

The Assembly met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRESENTING PETITIONS

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To present a petition regarding hospital closures. Reading the prayer:

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.

Mr. Speaker, the petition I present this morning is signed by people from the community of Young.

I so present.

Ms. Eagles: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I too rise today to present a petition on behalf of citizens concerned about the future of the Lanigan and Watrous hospitals. And the prayer reads as follows:

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

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

And this is signed by folks in Plunkett, Saskatoon, Nokomis, and Lanigan.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Ms. Bakken: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to present a petition on behalf of people that would like to have cellular telephone service in their area. And the prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to utilize the present SaskTel tower at Lake Alma to include usage for cellular telephones or to construct a new cellular telephone tower at Lake Alma, Saskatchewan.

And this is signed by residents of Weyburn, Beaubier, Lake Alma, Oungre, and Tribune.

I so present.

Mr. McMorris: — Mr. Speaker, I too have a petition regarding hospital closures. And the prayer reads as follows:

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

And this petition is signed by people in the Young area.

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.

Signed by citizens from Simpson and Watrous.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

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

The petitioners are from the communities of Lanigan and Watrous.

I so present.

Mr. Wakefield: — Mr. Speaker, I have a petition by citizens concerned with community access roads. And the prayer reads as follows:

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

Mr. Speaker, the signatures are from the citizens of Christopher Lake and Paddockwood.

I so present.

Mr. Addley: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also have a petition to present collected on behalf of the youth of Saskatchewan. And the prayer reads as follows:

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

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

I so present.

Mr. Kowalsky: — Mr. Speaker, I too have a petition which has been sponsored by the youth of Saskatchewan, and they are looking at tobacco control and they specifically asked that the government ban smoking in all public places in Saskatchewan.

Mr. Wiberg: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I have a petition this morning in regards to enforced municipal amalgamation. And the prayer reads as follows, Mr. Speaker:

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

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

Mr. Speaker, this petition is signed by the good people from Paddockwood.

I so present.

Mr. Hart: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to present a petition on behalf of the citizens of Cupar who are concerned about medical services in their community. The prayer reads as follows:

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

I so present.

Mr. Thomson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition here today calling for the legislature to enact comprehensive tobacco control legislation. The petition reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to pass comprehensive provincial legislation to prevent children from starting to smoke, to protect all citizens from second-hand smoke in public places and workplaces, and to control youth access to tobacco products.

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

The petition comes from constituents of mine as well as other residents from around Regina.

And I so present.

Mr. Allchurch: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I rise in the Assembly today to bring forth a petition to retain Lanigan and Watrous hospitals. And the prayer reads as follows:

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

And the signatures on this petition are from Lanigan, Drake, and Guernsey.

I so present.

Mr. Wartman: — Mr. Speaker, I too have a petition on behalf

of the youth of the province:

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

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

And this comes from citizens of Regina. Thank you.

Mr. Stewart: — Mr. Speaker, I rise to present a petition signed by citizens concerned with possible hospital closures. And the prayer reads:

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

And this petition is signed by individuals from the community of Allan.

I so present.

Mr. Prebble: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I have a petition expressing concern about the harmful health effects of tobacco, and the prayer reads:

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

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

Mr. Speaker, this petition is signed by residents of Saskatoon, including several residents of my own constituency.

And I so present.

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to present a petition to retain Lanigan and Watrous hospitals. The prayer reads as follows:

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

As is duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

Mr. Speaker, this petition is signed by the concerned citizens of Saskatoon.

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 residents of the province on the following matters:

- The amalgamation of municipalities;
- Cellular service in Strasbourg, Duval, Govan, and Bulyea;
- Keeping the Lanigan and Watrous hospitals open;
- Banning smoking in public places and workplaces; and
- The restoration of the Paddockwood access road.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the legislature two visitors from Denmark. Up in your gallery, we have Arne and Gurli Soerenson who are from Augustenborg, a town in the southern part of Denmark.

Seven years ago, Andrea Still, who is also seated in the gallery, lived with these people as her family on an exchange, and they have now come to Saskatchewan and are staying in the Humboldt area with Andrea's parents, Doug and Donelda. They plan to stay in Saskatchewan for about three weeks visiting many of the interesting things that they've heard about, about our province.

And I think all of us should welcome them to the gallery.

And to the Soerensons, Hjertelig Velkommen til Saskatchewan.

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

So let's all welcome them.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Royal Bank Economic Forecast

Mr. Thomson: — Well thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is Friday, and as we all know Friday is always good news Friday in this House. I'd be remiss if I was not bringing more good news about the Saskatchewan economy and for Saskatchewan citizens.

Today's good news is brought to you by the good people at the Royal Bank, Mr. Speaker, who have released their outlook for the year 2000-2001. The Royal Bank says that Saskatchewan consumers can look forward to low inflation, tax cuts, and reduced unemployment.

As you know, we have already passed legislation to introduce the largest income tax cut in Saskatchewan history. As a result of this and other measures, Mr. Speaker, the economy is expected to grow and unemployment rates are expected to decline in all provinces. Saskatchewan's unemployment rate is forecast to be the second lowest in the nation at 4.8 per cent and virtually tied with Alberta. It also notes . . . the Royal Bank notes that Saskatchewan's and Manitoba's economies have the

quote, "greatest potential" according to the forecast.

This is very good news for Saskatchewan people, very good news for Saskatchewan consumers, and great news for our province. Thank you very much.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Wood River By-election

Mr. Wiberg: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The period of time we have been sitting in this first session of the twenty-fourth legislature, for those of us who are rookies, has been an excellent opportunity to witness an NDP (New Democratic Party) government in full retreat.

Mr. Speaker, the abuse this NDP government is able to push onto those citizens who have chosen to support candidates other than those who are an NDP or New Democratic Party candidate, is a wonder to behold.

We began this session with a Throne Speech full of airy fairy promises that soon fell far short of its potential with the introduction of this New Democratic government's budget; a budget, Mr. Speaker, with little content and oodles of political payoffs.

The most interesting learning experience though was just how arrogant and self-righteous a socialist can be. Time after time, Mr. Speaker, we have heard from this NDP government that taxpayers in our province have no right to know how their hard-earned tax dollars are spent. In fact, this New Democratic Party government has informed us on several occasions that monies earned by Saskatchewan citizenry is actually property of this New Democratic Party government.

Well, Mr. Speaker, a new day is dawning in Saskatchewan. On June 26 another Saskatchewan Party MLA (Member of the Legislative Assembly) will be elected, as this side of the House continues to grow until the member from Rosetown-Biggar takes his rightful seat as Premier. When that day arrives we will truly get to see an open and accountable government. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Fund Raising by the Saskatchewan Party

Mr. Yates: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My colleagues this morning on this side of this House have more good news for Saskatchewan.

Sadly, Mr. Speaker, I have the reverse — bad news for Saskatchewan and even worse news for this Assembly, and for the political process in Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker.

I am referring, Mr. Speaker, to a letter sent out this week by the member for Redberry; a letter that shamefully attempts to divide the people of Saskatchewan into two camps — worker and non-worker, Mr. Speaker. Even more shamefully, the letter is a blatant attempt by the Saskatchewan Party to profit from the division it strives to create.

