bill No. 54 move on to committee.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Bill No. 78

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Nilson that **Bill No. 78 — The Highway Traffic Amendment Act, 2000 (No. 2)** be now read a second time.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, if this Bill, this exact Bill had have been introduced today, my first inclination would be look at The Highway Traffic Amendment Act and say I'll bet you this Bill is dealing with turning every highway in the province of Saskatchewan back to gravel.

But it isn't that way, Mr. Speaker, and we've had ample time to talk about this Bill, so I can rest my suspicions and my concerns about this Bill.

And we do though have a number of questions we'd like to address in committee, Mr. Speaker. So at this time I would let this Bill move to committee.

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

COMMITTEE OF FINANCE

General Revenue Fund Labour Vote 20

The Deputy Chair: — I'd like to invite the Minister of Labour to introduce her officials.

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Sandra Morgan is with me today, deputy minister of Labour; Cheryl Hanson, assistant deputy minister of Labour; Dr. Fayek Kelada, director, occupational health and safety services, occupational health and safety branch; Dawn McKibben, director, human resources and administration; John Boyd, director of policy and planning; Eric Greene, assistant director of labour services division; Jan Whitridge, manager of legal analysis, policy and planning; Doug Forseth, senior labour relations officer, labour relations and mediation division; and Peter Federko, chief executive office of Workers' Compensation Board; along with Gail Krueger, WCB (Workers' Compensation Board) VP (Vice-President) of finance.

Subvote (LA01)

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Mr. Chair, and I'd like to welcome the minister and her officials today. I have a number of

questions in a number of areas. I'd like to start out with the announcement recently that the government made concerning the Queen Elizabeth power station upgrading. And I would just like to ask the minister: is this a totally union job?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Mr. Chair, I'm sure that that information could be gotten from the member but that's a SaskPower project and they do their own tendering. I wouldn't know.

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Madam Minister. Could you give me and the people of Saskatchewan an explanation how the Labour Relations Board operates?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — The Labour Relations Board is a quasi-judicial body that's charged with the responsibility, Mr. Chair, of administering the Acts under its responsibility.

And to do that there's a board composed 50 per cent of representatives of employer bodies and 50 per cent of employee bodies. And the representatives that are appointed are nominated from those communities.

So I don't actually pick any of the names. Those names come forward from those communities, and they become part of the body that adjudicates on the various legislation that that body's responsible for.

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Madam Minister. The annual report 1998-99 shows there are 23 members on the board including the NDP member from Saskatoon Meewasin.

My question is, is it necessary to have that many members, and what per cent of members attend various board functions, and their duties at the time?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Basically people are assigned, I think, to the various cases depending on some of their expertise, but there's balance in the representation. And not all members sit on all matters. It depends on the availability of the board members. It's not a full-time job. And so it depends on their availability in getting the balance of people to adjudicate the various issues.

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'd like to ask the Minister — so it's conceivable that the Chair, the Vice-Chair, and one board member could sit?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — No. It has to be three — an employee rep, an employer rep, and Chair or Vice-Chair.

Mr. Weekes: — Now I've had many inquiries and complaints about the makeup of the board. It's supposed to be 50 per cent employer, 50 per cent employee. And I'd like to ask the minister, is she planning possibly a judicial inquiry or a investigation into how the board's made up to . . . if not to correct this imbalance, at least make the people of Saskatchewan confident of the makeup of the board?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Well, Mr. Chair, I'm sorry to laugh about this. But the fact of the matter is, is how can an imbalance exist when the employer reps are chosen by the employer groups, when the worker reps are chosen by the worker groups,

when there has to be an even number of representatives from both of those groups. I just have a hard time understanding how you can, with that kind of process.

Now, when I met with PIMA (Prairie Implement Manufacturers Association) they were raising concerns with the Labour Relations Board. And when they were questioned as to their representation on that board, Mr. Schneider basically indicated that they hadn't thought it was that important and hadn't recommended anybody for appointment.

So you can't have it both ways. If it's important, you have to appoint someone to participate. If it's not important, then I guess you live with the decisions of the people that are there who thought it was important to appoint someone.

But if you're interested, I can read to you who the labour representatives are and who the business representatives are on that board. But I just reaffirm that there has to be balance in any panel and that the representatives themselves are chosen by those respective bodies. This is not a matter of the minister choosing.

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Madam Minister. You announced that there may have to be a second Vice-Chair appointed. Has that Vice-Chair been appointed? And what will that person's salary be?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — No, there has been no appointment yet because there would be no authority for there to be an appointment until the Act would be proclaimed.

Mr. Weekes: — What will the salary be of the second vice-chair.

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Yes, that would have to be set based on a classification process where the job is looked at in regard of other jobs of similar responsibility. And a competition would be held before that position would be filled.

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Madam Minister. Mr. Chair, it is a position of a number of union leaders in Saskatchewan that certification without a secret ballot is reasonable because it prevents coercion . . . coercion by the employer. Does this not at the same time invite and encourage coercion by employees of union pushers and organizers?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Well I guess the best way to respond to that is the current method of voting by virtue of signing a card has been in place since 1944. And we have had successive NDP, Liberal and Conservative governments that have all decided to leave that provision in place.

And if anyone is found to be exerting inappropriate pressure, that card is considered to be null and void. And that's a matter that's adjudicated by the Labour Relations Board as well.

Mr. Weekes: — Is that the only mechanism? Is there any other mechanism that's in place to ensure that coercion and intimidation by union organizers can be checked?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — In the same way that it would be impossible to determine coercion by the employer unless

someone documented that, in the same way it would be impossible to determine coercion on the union side of the equation unless someone documented that. So whether it's the employer you're talking about or whether the union that you're talking about, someone has to bring that complaint forward.

So if someone does, certainly the Labour Relations Board would look at it.

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Madam Minister. Mr. Chair, the only problem is that the employer doesn't have any access to their employee to discuss anything concerning a unionization effort. So I'm not sure why you're comparing one to the other when the union has basically unlimited access to the employees, and so there's a great opportunity for coercion and intimidation.

Would not a secret ballot be the best way to ensure that coercion by anyone would be ineffective?

(1615)

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — I'll just reaffirm that the signing of a card . . . I mean in elections we have secret ballots; I think it goes a step further in the case of a union because they actually sign what constitutes their ballot. So in my view, that's very much an affirmation on behalf of the person who has signed it.

Now the person has the ability to withdraw their support from that card they signed. If they felt they signed it under duress, they can subsequently indicate to the board that they withdrew their support for it. As well if people felt they signed under duress, they certainly have the opportunity as well to apply for a decertification.

But I will mention that the Labour Relations Board does consider these matters. And even though people would like to believe there is a lot of coercion, the fact of the matter is this is usually found to be unfounded.

Mr. Weekes: — It's interesting, Madam Minister, that you bring up the comparison of how we exercise our democratic rights in this province and in this country. By signing a card, it's open to everyone to know that they signed it or they did not sign it. The only effective method to get around the coercion is to have a secret ballot regardless if they signed a card. What have you got against having a secret ballot, at the end of the day, to form a union?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Yes. I'm sorry to take a minute on that. I just wanted to verify that the union is obligated to keep it confidential — who signed which cards. It's not a matter where they make a list or something and give it to anybody. They don't do that. Each card is confidential.

Mr. Weekes: — Where's the checks and balances of keeping the union to their word? What's to stop the union from members or other people to know who signed cards? What's to stop the union organizers from intimidating workers? There's a number of cases that I've been presented with of exactly that going on.

Wouldn't, at the end of the day, a secret ballot be the only effective way to have a fair and open process?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Well, I would just say to the member opposite that I like to believe that we have respect, both for our business leaders and for our union leaders. And the implication here that any person who decides to join the union, it's through intimidation, I think is a rather unfortunate view of the world.

And I would have to say that if there is any evidence — any — of any kind of intimidation, that card becomes null and void. And certainly anybody can bring forward any evidence to support their view that intimidation has occurred — either from the employer side or from the union side.

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Madam Minister. Mr. Chair, if you have a Labour Relations Board that is pro-union and you have everything in favour of the union organizers and you have the employers not allowed to discuss unionization with the employees, it's totally one-sided. It's totally one-sided in favour of the union organizers. It's not a matter of accusing and necessarily thinking that all union organizers are intimidating the workers, it's just that the process is set up to be totally biased in favour of the union organizers and totally against the employers.

And in this country where we have democracy, where a number of other provinces allow secret ballots, wouldn't it be the best process, the fairest and the most democratic process, to allow a secret ballot, at the end of the day.

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Yes. I will have to reiterate for the member that it is a secret ballot. They put their name on it; there is only the person who they gave it to that knows that they signed it.

And in fact, in jurisdictions where they have the thing that you're asking for, this vote, the fact of the matter is the number of certifications out of the number of applications is approximately the same and has been for many years.

And the fact of the matter is, again, I go back to saying that since 1944 we've had this process and it's worked relatively well because what you're trying to do is balance some interests here. And the fact of the matter is, the person who pays your paycheque always has a large balance of power in any kind of a discussion because that's how you live.

And so you have to try to balance that with the reasonable opportunity for people to be able to exert their democratic rights within the workplace, if they wish to do that, because of course they may have an employer who's very receptive to their input or they may not. That's a condition that differs.

But I would have to ask the member opposite just to clarify for me whether he believes that all the business reps appointed to this board are labour-leaning because they are 50 per cent of every adjudication.

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Madam Minister, Mr. Chair. You keep coming back to comparing to our democratic process, but doing elections — first, the person has a secret ballot; and second, the parties involved have scrutineers to make sure the process is fair. What you've described is a process there was only one scrutineer — and that's the side of the union — and the people counting the ballots are the union people.

Where's the checks and balances to ensure that the other side is satisfied that there's fairness in this process?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Yes, the fact of the matter is the people who count the ballots are the Labour Relations Board — 50 per cent employers, 50 per cent employee representatives. That is the process by which those ballots are counted.

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Madam Minister, Mr. Chair. The only problem is that I don't think there's very many people in this province believe the Labour Relations Board is fair. I have had discussions with the former chairman of the Labour Relations Board and you rightfully say, back beginning in 1944 to the present, we have this system and so on and so forth.

And it is true that there was a fair Labour Relations Board in recent history — the Blakeney government, the Devine government, even the early years of your government; but recently it has become quite clear that it is not a fair Labour Relations Board, that the chairman has a bias towards unions. And when you have that circumstance set up, where's the checks and balances in the system to ensure that the workers' rights are protected — not only the workers' rights but also the employer's side of this situation?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Well I guess I'll respond in two ways. One is I don't know why you continue to insist that people appointed by the business community are pro-labour. I mean I guess you can take that up with the people who appointed them. I didn't appoint them. I merely rubber-stamped them.

The other comment I guess I might make is that several members of the business bar, the lawyers who typically represent business, were asked about whether Gwen Gray was a suitable person, and they were very supportive of her appointment.

So I guess you can have your opinion about that. But I'll tell you one thing that I know in the short time I've been Labour minister, and that's that if the union loses they complain to me. If the business loses, they complain to me. Nobody ever thinks it's fair if they're the one who didn't win.

But on balance, if you look at the statistics, it's pretty even-steven in terms of win and lose.

Mr. Weekes: — Has your government ever considered doing what I believe 50 per cent of the other provinces in this province have done, and allowed a secret ballot? What in particular about a secret ballot are you against?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — The system that we have works quite well. And the fact of the matter is every change you make to every labour law, Mr. Chair, becomes very controversial. So if we have something that's working, our idea is that we should just continue to do what we've always done that's always worked pretty well.