I will table this letter at the end of my statement, Mr. Speaker. It says, quote:

We need your help to stop the destruction of the non-union construction industry . . . Your generous donation to the Saskatchewan Party will have a direct and measurable impact . . .

They have asked for donations between 1,000 and \$10,000 to help them continue their attack on working men and women and their families, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, historically most political parties have opposed or supported legislation in light of their views on public policy. Here we have something new, Mr. Speaker — an undeniably cheap fundraising by division.

If the members opposite don't want to be called Devine Tories, they should stop acting like them.

Mr. Speaker, a strong economy, such as we have in Saskatchewan, is built on co-operation between workers and business. Workers know that, and employers know that, Mr. Speaker. The only party that does not know it is the Saskatchewan Party, Mr. Speaker — a sad day for Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

David Howe Golf Tournament

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I would like to draw the member's attention to a golf tournament being held on July 16. What makes this tournament so significant is that it's celebrating the 40th Anniversary of the David Howe Golf Tournament.

Mr. David Howe organized the first tournament in 1960. It has been an annual event for the past . . .

The Speaker: — Order.

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. He has been the driving force behind the tournament and had a great deal to do with organization of the Martin's Lake golf course where the tournament takes place.

Aside from his involvement with golf, Mr. Howe spent his entire life serving his community of Marcellin. He runs the Star Café that was started by his parents 78 years ago. He served as mayor of Marcellin from 1982 to '85. He has been chosen citizen of the year in Marcellin, has received plaques for his unselfish contribution to the community and district for his high level of hospitality provided to the travelling public from Saskatchewan Tourism. He was awarded the J.D. Claire Thacker Award for outstanding contribution to the independent insurance brokerage system.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to congratulate Mr. Howe on his dedication and contributions to the community of Marcellin as well on the 40th anniversary of the David Howe golf tournament.

And, Mr. Speaker, if there are any outdoor events that need planning, Mr. Howe might be the person to ask to help with organizing it. In the last 39 years the tournament has only been rained out only once.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

TRLabs and SIAST Training Partnership

Mr. Kasperski: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to inform the Assembly of some great news for skills training in our province. TRLabs and the Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology have teamed up to train an information and communications technology workforce of Saskatchewan. This collaboration will create new opportunities to prepare students for challenging careers.

The partnership will ensure that the SIAST (Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology) curriculum meets present and future demands for Saskatchewan's information and communications technology workforce. SIAST students will benefit from industry's input on their training and local businesses will benefit from a workforce that meets their needs.

SIAST provides career-related training that leads to employment. The institute has an exceptional track record, Mr. Speaker. Over 90 per cent of its graduates who look for employment find jobs within six months of graduation.

TRLabs is Canada's leading information and communications technology research consortium. Through collaborations such as this, Mr. Speaker, TRLabs creates innovative technologies and trains students to enhance Saskatchewan's expertise and improve competitiveness.

Mr. Speaker, let us all applaud this very important partnership.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Wood River By-election

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, people throughout Saskatchewan are sitting on the edge of their seats awaiting the results of the Wood River by-election Monday night. Pundits throughout the province are giving their predictions about the results. And while I would never be so bold to predict a Sask Party victory in the by-election, that's not true for the former member of Wood River.

As everyone in the House knows, no one has more respect for Glen McPherson's opinion than I. So I would like to read some comments he made in the media this morning. And now remembering, Mr. Speaker, Mr. McPherson is a former Liberal MLA. In fact for that matter, he's a former NDP MLA.

I quote Mr. McPherson, Mr. Speaker:

What I'm hearing is exactly what I've been hearing since they formed the coalition. It's not flying. The writing may be on the wall. If you're Mr. Romanow and Mr. Melenchuk, you're sitting back and not really caring about what happens in this rural seat. I think this is going to be a bit of a lesson to them.

Mr. McPherson went on to accuse the Premier and the Liberal leader of being too busy striking deals in the dead of the night, that they forgot the real issues in Wood River.

Mr. Speaker, far be it from me to argue with the opinions of this distinguished, former member of this legislature.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

E-business in Saskatoon

Ms. Lorje: — Yet more good news for Saskatchewan. Mr. Speaker . . .

The Speaker: — Order.

Ms. Lorje: — Mr. Speaker, yet more good news for Saskatchewan.

One of the political techniques the opposition has learned from their Alliance buddies is this — if something is not true, say it is true, often and loudly; someone may believe you. Like suggesting that the spirit of entrepreneurship has been driven west out of Saskatchewan. Of course that is absolutely not true as the lead story in yesterday's national paper, *The Globe and Mail*, illustrates. In a story about the 25 hottest e-businesses in Canada, a Saskatoon firm was listed as number one.

The company is Point2.com and it can be found at www.point2.com. Point2.com is a company which auctions heavy equipment on-line. It finds specialized mining and other heavy industry equipment, puts it on the net, and sells it.

The principals in the company are Wendell and Barry Willick, both of Saskatoon.

Mr. Speaker, Point2.com is one more example of the innovation and the entrepreneurship that is alive and well and growing in Saskatchewan. All of Canada knows about it, only the opposition is in the dark.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ORAL QUESTIONS

Border Health Centre in Climax

Mr. Elhard: — Mr. Speaker, today we have one more slap in the face of southwest Saskatchewan. Mr. Speaker, the Southwest Health District has announced that due to a nursing shortage, the Border Health Centre in Climax will no longer be open on weekends.

That means there will be no emergency services on weekends for people of Climax and area. And it also means that every Friday afternoon, Mr. Speaker, palliative care patients, people in the last days of their lives, will be loaded onto ambulances and shipped off to Shaunavon. Then on Monday morning, they'll be loaded back onto ambulances and once again shipped back to Climax.

Mr. Premier, this is a new low, even for your government. What is wrong with this picture? Why are you allowing dying people to be treated this way?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to make a few comments but I'd like to as well, propose a slight change to the proceedings today in light of the fact that the member for Redberry Lake and his caucus colleagues are bent on driving a wedge between working people in the business community in our province.

The Speaker: — Order, order. Hon. Minister, we are into oral questions.

Hon. Ms. Junor: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do want to assure the member opposite that during the last year there were two palliative care patients in the Border Climax facility. The district has been looking at all kinds of arrangements to deal with the issue of the staff shortages, and most of the staff shortages are occurring on the weekend.

They've worked long and hard with their staff and have come to the arrangement that the services will be offered Monday to Friday. The weekend services, because of the staff shortages, they are unable to offer, and they want to make sure the people in that area clearly understand what's going on.

So they have made this announcement. They've made the community aware. And they are doing the best they can to deal with the shortages of staff and still deliver adequate services in that area.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Elhard: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Premier, I have a letter from the Southline Palliative Care Committee based in Climax. And they say that every week palliative care patients will have to be transferred over that 55 kilometres of rather poorly maintained, dangerous highway, notorious No. 37 south. And the say in their letter, I quote:

The purpose of this unit is to allow local people to obtain the care they need in their own home area and to allow family and friends to be with them, day or night, during the last days of their lives. Removing them from this environment is physically cruel and psychologically inhuman.

Mr. Premier, this is despicable. Tearing dying people away from family and friends and shipping them around like cattle is just unacceptable.

Mr. Premier, the Southline Palliative Care Committee calls this decision cruel and inhuman. What do you call it? And why are you doing this?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Junor: — I think if we're going to demonstrate despicable, the question would be the demonstration of what's despicable.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Junor: — As I said in my first answer to the member, there have been two palliative care admissions in the Border Health Centre — one in June of last year and one in January.

So the letter that has been prepared from the palliative care committee is talking about a potential. And the district has worked very carefully to meet all the needs of the members or the citizens in that area.

The person who is part of the letter was also part of the solution that the district has arrived at. That person was part of the discussions. And the district has done the best they can to deliver services within their means and in light of the staff shortages that they have.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Elhard: — Mr. Speaker, the notice given to the people of the area from the Southwest Health District letter says, that the Border Health Centre will be closed on weekends from July 15, this year, to March 27, next year. I hope the minister can assure us that there will be no more palliative patients between now and then. I would appreciate hearing about that.

This is disgusting and it's inappropriate and we are very disappointed by this. First of all, these people have no services on the weekend. Then if they do have a patient problem, they have to travel on gravel highways and now we're loading terminally ill patients on ambulances. This is the most incredibly insensitive thing I've ever heard of.

Mr. Premier, these are real people with real families. And I'm sure you can understand the frustration and the anger these people are feeling. Do you think this is a proper way to deal with dying people now or people who may be in that situation sometime in the next 11 months?

Hon. Ms. Junor: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I won't go into the palliative care issue again since I've answered that twice. But I will talk to you about what the Border Health Centre will remain doing 24 hours a day, Monday through Friday.

The usual services that they will offer include X-ray services in support of the local physician; out-patient treatments as required; and a registered nurse will be on duty 24 hours a day, supplemented with a second RN (registered nurse) on call Monday to Friday.

Other services that are provided at the health centre are home care service coordination, visiting dietician, and a public health nurse.

The change here, as I said, due to the shortage of nurses, is that the health centre will no longer be able to be open on the weekend. The district has made arrangements for the weekend in the most responsible way that they can in consultation with their staff.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Plans for District Health Boards

Mr. Gantefoer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my questions are for the Minister of Health as well. Madam Minister, district health board budgets have been in your hands for some time now, and it's reported that you're continuing to look at these budgets.

Mr. Speaker, the minister knows that many districts are including cutbacks in their budgets to either reduce or eliminate their deficits, major cutbacks in some cases, including hospital closures.

But following the announcement of the health care review, the Premier indicated that no hospitals would close, and that's a strong promise. However it is one thing to suggest a hospital will not close, and another thing to turn around and convert it to a wellness centre.

Madam Minister, can you assure the public that you are not going to convert any more hospitals to wellness centres as a result of this budget.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Junor: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As we've been saying for the last few weeks, all the districts have submitted their health plans. They are being reviewed by the department and by myself and the Minister of Health. And we're looking at them in a provincial context, to look at what services should be delivered, for the provincial overview for the best delivery of health services to all the people in Saskatchewan.

What we're also looking at is the commission now that has been charged to overlook the health service in the province. We will be watching for . . . we'll be anxious to see the report of that commission. But in the meantime, we are doing the review of the health plans and they will be released in the very near future.

Mr. Gantefoer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the official opposition is very concerned that the commitment of the Premier is only very specific and very limited, and there's all kinds of wiggle room in order to avoid conversions or shutdowns in other areas.

If you won't make the commitment about conversions, will you make the commitment that there won't be any closures in long-term care homes? Will you make the commitment that there will not be any conversions?

Madam Minister, what's going on in this budget? Are you going to make the commitment that goes beyond the very specific commitment of the Premier not to close hospitals, or is there just so much wiggle room that you need in order to change it and make conversions or closures of long-term care homes and/or beds, Madam Minister? Will you make that commitment?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, I will not take the time of the House to repeat the answer that the Minister of Health

just gave, and that I gave a week or so ago in response to, I believe, the Health critic of the official opposition. So I will simply repeat what I said.

But the member did get up and talk about wiggle room. And he alleges the government has, quote, “wiggle room”. Well, Mr. Speaker, I have a CBC (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation) report of February 3, 2000, where the reporter, one Mr. Jones, says the following, quote:

All along the opposition has been saying the health care system should be studied before there are any more hospitals closed. And even though the Saskatchewan Party . . .

. . . (inaudible interjection) . . . No, no, but get this, Mr. Speaker

. . . And even though the Saskatchewan Party is blasting the government for not guaranteeing the future of rural hospitals it's not prepared to do so itself.

Gantefoer. Gantefoer, the quotation, quote:

I will guarantee (that) no hospitals closed until this study is done so that we know what we are doing.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Lanigan Hospital

Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: — Order.

Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the Living Sky Health District is one of the districts that's considering hospital closures in order to reduce the operating deficit.

The hospital in Lanigan is slated for closure in their budget proposal. Lanigan is a large agriculture and mining community. Pound-Maker feedlot and ethanol plant are located close by, and they all depend heavily on access to acute and emergency health care services.

The Premier has said that no hospitals will close while the health review is underway. However, we have a letter dated June 14 from the mayor of the town of Lanigan to the Minister of Health. In this letter, Mayor Vigoren says, and I quote:

We can appreciate your views regarding the establishment of a health centre in our community.

So, Madam Minister, is that what's going to happen to Lanigan? Is the hospital not actually going to close but instead be converted into a health centre?

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, we're on the same line of questioning; and one of these days, sooner than the Saskatchewan Party opposite expects, they will have to fess up and tell the people of Saskatchewan; and one of these days, sooner than perhaps the journalists expect, they're going to have to fess up and tell where the Saskatchewan Party stands.

Leader-Post of March 3, 1999, under the headline, “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 . . . (will) be done first to decide how to best serve the communities, he added.

I've already given a quotation about the health critic. Quote, he said:

I will guarantee there'd be no hospitals closed until this study is done so that we know what we are doing.

That's exactly what our commitment has been. The hon. member knows it.

You tell us where you stand, because I say under your privatization, two-tier approach to health care you . . .

The Speaker: — Order.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Unfortunately the budgets are being reviewed now, and the Saskatchewan Party is not making the decisions, the NDP government is. And my question was, is this going to be converted into a health centre?

Mr. Speaker, Mayor Vigoren says the community definitely . . .

The Speaker: — Order.

Ms. Harpauer: — . . . definitely does not want the hospital to close or the emergency services eliminated. The mayor correctly states the X-ray lab and 24-hour emergency services are necessary for that area. In *The Leader-Post* yesterday, the Minister of Health says that she doesn't think the public has any concerns any more. Well she's wrong.

The people of this province have seen promise after promise broken by the NDP government and they don't believe her any more. Mayor Vigoren says if the proposed closure goes ahead, the town will consider legal action and they will ask for an investigation.