And like I say, the provinces that do the vote, it may satisfy some kind of view of democracy. But the card, the signed card confidential, has always been considered the vote. And we don't see any difference in the certification rates that suggested a different process should be required.

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Madam Minister, and Mr. Chair. The only . . . well to go back again, the only problem is that a signed card is basically public knowledge, or it can be public knowledge, where a ballot in a secret ballot during an election is totally secret and there is no room for any mistakes, errors, or letting that view out.

I'd like to go on to another area. There is an Internet link between the Saskatchewan NDP web site and the United Steelworkers of America's web site. Would the minister care to explain the reason for this link?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Well if there is a link, I didn't do it. Because I'm totally unaware of it. If the member would like to and thinks this is an important matter to pursue, certainly he can provide me with that information and I can try to find out whether this is a good thing or a bad thing and what in fact it is. But I am not aware of any such link.

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Madam Minister.

The Deputy Chair: — Order, order. Randy, sorry, but . . . Order, please. I'm afraid that I'm just having some difficulty . . . I don't want to curtail the member's questioning, but this doesn't . . . this question doesn't appear to relate to a government matter.

And maybe you could enlighten me if you think that it does. But I'm just having difficulty understanding how the question relates to the Department of Labour or to any aspect of provincial government affairs.

But please, if you think it does, I'd invite the member for Redberry Lake to explain how it does and proceed.

Mr. Weekes: — Be glad to, Mr. Chair. The point I'm getting at is the NDP Party has received \$300,000 in donations from unions. I believe it's \$30,000 from construction unions. The minister herself has received \$6,500 from unions.

And the question is, about the link, is concerning donations from the steelworkers. And I'd just like to ask the question concerning the link. Is it so you can communicate directly with the steelworkers' head office in Pittsburgh to obtain instructions? And has the government ever received donations from the steelworkers?

And the reason why I'm asking this question is because your relationship with unions affect your ability to govern fairly and to bring in fair labour laws. And this brings the whole situation back to what kind of laws we have here and what kind of laws that your government is bringing in.

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Now, Mr. Chair, according to this logic, anybody with whom we associate who might actually vote for us is suspect because they might actually donate money to us. Like I thought that was the reason why people voted for you was because they supported you, and I'm not really sure what the member's point is.

I suppose we could go to their party's web site and hunt out all the links and look at their donations from Conrad Black. But there's really no point in going there because the people that

support you will support you, the people that support us will support us.

But our responsibility, when in government, is to do the best we can for all the people of Saskatchewan in a balanced way. And I have never been confused about my public obligation in that regard.

The Deputy Chair: — Order. I just want to say that I really think this line of questioning is . . . I really do not want to place unreasonable limits on the scope of debate here, but I fail to see how this line of questioning is related in any way to a government matter, and I'm going to rule it out of order.

This relates to . . . this may relate to caucus matters or party matters, but it is unrelated to government matters and it's not related to the Department of Labour. And I'd just like to invite the member for Redberry Lake to proceed with another question, and to pursue this other matter in another context.

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. The *Regina Manifesto* of 1933 outlined the government's mandate as, and I quote:

In addition, workers must be guaranteed the undisputed right to freedom of association, and should be encouraged and assisted by the state to organize themselves in trade unions.

Is this still the government's position?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — I don't know of any modern society or economy that outlaws freedom of association for either the purposes of organizing unions or for expressing your public opinion on any matter of interest to the public. Although I suspect in Ontario today, they're wishing they had such a law against the homeless. But the fact of the matter is, in this society, we are . . . we have freedom of association. It's one of the basic principles of a democratic society.

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Madam Minister. If it's about guaranteeing the workers' rights to freedom of association — what does assist mean?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — The member will have to repeat the entire quote, Mr. Chair, because I'm not able, I really don't have the *Regina Manifesto* memorized and I'm going to have to . . .

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Madam Minister. Mr. Chair, I'd like to read it again:

In addition workers must be guaranteed the undisputed right to freedom of association, and should be encouraged and assisted by the State to organize themselves in trade unions.

(1630)

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — What I might do is give the member a bit of the history of how this all developed, both in the United States and in Canada. There were points in the history of the relationship between employers and workers where people started taking up arms to try to enforce their right for a say in

their working conditions, their safety — the things that affected them.

Both in the United States, under right-wing governments, and in Canada, they decided that rather than people having to take up arms, it would be preferable to have democratic processes put in place so people who wish to exercise those rights would not have to take up arms.

And that is the source of these laws in both the US (United States) and Canada.

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Madam Minister. Mr. Chair, well it just goes back to the right to choose. And how can any reasonable person on one hand, defend one's right to choose to belong to a union, and on the other hand, deny another's right not to choose? That's what I'm getting at.

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — I guess it's no different than when we make amendments to the electoral Act or when we do those kind of things in the legislature that try to strengthen the democratic process.

The fact of the matter is all the labour relations legislation that exists in both the US and Canada, probably in all the G-7 countries, have been put there to ease industrial relations, to ensure workplace democracy, and to ensure the support of democratic processes in a more broadly democratic society. And aside from that, I really don't know what the member is getting at.

Mr. Weekes: — I'd like to go back to Doepker Industries. Reports of coercion were reported to the Labour Relations Board by Doepker's employees. Why did the Labour Relations Board dismiss these out of hand? And are reports of coercion by unions on union and workers typically dismissed out of hand by the Labour Relations Board?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Again, I ask you to indicate which of the business community's appointees was . . . all of a sudden developed a strongly pro-labour bent in the investigation of those. Because I'm sure that each instance that was put forward was looked at, was investigated, and the Labour Relations Board, according to my understanding of that ruling, was very satisfied that there wasn't a problem there.

But you know, I would urge the member . . . There's always a moment of acrimony during any kind of labour relations negotiations, bargaining, union formation. And instead I'd like to point the member's attention toward this joint press release from Doepker Industries and the steelworkers that says that the United Steelworkers of America and Doepker Industries believe that they can embark upon a fruitful, good faith, collective bargaining process.

Doepker wants to be able to carry on its business in the interests of its customers, owners, and employees. The union wants to negotiate a fair and reasonable collective agreement for employees that will hopefully result in a continuing commitment of employees to the enterprise. Their mutual objective is to make Doepker Industries a world-class manufacturer of world-class products produced by world-class employees.

And I just urge the member to understand that, during this kind of a dispute, it always gets rancorous. But in fact the parties have come together now, with the help of the Labour Relations Board I might add, and are starting to get on a new footing in their new relationship.

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Madam Minister. I've asked a number of questions concerning decertification and certification in the past, and I've received some information but not all of it. But I'd like to ask a few more.

Of the requests to decertify, how many of them have been requested more than once in the past year?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — No. The board would have those kind of data, but I don't do random data analysis of their ruling, so I wouldn't know that and certainly the member can request that directly from them. And anything that falls outside of confidentiality requirements for employers or employees would certainly be available.

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Madam Minister. Mr. Chair, does the Labour Relations Board have the power to order business to keep employees on the payroll even if there is no work, based on the pretense of technological change taking away jobs?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Yes. The tech provisions that are in place have been in place for quite a long time. And I think there's only been, we think, two or three applications involving tech change. So this has had a fairly limited application.

Mr. Weekes: — And out of the applications, how many were granted? How many employees has it affected?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Again this is data of the Labour Relations Board. And unless someone makes a specific inquiry of me, I don't make an inquiry of them for that purpose. And certainly you're able to inquire all of that information from them directly without worrying that it has been filtered through my lens on the way through.

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Madam Minister. Well this is a very serious development, and a number of businesses have many concerns over it. And I just would like to know, does the minister know that this practice by the Labour Relations Board is one of the many reasons that businesses are afraid to set up businesses in the province?

And when businesses look at the climate, they look at menacing taxes, regulation, what kind of infrastructure. But labour laws and regulations are high on their list, and this is one that has definitely been a hindrance to development in this province.

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Well you know, I guess I'd certainly take that seriously. One of my previous lives I was an economic development officer, and I was also at one point treasurer of the chamber of commerce in La Ronge, so I mean I care very much about these things.

Just recently an Alberta garment manufacturer set up shop in Saskatoon. And quoting Mr. Bussoli, he said:

One of the benefits here is that the plant is unionized, so

we qualify for union contracts. (I'm sure he means uniforms and whatnot, which is a real benefit) Taxes are competitive and we looked at that as well.

And then when I look a little further, I see that, after two terms of government that I suspect many of you voted for and gave donations to, there was 458,000 working in Saskatchewan. After two terms of our government, there's 496,100 people working in Saskatchewan.

If you want to give you the net in-migration and out-migration figures, I can do that.

But the fact of the matter is that, year over year from last year, there's 18,000 new jobs in Saskatchewan. We have virtually the lowest unemployment rate in Canada, and Regina has the lowest unemployment rate in Canada. And I don't know what your argument is.

Mr. Weekes: — Well, my argument is that we would have a greater interest in . . . Mr. Chairman, the point would be that we'd have a greater interest investing in this province if we didn't have draconian rules and regulations like that.

I'd like to go back to the certification applications. I am told and I understand that the certification applications are handled quickly and decertification applications are put on the back burner, maybe delayed by many months. Is there a maximum time limit for decisions by the Labour Relations Board?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Now any information that we have would say that this isn't true. And if you have other information certainly I think . . . You know the Labour Relations Board will meet with people to discuss concerns, and if you think there is real merit to that question . . . Like I say, we checked into it briefly and were told that that's not the case. But certainly if you wanted to meet with them directly about that, I'm sure they would be willing to do that.

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. A concerned citizen requested the transcripts of Doepker Industries' Labour Relations Board hearings and the cost of obtaining this transcript was over \$3,000.

I'd like to ask the minister why is this information not available to all the people of Saskatchewan free of charge? And will it be available on the Internet?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Any court transcript there's a charge, and of course there's many people who might spend a lot of time asking government for a whole range of information — including courts, including labour relations boards, including whatever bodies exist in the public interest — and so there is a cost to that.

And I know that you very much believe in keeping costs down, and one of the ways that costs are kept down is so that when people ask for things that aren't necessarily essential to the general public good, that there's a cost associated with receiving that information.

Now your suggestion about whether they put those up on a web site — I don't know whether they've considered that, but it's

certainly something one could ask them.

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Well I'd like the minister to make this information available to me and I'd gladly pass it on to the individual. The Labour Relations Board file is no. 016-00 April 11, 2000.

Madam Minister, I'd like to go on to workmen's compensation, and I'd like to quote information from a letter I received. It's concerning the November 29, 1999 request for proposals for interior design services for the Saskatchewan Workers' Compensation Board. And the letter goes on to say:

The Workers' Compensation Board of Saskatchewan recently had a request for proposals regarding interior design services for their Regina offices.

And the person writes:

I know of four Regina firms that responded, one firm from Calgary . . . one from Winnipeg. After weeks of analysis, the . . . (workmen's compensation board) selected the Calgary firm. When asked the reasons for the selection, the designers were told "the Calgary firm did not have the lowest fees, but that the WCB wanted new ideas." (The workmen's compensation board) . . . has hired only one of the Regina firms in recent history, the last 10 years, so presumably the other 3 Regina firms could have offered those "new ideas". Furthermore, even if (workmen's compensation board) . . . did not feel the Regina firms were qualified we question the criteria for proposal (invites) . . . since not all Regina interior design firms were invited nor were other Saskatchewan firms outside of Regina invited to submit proposals.