Madam Minister, is that what the town of Lanigan is going to have to do to get the health district and your department to listen to the people and their concerns?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, there is one aspect of the hon. member's question with which I totally concur. She got up and she said in a preface to the question, something to the effect that we . . . it is fortunate that we have to make the decision. That is right. Check the record.

And I want to say to her, Mr. Speaker, it is very fortunate indeed that this coalition government has to make the decisions. It would be very unfortunate and very tragic if we adopted the Saskatchewan Party approach on health care which is,

according to their campaign platform, value for money audit; five year zap you're frozen on health care expenditures; the privatization policies of the member of Weyburn and the other members; the support for Bill 11 in the province of Alberta; in effect the destruction of medicare.

You're right, Madam Member, it is very fortunate that the coalition government is in charge of medicare. You cannot be trusted because you do not support medicare . . .

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Assiniboine Valley Health District Ambulance Services

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my questions are also for the Minister of Health.

Madam Minister, the Assiniboine Valley Health District is another district facing a very large operating deficit for the upcoming year. In preliminary budgets proposed on March 14, they estimated a deficit of \$600,000. One month later that deficit estimate has doubled to \$1.2 million.

This district is now considering major changes to operations. The owners, operators, and staff of Canora Ambulance Care and Duck Mountain ambulance service are extremely concerned that the health district wants to take over their services. They have been told by the district CEO (chief executive officer) Gary Johnson that if owners refuse to sell, he will not renew their contracts with the health district.

Madam Minister, will this health district be allowed to force these ambulance services to sell?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, the members of this House and those who are involved in health care administration in Saskatchewan know full well that the budgets are being advanced now for the Department of Health and are being considered by the Department of Health — of which this question is a part and parcel of the issue.

So we know where the situation is in that regard, and in due course decisions will be made, as I say, by the coalition government partnership that supports medicare — and not by the party that wants to freeze funding for five years.

I repeat, Mr. Speaker, about what I can only describe is the attempt by the official opposition, which purports to seek government and therefore has a responsibility to come clean in its position, how it tries desperately to square the circle of freezing funding for five years — not an extra penny for health care; two-tier systems; they're in favour of privatization; the member's question talked about health ambulance services privatization; in favour of Alberta's Bill 11 — how it is that they can square all of that under some sort of a rubric of defending medicare? Mr. Speaker, it is as phony as a \$3 bill.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Krawetz: — Mr. Speaker, these ambulance services have been working with the health district board and have even

agreed to raise their rates to help meet their budget needs for the coming year. As at the end of March they had no indication the health district was even considering taking over ambulance services, but by April it appeared to be a major component of their attempts to deal with their deficit.

These service owners have spent many years building their businesses and contributing to the communities they serve. They do not want to sell their businesses. They have even talked to other districts in Saskatchewan Health, and they believe the district will not save money by taking over ambulance services. They believe ambulance service will be reduced to the residents of this district.

Madam Minister, before you finalize these budgets, are you considering whether the options proposed by the districts are actually feasible and will they save costs?

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, the answer to the member's question, I repeat again. He asks whether or not the arguments advanced by these people will be considered by the Department of Health. The answer is yes. We're doing a review of emergency services and looking at the budget plans right now. So there's no problem in that regard.

But the difference between us and the questions which come from that right-wing extreme party, which wants to demolish medicare, is this: that our reviews contemplate continued delivery of more dollars — 6 per cent in this year's budget for health care; a renewed and revamped medicare which will be here for not only today but for tomorrow, based on the principle of single-tier, public administration.

Theirs is predicated on some Americanized two-tier system approach, Alberta style, the destruction of it, medicare fees. Who knows, maybe even new utilization fees — they advocate that. And that is the big difference.

We're for medicare and they're against medicare. Let's be clear about that.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, Mr. Speaker, the Premier knows full well that the questions I am asking this morning are on behalf of two ambulance businesses who've been around for years. They're on behalf of the people of Canora-Pelly who have an ambulance service that they want to protect, because they know full well that if this government allows those ambulance services to become public, the people of the Canora-Pelly constituency will lose a service, Mr. Speaker. That's reality.

The owners of these ambulance services are very distressed about the actions of the CEO of the health district. He indicated to them this week that he intends to use transitional funding from the province to purchase the ambulance services. He also says in this letter that if transitional funding is denied, the district would borrow money to push the takeover.

Madam Minister, Mr. Premier, is this the type of budgeting you endorse, and is this what transitional funding you have set aside is for, so that they can take over locally provided health

services?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, the questions, apart from being highly speculative and based on the speculation then leading to some illogical conclusion, as the Deputy Leader of the Saskatchewan Party indicates, is simply that. They're intended to be campaigns of disinformation by a political party which is not committed to medicare.

I say to you, Mr. Speaker, and I say to the people of the province of Saskatchewan, and to the Canora people, we want to work with everybody in Canora and in every part of the province of Saskatchewan to provide the best health care system that we can within the budgets that are being provided. Rising at 6 per cent and sometimes higher a year. That's what we're prepared to do.

But here's the difference. We're prepared to do it within the five principles of the Canada Health Act, something which those people want to do away with. We do not want two-tier privatized health care. They want it. This debate is important about the specifics but the larger issue is who's for medicare, who's against it, and we're for medicare.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Krawetz: — Mr. Speaker, you know, Mr. Speaker, I would like to inform the Premier about the following facts.

In his letter to ambulance businesses, Mr. Johnson goes even further to say that if the ambulance owners refuse to agree to a sale price, he will build new ambulance base sites and let the current owners sit with their assets and he will have no obligation to hire the current staff.

Mr. Premier, this man is threatening the owners of the Canora and Duck Mountain ambulance services by suggesting their contracts won't be renewed if they don't sell. And they must sell at his price or the staff would lose their jobs. The owners of the ambulance services have the support of their town councils, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, and residents of the health districts.

Now they want your assurance that this is not the intention of your government — to threaten and intimidate private health service out of business.

Mr. Premier, will you review the actions of Mr. Johnson and assure the Duck Mountain and Canora ambulance services they will not be forced to sell their businesses to the health district?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, our commitment to the people of Saskatchewan — ever since medicare was implemented in 1962 and every year thereafter, in government and in opposition, provincially and nationally — is for the best publicly funded medicare system that this country and this province can afford.

That means working with occasionally private service

providers, everybody involved in emergency, and this particular issue that the member raises — I have repeated in the answers over and over again, as the Minister of Health has said, that those arguments will be very carefully advanced.

But I will tell you something that we are not for on a broad and philosophic basis. We are not for the June 20, 2000 *Hansard* statement made in this House by one of the members — I believe it was the member from Weyburn — quote:

I think it should be an option.

And what is the it?

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.

Well she's for privatization, and we're not. We'll work out a solution.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Agricultural Income Disaster Assistance Program

Mr. Boyd: — Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my questions are for the Minister of Health . . . or for the Minister of Agriculture, pardon me. I'd prefer the Minister of Agriculture to answer them, rather than the Premier wanting to talk about health care in 1962.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Boyd: — Mr. Minister, Mr. Minister, *The Western Producer* is reporting this week that the AIDA (Agricultural Income Disaster Assistance) program is running out of money. According to reports out of Ottawa, the AIDA program could experience a shortfall, as much as \$300 million this year.

Some AIDA officials are indicating farmers will receive interim payments of 50 per cent with the unpaid . . . or the paid balance if there's enough money left in the fund at that point.

Mr. Minister, do you expect to have a shortfall in the AIDA program in '99 . . . in the '99 program year? Will farmers be receiving only 50 per cent of the expected payment this summer?

And will you assure Saskatchewan farm families that they will indeed receive the full payments expected out of the AIDA program?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — Mr. Speaker, in the preamble to the question, the member from Kindersley mentioned he didn't want the Premier talking about medicare any more. And after this question period, I understand why, with the licking they took.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — And his attempt to take the heat off

the privatization of health by asking a question about agriculture at the very end of question period, tells you how important the question is.

But for the record, Mr. Speaker, in 1999 under the AIDA program, there were 28,000 applications and \$142 million paid out. This year under the 1999 program to be paid out this year, there will be \$300 million paid out in Saskatchewan, double last year. And so far we have about 4,000 applications.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Stewart: — With leave, to introduce guests, Mr. Speaker.

Leave granted.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Mr. Stewart: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly, two very accomplished young people seated in your gallery, my middle child and youngest daughter, Alison, and her great friend Randy Morse.

Both Alison and Randy have recently completed bachelors degrees in Business from the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, University of Cornell, Ithaca, New York.

Alison has competed on behalf of Saskatchewan at that national level in field hockey, ice hockey, and lacrosse. She's also played the last four years with the Cornell women's varsity women's hockey team, the last two years as captain.

She played for Team Canada in the winter of 1998-99 where the Canadian women won the Christmas Cup in Germany undefeated in the round robin and playoff rounds.

Randy, a native of Geneva, New York played football for Cornell University and is a brother of the venerable Alpha Gamma Rho men's fraternity, an institution that I came to appreciate very much on my visits to Cornell.

Mr. Speaker, I hope that all members of this Hon. Assembly will recognize Alison and Randy and I ask them to stand.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Junor: — Mr. Speaker, leave to introduce guests before I do my statement.

Leave granted.

Hon. Ms. Junor: — Mr. Speaker, I'd like to introduce to you in the gallery and through you to the other members of the House, three members of the Saskatchewan Seniors Mechanism. They're seated up in the gallery across there.

They're Frank Bellamy, Lynda Blach, and Bob Torkelson. If you could just stand up. I'd like to welcome them all.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Senior Friendly Program

Hon. Ms. Junor: — Thank you. Thank you very much. Earlier this month, Mr. Speaker, I had the privilege as the Minister responsible for Seniors, to announce the creation of the Provincial Advisory Committee of Older Persons.

Today it is again my pleasure to tell you about more good news for seniors in Saskatchewan. Seniors are the fastest growing age group in Canada right now. In Saskatchewan we have the second-highest proportion of seniors. They make up 15.3 per cent of our population, and more than half of the people living in rural Saskatchewan and small communities are seniors.

Yesterday I had the great pleasure of joining the Saskatchewan Seniors Mechanism and the Saskatchewan Tourism Education Council to launch a new program called, Senior Friendly. And you'll see all of us have our Senior Friendly badges on.

This program is designed to make our communities senior friendly. What that means is that physical space, technology, printed material, and services are all designed so that seniors' needs are met. In the Senior Friendly tool kit, there's a checklist or an assessment questionnaire that you can use to ensure that your facilities and services keep seniors in mind.

Some things that can be done to make facilities more senior friendly are: to provide a bench in the middle of the grocery store so that you can have a break between getting your meat and getting your bread; providing larger, more distinguishable signage for bathrooms; and ensuring your doors and entrances are easier to find and easier to open. These are just a few of the things that can be done to make everyone's life easier.

Thus the program is important for communities. — things like parks, facilities, streets, lighting, policing, etc.; as well as businesses, organizations, and services.

Two key organizations have worked together to bring this program to life in Saskatchewan. The Saskatchewan Seniors Mechanism is the group that brings together our province's seniors' organizations. The Seniors Mechanism promotes a unified voice for seniors, it promotes research and action on issues affecting seniors, and it promotes both awareness and coordination of resources and services for seniors.

The Saskatchewan Seniors Mechanism is working to make seniors, businesses, and everyone in our province aware of this new program and the importance of being senior friendly.

The Saskatchewan Tourism Education Council is administering the training end of this program. STEC (Saskatchewan Tourism Education Council) will work with training facilitators and interested businesses to get senior-friendly training programs for service providers off the ground across Saskatchewan. By working together, these two organizations are helping to create a better society and better communities for all of us.

An added benefit of this initiative is that the level of service and the treatment we receive in communities and at businesses that have taken the time to make sure they meet the needs of the

particular groups, such as seniors, will make it better for all of us. Additionally, for those of us who aren't considered a senior citizen yet, guess what? All of us will be.

I encourage all members in the Assembly to use the evaluation tool to ensure that their offices are senior friendly. I think the program is a great step forward for seniors, for businesses, for communities, and for our province. Let's all be senior friendly. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wakefield: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The official opposition would like to respond to the ministerial statement if we may. And when we wish to do that, all eyes turn to me for some reason. I'm not sure why.

But I have to admit that the seniors, as the minister so rightly stated, it is a growing portion of our society. It's an important part and of course it is growing.

When we all think about our own selves growing older, it's something like comparing what we experienced with the coming Millennium 2000. We knew it was coming sometime in the future and then all of a sudden it's actually here. So we're very pleased to learn about these new initiatives.

Mr. Speaker, seniors have been a very integral part of the development, certainly of our province, of our culture and our society. They've developed our province substantively in the past and they continue to contribute very greatly. They have set the standards. They have set the expectations for us and in fact have put the reputation of our province before us, and we commend them for that.

And we owe them a great deal. So we can't just categorize seniors right out of our attention because they are continuing to be an integral part of our province. So we can't categorize them as just aged or seniors or older people because, in fact, they as well as us, continue to pay taxes, they purchase utilities, and they pay fees and they utilize the facilities such as extended care and health services.

So we cannot forget that, while these new initiatives are very constructive and commendable, we are also making it continually more difficult on the other hand for seniors in the day-to-day living and coping with these increases in taxes — great hikes — along with the shrinking services; and especially for those seniors that are on fixed retirement incomes.

So, Mr. Speaker, we agree with these programs that are referred to by the minister, and they are in fact a step in the right direction for both the seniors as well as our communities. And we look forward to the unfolding of these programs called Senior Friendly. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Mr. Speaker, before orders of the day I seek leave under rule 46 to move an emergency motion regarding transportation.

TABLING OF REPORTS

The Speaker: — Before I do that, hon. members, and I will recognize the minister, I have the duty to table in the House, before orders of the day, the *Annual Report on Operations For the Year Ended March 31, 2000* submitted by the Provincial Auditor, and I so table.

I would ask the hon. minister to indicate to this House briefly the urgency of the motion he is proposing without notice.

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — In light of the announcement yesterday regarding accelerated elevator closures, we think it's imperative that we impress on the federal government, first of all, the impact that this will have on our roads here in Saskatchewan; and that we desperately need the federal government at the table with us in trying to resolve this issue.