And the letter also goes on to say:

The (workmen's compensation board) . . . has responded to (the Interior Designers Association of Saskatchewan) . . . and has offered the unsuccessful firms an opportunity to attend a debriefing session to discuss the criteria evaluated and to explain why the proposals were unsuccessful. (The workmen's compensation board) . . . and the Minister's office have made it clear that the award to the Calgary firm will not be rescinded nor will the process be reopened as a fair competition. Our association is outraged (at the) . . . government . . . condoning WBC's actions to support Alberta's economy with Saskatchewan projects.

And it goes on to say:

Compounding the problem, and perhaps now making the Calgary firm more competitive, the most recent provincial budget adds another 6% to interior design fees. Interior design fees are not subject to provincial sales tax in Alberta, as there isn't one charged in that province.

And it goes on to a number of points on behalf of the interior designers:

1. The four Regina firms all pay to (workmen's compensation board) . . . and should be treated fairly.

2. Presumably at least one of the Regina firms — perhaps all the firms had lower fees than the Calgary firm did.

3. Unlike . . . (workmen's compensation board), the Regina firms have a commitment to this province and to the City of Regina and deserve to be treated fairly.

4. The interior designers from Regina who responded are all more than capable of (competing for) . . . the work. The service requested by (workmen's compensation board) . . . was not unique and has been completed by Regina designers for other corporations.

Also:

5. The interior designers from Regina who responded are known for the excellent quality of their design product.

And:

6. The minister's office has advised (the interior design association of Saskatchewan that) . . . they will make efforts to more carefully monitor these situations in the future.

And of course it says, "Too little too late."

I guess it's a matter of fairness on the part of the provincial government and it's about our government providing people another reason to leave the province.

Will the minister rescind this agreement with the Calgary firm? And will you reopen the process to a fair competition to interior designers?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. I guess the first point I would make is I don't believe in ministerial interference with decisions of the departments. And typically ministers don't know who gets contracts till after they're awarded through the fair tendering processes. So I would just begin by saying that if I was to blame for anything here, it was in being too fair in allowing the process to take place without my interference.

Now the one comment I will make is all provinces in Canada are signatory to an internal trade agreement, which means that any contracts over a certain size have to be tendered across Canada. That's one of the ways that companies from Saskatchewan get work in other places and that's one of the ways that firms from other places get work here.

All that being said, if you're suggesting that I rescind a duly entered into contract — and I'm sure you don't mean that because I know that you are opposed to retroactively changing contracts that have been entered into, so I'm sure that's not what you mean to say. But what I will tell you is, I was as concerned about this, I think, as you are and asked the department to please review how they do these things in future so an unfortunate circumstance that might have been avoided doesn't happen again.

(1645)

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair of committees,

Madam Minister, and welcome to your officials as well.

I have a question related to the Workers' Compensation Board as well. It does stem from a particular case of a constituent of mine; however, I guess the questions are more general in nature. Her particular case, I think, is extremely compelling and I think I've written to your office about it, and she's gone through an incredibly long process to find some sort of remedy.

Just very briefly, her own situation is such that she is certainly continuing to apply for work, and she wants to continue to work. However, she had carpal tunnel syndrome some time ago and an operation, for whatever reason, left her hands basically useless. Her name is Shirley Fedorowich from Swift Current.

And in Shirley's case, she even applied for a Wal-Mart greeter's job because she thought that would perhaps be one of the jobs that she could do, and Workers' Comp was encouraging her in that there would be several jobs that she could do. As it turns out, she couldn't even do that job in terms of the odd pricing you have to do, and it's truly a compelling case, I believe.

But the question on the process is this. She's concerned . . . she has not gone to the appeal process yet. She's involved the Workers' Advocate and the Workers' Advocate has been working on her behalf, and he has just received a response from Workers' Comp that again reinforces what I think was an unfair ruling with respect to denying her full benefits.

But in any event, you know, her next — and the letter details it — her next step of course is to appeal.

But when she appeals, she informs me — and this is the question, Madam Minister or Mr. Deputy Chair — when she appeals, she gives all right to . . . she gives up every right to make public her case in any way. It's basically, in my understanding and what she's informed me, is that she feels she has to sign a confidentiality agreement and then is unable to take her case public or, for example, unable to have her MLA or others advocate in a public way on her behalf.

Could you please confirm that that's the process that is used at Workers' Compensation, and would you please explain the rationale for that?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — It's the Workers' Compensation Board that can't talk publicly about it. The worker themselves can talk publicly about it, and if the board is to respond, she has to sign a release that they can talk publicly about it.

Mr. Wall: — And no point in the process when she's appealing is she effectively prohibited from talking about her case? And you're saying also that the Workers' Comp can respond, I guess, if she makes some public comment? If she signs — and it's up to her — if she signs a release . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'd like to continue on with some questions concerning workmen's compensation board. Does the minister know that the health system is owed money from the workmen's compensation board due to lack of payment for doctor services provided to workmen's

compensation board claimants?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — This matter has been raised with us and we do have someone looking into it. But I apologize — we don't have the answer yet because we're just undertaking the investigation right now. They have to go through billings in two systems and whatnot. So they're looking at it right now.

Mr. Weekes: — Mr. Chair, have you taken steps to stop the practice?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — I think the problem was more one of a technical nature in terms of the technology to be able to check the dates and whatnot of billings that came through. And they've worked together with the Department of Health and feel that that will not be a problem in the future, but are still looking at the back records to see what may have happened before they got that system more integrated.

Mr. Weekes: — Mr. Chair, would you have any idea of how much money is owed?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — We don't know if any is owed. I mean they're just checking on whether there's even any substance to this. So there's no way without tracking all the individual cases to know and that process is just happening.

So I think it would be impossible to even say whether that factually is the case or not.

Mr. Weekes: — Mr. Chair, Madam Minister, how many meetings and hearings does the chairman, Stan Cameron, attend?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Because it requires a meeting-by-meeting matchup with the president's calendar and the board because . . . the estimate of the time that he actually spends in hearings is a third of his time.

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Madam Minister, how much money does Stan Cameron make as chairman of workmen's compensation board?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — The remuneration for that job is \$99,990 per year and I would presume that that was based on classifying the responsibilities both in terms of number of people and budget managed, etc. within that corporation as responsibilities of the Chair.

Mr. Weekes: — Mr. Chair, could you also tell me how much money does the rest of the board make?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — There are two other members of the board, Norm Brown at \$5,484 a month, and Darlene Light, \$5,484 a month. And these are both full-time . . . this is a full-time job.

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Madam Minister. Mr. Chair, I'd like to ask the minister, has the workman's compensation board chairman's wage decreased since Mr. Peter Federko has been hired as CEO (chief executive officer) and taken up much of the chairman's duties?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Okay, just so we have all the information here, the salary hasn't changed. In 1992, apparently the committee review, which meets every four years and is a public process, recommended that those two positions be split. So that's how that split initially took place.

There was a lot of problems with the financial solvency of the WCB and a number of other issues, and certainly one of the roles that Peter Federko has had in there, coming out of a financial background, has been to look at things like the actuarial basis for the . . . both the assessments and the administration of the plan itself. So there's been a function there that has been greatly strengthened, that has not been specifically centred on the adjudication of claims but on the financial operations of the WCB.

Mr. Weekes: — Mr. Chair, so I assume from your answer that the combined wages of Mr. Federko and Mr. Cameron is greater now than the single wage of Mr. Cameron before Mr. Federko was hired?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Because there is additional work being done in the fiduciary area now that seemed to be very necessary to do, yes that would be true. As well, as the number of employers in Saskatchewan increases so does the . . . and the number of people employed increases in Saskatchewan, so does the volume of work.

Mr. Weekes: — I'll treat that as a yes.

Madam Minister, what is the Workers' Compensation Board advertising budget and what per cent has been spent so far this year? And also what is the money being spent on?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — The budget for the year is \$600,000 but really virtually nothing has been spent. There has been some discussions around whether there's a need for a public education campaign around both Workers' Comp — both from a prevention point of view but also an awareness point of view. But at that point, there has been no decision to proceed with that. So at this point, that expenditure is largely unexpended except for some pamphlets and a few things like that.

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Madam Minister. I met with the CEO of workmen's compensation board a while back. Mr. Federko told me that the board keeps the premium rates up higher than necessary to encourage . . . to employers to encourage them to keep safety a priority.

Now I'd like to point out the employers of Saskatchewan are bound by occupational and health safety rules and regulations, and I might add, good judgment where safety working conditions are concerned.

Do you agree with Mr. Federko's comments concerning high workmen's compensation board premiums?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — There's two ways in which that consideration is given. One is that the rates have to reflect the real costs and the risk levels in the particular industries.

But the other one is that, as you would in any responsible organization that has a large fiscal role, financial role, you also

have to retain a certain amount of your surplus for eventualities that do crop up time to time, whether that be a serious accident that affects many people or a problem like we had with the situation of the widows' payout.

So there is a portion that is kept for those purposes, but that is based on what is considered to be the industry norm for the ratio of that kind of fund to the overall requirement on rate setting.

Mr. Weekes: — Mr. Chair, that's not quite what I was getting at. What Mr. Federko was getting at at our meeting was that the employers, if the rates were reduced to what they should be, that the employers would just forget about safety concerns; and this is a way of keeping these employers basically in line so that they would consider safety concerns at the workplace.

I found his comments very disturbing. He's treating the employers of this province like little children.

And I want to know if you agree with what he said. And do you consider these premiums too high based on what he said?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — I think it's really a matter of how you conceptualize how the process works. Now the rates are set the way they are so that they cover the true costs of paying out that insurance.

However, when employers have been very good performers, they receive rebates, but the actual cost reflects the true cost of what that insurance plan is. And it's only by the non-necessity to expend those funds on their behalf that those funds are then rebated to them.

Mr. Weekes: — Mr. Chair, well that's not what Mr. Federko said. And I'm quite clear on that — that the premiums are kept higher just to keep the employers in line so they consider safety matters.

And I'll ask the question again. Do you agree with this practice by workmen's compensation board?

And I would just like to say that the employers of this province are very concerned about safety. And what they need more is their money to be kept in their businesses so they can create more jobs and hire more people. And the workmen's compensation board is acting like Big Brother in this situation, keeping rates high on some pretense that the employers don't have a clue in the world about safety matters.

And I would just take exception to what he said. And I'd just like to again ask you: do you agree with what he said concerning high premiums?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Well, I will first of all say that the board has a very co-operative relationship with employer safety organizations around the province and they do many jointly sponsored efforts.

On the other point, the insurance reflects the real cost of insurance. And what you're suggesting — just to take the flip side of the argument — is that you would charge them less than the real cost of insurance, and then when they perform badly,

send them an extra bill.

So the rate that's set now reflects the true cost of insurance; however, if because someone is a particularly good employer they don't use up the usual and real cost of insurance, then they get a rebate.

Mr. Weekes: — Well, Madam Minister, that's not what he said. And he cited Alberta as an example of the rates are very low and that somehow there was some correlation between low rates and high accident rates on the workplace. And what he said was that they keep the rates high specifically to encourage employers to consider safety matters, and he felt that if they lowered the rates to what they actually were, that somehow the employers wouldn't be concerned about safety with the employees.

(1700)

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — I guess the best way that I can explain it is that it reflects the real cost of insurance in the real world of insurance, and if Mr. Federko caused you to believe that, he now agrees with the way I've described it. And we now are amending whatever you believe that discussion was in the past and we are now all agreeing on the same thing.

Mr. Weekes: — Well, Madam Minister, I take it that you agree that he made the comments in the past. And I'd like to say it's on record; it's public record that he said it in other settings too.