Leave granted.

MOTION UNDER RULE 46

Impact of Accelerated Elevator Closures on Saskatchewan Rural Roads

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'll be very brief. First of all, I wish to introduce a motion:

That this Assembly call on the federal government to immediately provide more funding to relieve increased pressure on Saskatchewan rural road system due to yesterday's announced accelerated elevator consolidation in the grain handling industry.

Farmers in rural communities are facing unprecedented challenges due to rapid changes in grain handling and transportation and our transportation system. We have seen the elimination of the Crow benefit and a decline in federal support for agriculture. Farmers have consistently borne the brunt of these changes in the federal grain policy. And of course the province has consistently borne the brunt of these changes on our rural road system.

Rationalization of Saskatchewan's grain collection system is estimated to increase road impact costs by up to \$85 million annually, Mr. Speaker. Right now those costs are at about 50 million per year. Increased grain handling . . . or grain trucking to high throughput elevators and other changes in the grain collection system has caused serious problems in the rural road system.

The number of grain delivery points in Saskatchewan has declined dramatically in the 1990s. The average haul distance increase from farm to elevator has doubled since the early 1980s. The closure of rail lines and elevators has increased the amount of heavy truck traffic causing our road network . . . using our road network I should say, by about 860 per cent since 1984. By 2005, total grain haul is expected to increase by an additional 42 per cent.

(1100)

The federal government continues to underestimate the actual

haul and transportation needs being experienced in Western Canada, and especially here in Saskatchewan. The federal government must respond to our concerns now, Mr. Speaker. The federal government, with our input, needs to create a long-term program to help fund the road impacts in Saskatchewan caused by elevator consolidation because a good deal of the change is yet to take place, Mr. Speaker.

It has been a long, difficult spring. Today we are asking for immediate funding from the federal government, but Saskatchewan believes we need more transitional funding. We need a sustainable road network, and the federal government must help us now.

The cost of the Crow benefit was \$320 million per year and it was a major shift in federal transportation policy, which resulted in huge impacts on our provincial highway system, especially the elevator consolidation and rail-line abandonment.

In the last four years the Department of Highways and Transportation's budget has increased by almost 50 per cent. The 2000-2001 budget of 250 million is the largest expenditure in Saskatchewan's history. But, Mr. Speaker, obviously that is still not enough, given the huge changes in transportation.

Despite that big transportation budget, we simply don't have enough money to fix all of the roads, Mr. Speaker. Saskatchewan and Alberta . . . Saskatchewan has more I should say . . . Saskatchewan has more roads, Mr. Speaker, than Alberta and Manitoba combined. And as I said earlier, total grain haul onto Saskatchewan roads has seen an increase of 860 per cent since 1984.

Changes in federal transportation policy have had a far greater impact on Saskatchewan than any other western province. Over 40 per cent of all grains grown in Canada are grown here in Saskatchewan.

The province of Saskatchewan is doing its part. We need the federal government to step up to the plate and do their part. I want to thank all members for giving me leave to make this statement, and I would therefore, Mr. Speaker, move, seconded by the member from Regina Qu'Appelle Valley:

That this Assembly call on the federal government to immediately provide more funding to relieve increased pressures on Saskatchewan's rural road system due to accelerated consolidation of the grain handling and transportation system.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wartman: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I would like to speak to this motion as seconder, but before I do I would ask leave of the House to introduce guests please.

Leave granted.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Mr. Wartman: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In your gallery, I have two friends that I would like to introduce to you and to this Chamber — Rodger Linka, who was very helpful in my

campaign, and son Dan, who has also helped out in my campaign for the election, and have remained steadfast in support and help.

I would ask all to welcome them to this Assembly.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

MOTION UNDER RULE 46

Impact of Accelerated Elevator Closures on Saskatchewan Rural Roads (continued)

Mr. Wartman: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think this is a very important motion for us. There is a tremendous need for more funding from the federal government to support our highway system, our road system in this province. We know that the increased traffic of grain haul is devastating our light-surface roads in the province.

I share the frustration of many of the people who have to travel those roads time and time again in their vehicles. The difficulty that there is in getting by without increased damage to those vehicles is really . . . I mean it's just not right.

Mr. Speaker, the big part of the problem is the lack of money that the federal government has been putting into this program. They take a lot of money out of this province every year in taxation for gas, and it does not come back into the province.

We know that we have more roadway than both Manitoba and Alberta. We put more per capita into these roads than any . . . than the other provinces every year. In the past year we put \$229 per capita into the road in Saskatchewan, compared with \$191 in Manitoba and only 189 in the opposition's beloved Alberta.

So per capita, per capita, Mr. Speaker, we are putting far more into our roadways already. And if you look at the total budget that we're dealing with, Mr. Speaker, it is almost . . . it is so difficult when we are trying to be good stewards of all our resources.

Mr. Speaker, I can't hear myself think because of that nattering coming from the other side of the road. There's . . . Mr. Speaker, the amount of money that the federal government takes out of this province is by far too much compared to the amount of money that they're putting back in to sustain our roadways.

We cannot . . .

The Speaker: — Order. Hon. members, there will be ample opportunity for individual hon. members to debate this motion, and I would ask that you allow the speakers to be heard.

Mr. Wartman: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the provincial highway system, particularly the thin membrane system in our province, has been traumatically impacted by the shift in grain transportation from rail to roadways.

Mr. Speaker, family and friends who are farming have found

that they no longer can deliver to their local communities. They have to drive miles and miles over this thin membrane highway. And especially when those roads are shifting because of frost, when they're just . . . when it's wet, those roads break down incredibly.

We spend hundreds of thousands of dollars on each of those roads, trying to get them patched up; it rains, the trucks go over, and in no time those roads are destroyed again, Mr. Speaker.

Safety becomes an issue and we — doing our utmost to provide a good stewardship of this province's resources — put money into repairing those highways; the trucks go over them and they are broken up again in short order.

Mr. Speaker, with the increasing commodity haul, these TMS (thin membrane surface) highways cannot be cost effect . . .

The Speaker: — Order, please. These side debates are interfering with the hon. member's right to be heard in this Hon. Assembly.

Mr. Wartman: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With the increasing commodity haul, some TMS highways cannot be cost-effectively maintained as a dust-free surface. In these instances the department may have to convert sections of the TMS to a gravel surface.

We would prefer to be able to keep the highways in better shape, to be able to convert them to a heavier pavement. But given all of the demands in this province for our limited resources, Mr. Speaker, it is an impossible task. We would like to do it; we are unable to because we have education costs, we have health care costs that continue to skyrocket.

We have put more money provincially into our Highways and Transportation budget than has been put in ever before. We have committed to \$2.5 billion over 10 years.

Mr. Speaker, we are reaching that commitment. Mr. Speaker, each year we are pumping whatever resources we can into maintaining this massive system and in trying to provide good access, good transportation possibilities.

But, Mr. Speaker, with the change from rail to road, we are unable to do that adequately without funding from the federal government. The federal government, as our minister has said, took a whole lot of money — \$360 million — with the change to the Crow benefit.