So I take it that that is no longer the practice. But if it has been the practice in the past, what should the rates be?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — The rates should be the rates as calculated by people in the insurance industry to cover the actuarial costs of anticipated payouts under that insurance fund. And if by some wonderful occurrence someone does not use what is considered to be normal and based on actuarial tables, then they get a rebate.

Mr. Allchurch: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Madam Minister, welcome to your officials.

My questions are regarding the pension lawsuits. In May 1981, the Government of Saskatchewan, under Premier Allan Blakeney, implemented changes to the superannuation Act which allows temporary, part-time, and casual employees to join the new plan.

In regards to the Saskatchewan Crop Insurance employees' pension plan, SGEU (Saskatchewan Government and General Employees' Union) is suing SCIC (Saskatchewan Crop Insurance Corporation) for back pension. The corporation didn't inform the employees that they could belong to this plan and the employees want to buy back the lost years.

My question, Madam Minister, is how many government agencies have been served with this statement of claim?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Maybe just to clarify from the member, I appreciate the question but Justice is responsible for the pension Act and Finance for pension administration, so you would have to ask those ministers because this is really a matter

that I'm not familiar with.

Mr. Allchurch: — Okay. I didn't know that, Madam Minister.

From what I gather there's 250 employees affected by this. Is there going to be any cost to the employees?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Again, as much as I sincerely would like to answer your question, I really have no idea and you'll have to bring it back on either Justice or Finance questions.

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Madam Minister, I'd like to change the topic to balancing work and family.

In October, 1997 the Saskatchewan government introduced the Balancing Work and Family Initiative to discuss workplace and family issues. During the 1999 provincial election, the NDP suggested legislation to allow every parent the right to at least five family leave days every year to help balance their family responsibilities. Then in the fall Throne Speech, the government announced that you would introduce legislation to implement family leave to help families find time for necessities like children's medical needs and school visits and so on and so forth.

The Canadian Federation of Independent Business has conducted research which reveals that employees of small businesses tend to be the most satisfied with the job. Why? Because of the level of flexibility for personal needs.

Most small businesses in Saskatchewan are very small and are able to work out appropriate workplace arrangements with their employees. In fact, about 75 per cent of Saskatchewan businesses employ fewer than five people, and 95 per cent of all businesses have fewer than 50 employees.

Why did the government's primary research in balancing work and family task force focus on a handful of large, independent companies as well as a mixture of businesses within the range of 100 to 499 employees?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — I guess what I would say is that our primary thrust is not legislation in the balancing family approach. It's to talk to employers about best practices, to talk to employees and unionized employees and their representative about best practices in the workplace.

Certainly some people have these things in their contracts; other people it's informal arrangements with the employer. And it's our goal to get the discussion going and to facilitate best practices. And we certainly acknowledge that small employers usually have close relationships with their employees and are very sensitive on that front.

I think where this will become a discussion is during the labour standards review because one of the things labour standards tries to do is look at the real environment in which workers work in today's society. And there's no question that we have more two-parents-working families than we've ever had before and we have more single parents working than we've ever had before.

So there may be things that need a remedy. Whether or not

those things need the five days of leave, I think we're going to leave that up to the labour standards discussion to discuss whether in fact there is a necessity, and if so, is that the best way of approaching it.

So I guess I would just say today that we're not married to that particular solution but are certainly conscious of the needs of the modern economy.

Mr. Weekes: — Madam Minister, I guess my question goes back to the task force that only discussed the issue with large employers. Small business make up . . . large employers make up less than 5 per cent of the Saskatchewan business population. And I believe a discussion surrounding the issues that affect Saskatchewan workplace cannot exclude the main job creator in the province — that's small business. And a true picture of the workplace issues facing the Saskatchewan economy will not be evident if the view of the small businesses are not actively portrayed.

I'd like to ask the minister what companies did you use for your research?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — The provincial work family survey that was conducted by Dr. Linda Duxbury involved 40 employers and 5,000 unionized and non-unionized employees. It included 4 large and 15 medium-sized private sector companies, 8 provincial government departments, 1 commission, 2 Crown corporations, and 10 not-for-profit organizations. And as well management, professional, non-professional, and technical workers took part.

We did have focus groups that involved small business, and I think everybody agreed it was something that they needed to be conscious of and to try to find solutions to. I think what was less definite was what those solutions were. And certainly our goal would be to solve as much as possible as we can in a flexible way that suits the employers, suits the employees.

But I also say that one of the purpose of labour standards — like environmental standards, like health standards — is to also ensure a certain standard in our society based on public interest as expressed by the public. So as we go through the labour standard review, we wouldn't automatically discount changes that might have an effect on families. But on the other hand, our approach is not looking to legislate all these matters.

Mr. Weekes: — Madam Minister, it goes back to the small businesses in this study and I would like to know why the government ignored the small businesses who are already flexible and able to work out appropriate workplace arrangements with their employees?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Small businesses were full participants in all the community meetings that were held. And again I think I would have to say that we're very sensitive to the fact that what's going to work for an employer with a hundred employees is not what's going to work for a workplace with three or four employees.

So I think we're sensitive to that issue, and certainly if you would like a copy of the Duxbury report that was a result of these consultations, we can certainly get a copy of that to you.

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you. I appreciate that.

Getting back to this topic, though, 75 per cent of Saskatchewan businesses employ less than five people. How do you think they'll cope when they have to replace their small staff, particularly during peak periods?

And I think that's very critical in this whole area. Even talking to large employers, this is a very, very tough situation to manage when suddenly, basically without notice, that a company or business is going to lose an employee and they have to scramble to make up time somewhere else by asking other employees to come in on overtime; and naturally the employees have the right to say no to overtime.

How do you think the small businesses will cope with this?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Well I'm not sure what they're coping with because we haven't done anything. So I think we should worry about them coping when we actually talk about actually doing something that has some reasonable prospect of actually becoming real. So I suppose they're coping with the absence of us having done anything fairly well.

But what I will say is I do take this seriously, and we see a solution that's workplace by workplace, community by community, and not some overarching, sweeping solution; unless in fact a very good case could, or might be made, that some measure is dramatically needed and that discussion would take place during a labour standards review.

Mr. Weekes: — Well, when it is implemented, do you have an idea what it's going to cost employers, and how that translates into lost jobs, and how many jobs it will lose?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Well again, seeing as I haven't got the slightest clue of what it is we're implementing, I don't know how I can speculate on how what we don't know we're implementing will affect someone.

Mr. Weekes: — Well I think the point is . . . the point I'm getting at is, you don't know what implications that policy will have. And before you implement anything, you should know what the cost to employers will be, how many job losses there will be, and that that study should be taken long before you implement any such measures.

Can you tell me the job description within the Department of Labour of the person in charge of balancing work and family?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — That individual for this phase of the work that's being done on that hasn't been hired yet, and work is just going on now with the Public Service Commission to define that job and the process for filling that job.

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Madam Minister. Many business owners that I talk to fear that legislating unpaid family leave may be the first step towards creating . . . creation of paid leave. In fact if you follow the labour . . . your views on the subject, you don't blame the business community for having those fears.

The Leader-Post, Tuesday, December 7, 1999 review, when asked about the possibilities of time being paid, you said, and I

quote:

We'll see when we get to the point of legislation . . .
Labour law changes incrementally.

Is this your intention, to introduce family . . . paid family leave?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — No, and in fact I would say at this point, I have no intentions because I plan to see what comes forward in the labour standards review, as recommended by the reviewers who spend all of the time meeting with people to get their input on the labour standards review. And at such a point as recommendations are made to us, we would then examine them and I'm sure hopefully would ask all the same questions that you're asking today. And certainly you would be involved in that process as well.

Mr. Weekes: — Well thank you, Madam Minister. I hope you consider the small businesses in this situation that you're considering and what it will do to the small business community in this province.

I'd like to move on to one other item. The federation of labour was quoted shortly following the Throne Speech as calling for a 7.15 an hour minimum wage. Is your government entertaining an upcoming review of the Saskatchewan minimum wage rate?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Normally what happens is I think most provinces look at their minimum wages on a regular basis. And at this moment we don't have a sitting board in Saskatchewan so there would be no one to bring forward a recommendation at this particular time.

But we've been quite a while now that we haven't had a sitting minimum wage board and I am going to have to make that decision soon about putting a board back in place so they can receive information from people.

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you. I'd like to go on to occupational health and safety. Just want to get your views on this.

Given that the safety and safe working conditions are a high priority for employees, the employers, and society as a whole, should the government and the employees help fund a share of the occupational health and safety instead of being 100 per cent funded from workmen's compensation board which is totally funded by employers?

(1715)

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Legislation in the WCB requires that industrial safety is funded from WCB rates. And apparently this is not an exception to the way it's done in other places in Canada. This is a very standard way that it's done.

Mr. Weekes: — It's come to my attention, Madam Minister, that the Labour department presents a bill to workmen's compensation for about \$3.5 a year for occupational health and safety. Workmen's compensation pays it. It doesn't seem to . . . no one seems to know where the money goes.

Could you give me more detail where that money goes?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — The industrial safety programs are what's funded out of this money and a detailed invoice is sent to the WCB on how all these monies are expended. That information is also available.

It's reviewed by Treasury Board, it's reviewed by cabinet, and it's also reviewed in *Estimates*. So if people have I guess concerns, there certainly is a great deal of information there to examine on how the industrial safety program is both paid for and administered.

I have to say I get requests quite often for an expansion of the role of industrial safety, and actually recently now, with the expansion in the forestry industry, had a request from the industry itself to expand the occupational health and safety activities and the inspections that would take place in the industry.

Mr. Weekes: — Just two, three more questions, Madam Minister. *Public Accounts*, '98 and '99, occupational health, Saskatchewan Federation of Labour received \$10,500. Could you explain what that was for?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — That's to help sponsor their annual health and safety conference where they highlight these issues amongst their members, who are often part of workplace committees. It's partly so people understand their role in those workplace occupational and health safety committees as well as emerging issues in the various industrial safety sectors.

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Madam Minister. It also has stated that there is an increase in the number of occupational committees. How many active occupational health committees are there to date?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Every workplace of over 10 employees is supposed to have a committee but they don't all have them. And this is one of the reasons that people argue that we should have more enforcement officers.

We've tended to go with the model of encouraging workplaces and requiring them to have these committees but we don't always know exactly; but our best estimate at this time, unless new committees have formed since we had this data, is that there's 3,606 committees. And in 1999-2000, 420 committees were formed. And the number of occupational . . . that are required to submit minutes that we have on file are 12,032.

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Madam Minister. What per cent of occupational health safety infringements have a follow-up meeting to ensure the infractions are looked after?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — All these minutes that are sent in from the occupational health and safety committees are reviewed. And if there's something that, I guess contravenes the Act would be the best way of putting it, it's up to the occupational health and safety officer to identify that, to identify to the parties what remedies has to be taken, and to give them a time frame in which to comply with the remedy.

Mr. Weekes: — I'd like to thank the minister and her officials, and that's all questions I'll have at this time, Mr. Chair.

Subvote (LA01) agreed to.

Subvotes (LA02), (LA03), (LA05), (LA04), (LA07), (LA06), (LA08) agreed to.

Vote 20 agreed to.

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'd like to thank the members opposite for their thoughtful questions, and as well, to all the officials for assisting in the proceedings today.

Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen: — Mr. Chair, I move the committee rise, report progress and ask for leave to sit again.

The committee reported progress.

The Assembly adjourned at 5:24 p.m.

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