They take \$225 million plus out of the province in taxes for gasoline and what do they put back in? Next to nothing — a couple of million. That doesn't help us, Mr. Speaker. We need a lot more put into this highway system if we're going to maintain it.

Mr. Speaker, the department is taking every effort — every effort — to minimize the conversions, but expects that we will still have to convert up to 400 kilometres by this fall. This is not what we would prefer to do. As I said earlier, Mr. Speaker, we would prefer to be able to upgrade these highways. But without the support of this nation — we're a small province, we grow most of the grain — without the support of the rest of this

nation we cannot provide the kind of quality transportation that our citizens need.

Mr. Speaker, we present this motion because we know that the federal government has to get on board; they have to carry their share of the load, which they are not now presently doing. Mr. Speaker, I am convinced that if they put the proportional share into our highways, we would be able to repair those roads.

Now the other thing that's happening, Mr. Speaker, is safety becomes one of the key issues for us. We saw in the accident down in the southeast corner of the province how devastating that problem can be not to have twinned highways. So together with our members opposite we put together a motion to the federal government calling for support in twinning those highways. That's helpful.

But it does not — does not — address the problem that we're facing in our rural areas. We need to have the federal government support to build those roads up to standard.

And so we make this motion, and I second this motion calling on the federal government to put more money — out of the money they take from this province — to put more money back into maintaining and sustaining our roadways, Mr. Speaker.

I second this motion.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Elhard: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, under ordinary circumstances, I would be prepared to support a motion like this. But there's one small flaw with it, and that is that it doesn't in any respect indicate the provincial government's responsibility at all.

Now the interesting thing about this, Mr. Speaker, is that we know by matter of law that highways in this province and all the provinces for that matter . . .

The Speaker: — Order! Hon. members will have an opportunity to debate. I'd ask members on both sides to kindly allow the member speaking to be heard.

Mr. Elhard: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The reality is that the provincial government has the responsibility by law for the highway system in this province. That's true of every province in this Confederation.

And the fact of the matter is that the provincial government, while it may have financial constraints and wants the support of the federal government, needs to take responsibility for the decisions it has made in the past.

We have looked at some of the figures for highway funding over the past nine years. And I've heard many figures quoted here today, some of which I won't even try to dispute — I think they're accurate. But there are some other figures that need to be brought to the attention of this House.

Over the last nine years of this government's role of responsibility as the agency responsible for apportioning the money on an annual basis, the Highways department has

received an average of \$199 million.

Now while we talk about a \$250 million Highways budget currently, the fact of the matter is that that department has been dramatically and consistently underfunded by this administration. From the time it took power in 1991, the Department of Highways budget was gutted, and we have now seen the end result of that decision.

The previous administration spent an average, as I understand it, of about \$219 million per year. That money would be considerably greater if you took the inflation factor into consideration there. So what we've had is a consistent underfunding of the budget for the Department of Highways.

In view of the difficulties with the current budget and the amount of money necessary to meet the needs of our highways, I had a discussion with the deputy minister last fall and asked him for his view of what would be required to bring funding for highways to an adequate level. His response to me was \$400 million a year. That might allow the department to catch up to the requirements of the rural highways system.

We're not likely to see \$400 million a year in highway funding from this administration. And I don't know that we'll ever hope to get that kind of help out of the federal government, especially when it was this government's decision to minimize the budget in the first instance.

This particular situation that has developed, while crucial, should not come as a surprise to anyone. When you underfund the budget for maintenance consistently in many years in a row, for many years in a row, you're going to have the kind of failures that we've got now. Maintenance was necessary in 1991, '92, '93, '94, '95. We're just now seeing the end results of that failure to maintain the roads in those early years of this administration.

Mr. Speaker, the abandonment of rail lines, the consolidation of elevators, the closures that have necessarily come as a result of those decisions, are not things that have just happened in the last year or two. We've been talking about rail line abandonment. We've known it was coming for at least 10 to 15 years. We've seen it accelerated over the last decade.

And I need to ask this government what in fact it did. What did this government do to forestall, to try to dissuade the rail companies from abandoning these routes? What did this government do? What active role did this government play in trying to prevent the abandonment of rail lines? What is their record in that regard?

The other thing I want to ask is why did this government not know that elevator consolidation would eventually take place? The Saskatchewan Wheat Pool is the largest elevator company operating in this province and they have had a closer working relationship with this government than any other elevator or grain handling company. Surely this government ought to have known what one of its chief allies and supporters was intending to do in terms of elevator abandonment or of closure.

And if they didn't, they ought to have known. I think that what some of this boils down to is mismanagement and neglect on

the part of this government. It's a situation that they ought to have been aware. And if they weren't, there's an element of incompetency that has to be levelled against them.

Mr. Speaker, we have heard about the reverting of roads back to gravel. We've talked about that a lot. We've heard a lot of comments. We've seen the angst that has arisen among the people whose communities are going to be faced with this.

We've been told that this is being done for safety reasons. It's ironic, Mr. Speaker, that safety is being given as the primary justification for this move, when 50 years ago thin membrane surfaces were being applied to roads across the province for exactly the same reason. Gravel was deemed to be unsafe. We needed this kind of pavement to provide safe travelling environments for the people of this province.

We've heard also about the cost per capita that the people of Saskatchewan are asked to contribute the roads of this province. And I might say that while that figure could be accurate, the underlying explanation is always ignored by the government. The fact of the matter is we pay more per capita for our roads because simply we have more roads but we have fewer people.

And I'd like to ask, who's going to take the responsibility for that fact? Why is it that we have a small population? Why has our population not grown beyond the 1 million point in the last 60 years? Why is that? Does that not coincide with the 50 years of NDP socialist philosophy? Has that not played a part in this whole discussion? Maybe we owe more money per capita for that reason alone. I think that that's something that needs to be considered in these discussions, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, first of all we have the government saying that we need more money for the highways, but secondarily they've encouraged the people of rural Saskatchewan to do their own highway repairs. I'm just wondering how that jives in terms of contradiction and juxtaposition in view of this whole discussion here.

Is it in fact the case that if we don't get more money from the federal government we're going to have to ask the citizens of rural Saskatchewan to fix more of their own potholes? I'd like to know if that's going to be the natural outcome of this.

We have a by-election coming up in the extreme southwest, Mr. Speaker, in just a few days from now. And believe it or not, highways have become the number one issue in the Wood River constituency. And having driven some of those roads, having met some of the people down there, having toured that area because of some other business issues that I've had to pursue personally, I can actually say, Mr. Speaker, that if it wasn't the number one issue, I'd have been very surprised.

Highways in the Wood River constituency have become a disaster, and I think that the people of that area are going to clearly indicate by the vote outcome who they believe is really responsible for highways in this province.

I don't believe a single person in Wood River will go to the polls believing that the highways are in deteriorating shape and in serious need of repair because the federal government hasn't contributed their share. I think they are going to place the blame

where the blame rightly belongs and that is with this government.

Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, while I will wrap up my comments very briefly, I want to indicate that the federal government seems almost totally reluctant to participate in this area of need.

I recall when we did a unanimous resolution asking for twinning funds for the No. 1 Highway East and West, and for the No. 16 Highway, we worked jointly in this House; we passed the resolution unanimously.

We sent a letter to the Minister of Transportation, federally, and it took him a considerable amount of time to respond, and when he did, he was less than forthcoming. He talked about the amount of money that the federal government spends on infrastructure and what their projected expenditures will be in the next several years. But in reality, the federal government doesn't anticipate spending any money of any serious nature on infrastructure until the year 2003. And when they do, out of the \$550 million they are proposing for projects all across the country, only 150 million will go for strategic highway infrastructure.

I assume that \$150 million will have to be apportioned out, based on population statistics, and that's going to leave Saskatchewan with very little money to do anything in terms of highway infrastructure.

Just recently the minister responsible for the Wheat Board, the Hon. Ralph Goodale, spoke with some conviction about the government recognizing the need for highway funding in Saskatchewan. And yet when push came to shove and we got a little money out of the federal government for transportation issues, it boiled down to \$105 million roughly for the province of Saskatchewan over five years — an average of \$21 million a year for five years.

Now, what's ironic about that is that isn't money over and above the CAIP (Canada/Saskatchewan Agri-Infrastructure Program) program that had been in existence; it's money that will replace the CAIP program and is totally inadequate to accomplish anything.

As I understand it, \$21 million would probably only build us about 42 kilometres of good highway. And when you spread 42 kilometres of decent highway throughout the province, it's next to nothing at all.

So the federal government doesn't seem in the least concerned about our needs out here. And maybe the reason for that, Mr. Speaker, is that they don't see the provincial government as taking their responsibility in this area seriously at all. I think that the federal government might be much more inclined to participate if they saw this government take this issue and run with it, work with it, and employ the resources that they've got specifically to the needs of these highways in the rural area.

What they have seen is the Department of Highways spend money in many other areas — not on the roads itself. And I think that's part of the reason why the federal government is so reticent to get involved in this financing issue.

Mr. Speaker, we in this province generate \$347 million plus a little in fuel taxes alone. We generate another \$112 million in motor vehicle fees. That gives us a total of \$460 million. The Highways budget as a whole is 250 million, but when you break out the actual highway maintenance and highway construction portion of that budget, it's \$170.8 million.

Mr. Speaker, when we generate \$460 million in revenue and only spend \$170 million of our own money on highways, how seriously are we taking the problem? What is the extent of our concern here? Percentage-wise it's not very high — 36 per cent of our own revenue goes into that area of highway maintenance and repair.

And I think the federal government can look at that and can say with some legitimacy that we're not doing our own province any great turn by underfunding it, why should they participate?

And so, Mr. Speaker, I cannot support the motion as read. I would like to move an amendment to the motion which reads as follows; following the last word of the amendment I would like to add the words:

but recognizes as well that the provincial government is responsible for the state of Saskatchewan's highways.

This motion is moved by myself, and seconded by the member from Cannington . . . amendment. I'm sorry.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I have to agree with the amendment as put forward by the member from Cypress. Because I do believe, Mr. Speaker, as do all of the people in Saskatchewan, that highways are the responsibility of this provincial government.

Now we have seen a long history of this government trying to abdicate their responsibilities. They simply refuse to ever accept responsibility for any of their actions. That has been one of the hallmarks of this government for the last nine years.

What we see here today with the motion as presented by the Minister of Highways is simply a crass attempt to save a little bit of face in the Wood River by-election, Mr. Speaker.

If they were listening to the CBC reports this morning, they would certainly have felt the mood of the people of the Wood River constituency. And that mood, Mr. Speaker, is echoed across this province — that the NDP government, aided and abetted by the Liberals under Mr. Melenchuk, are responsible for every . . .

The Speaker: — Order. The hon. member would recognize that proper names are not to be used.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I apologize for that. The Minister of Education, Mr. Speaker, aids and abets this government . . .

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — Mr. Speaker, with leave to introduce a guest.

Leave granted.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — I apologize to the member for interrupting his flow of thought. It might be difficult to get back. But seriously I . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . no I'm sure it isn't, I was being facetious.

I would like all members to join with me in welcoming Phil Entz one of the Mennonite Brethren who is good enough to join with us today from the Abbey colony. I'm sure that Phil will find the debate going on in agriculture of interest, because of course being a large grain producer in that part of the province, using the roads of the province and the highways is an important part of doing business.

So welcome here today, Phil.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

MOTION UNDER RULE 46

Impact of Accelerated Elevator Closures on Saskatchewan Rural Roads (continued)

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the thought I had was not difficult to keep track of because it's the same thought everybody in Saskatchewan who drives the highways has — that this government is failing, Mr. Speaker, in their responsibility to maintain an adequate and safe highway system in this province.

Mr. Speaker, the provincial government, as I have said, is abdicating its responsibility to maintain the roads and highways of this province. They have even, Mr. Speaker, reduced the amount of money that they've put into construction from last year's budget. They've reduced it down to \$61 million, Mr. Speaker, for construction.

They're calling on the federal government, Mr. Speaker, to put more money in. The federal government just announced last week that they're putting \$60 million into construction of roads and highways around this province.

Mr. Speaker, they're matching the amount of money that this government is putting into place for highway construction, and yet you look at the taxes that are collected. This government, in fuel taxes, collects \$347 million. In licensing fees on vehicles — not insurance, Mr. Speaker, licence fees only — they are collecting \$112 million, for a total, Mr. Speaker, of almost \$460 million.

How much do they put back that actually reaches the road: \$61 million in construction and another \$120 million, Mr. Speaker — I believe it's 120 — in maintenance; 109 my colleague says, \$109 million in maintenance. Mr. Speaker, that amounts to 37 per cent of the money they collect from drivers in this province that should go to road maintenance.

The federal government in turn, Mr. Speaker, collects about \$240 million, again a significant amount of money. But they have responsibility, Mr. Speaker, not just for highways. They have responsibility for the entire transportation system.

And, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker, there is money coming from the federal government, but the majority of that money, Mr. Speaker, should be coming from the provincial government.

Mr. Speaker, we have here a coalition government, a coalition government of NDP and Liberals. I have no idea why the Premier simply can't turn to his colleague, the Minister of Education, and say, Mr. Minister of Education, can't you phone up your buddies in Ottawa, tell Jean Chrétien, Ralph Goodale, who's supposed to be the minister responsible for Saskatchewan, and do something about this? Get some of that tax money.

The Minister of Education is always bragging about how successful he is in influencing this government. Does he have no influence then with the federal government? Do they simply ignore him? Does Ralph Goodale even know what his name is? Obviously not, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the government opposite brags all the time about how much money they're actually putting into highways. Well even, Mr. Speaker, if you include all of their massive bureaucracy in the highway spending, it's still only amounts to 54 per cent, Mr. Speaker, 54 per cent of the dollars they collect.

Now the Minister of Highways stood up today and said, oh my gosh, they're accelerating the closure of elevators. That should be no surprise, Mr. Speaker, the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool announced it a year ago. But I guess with the current government's methods of communications, their disregard for our transportation system, our communication system, it may have taken a year for that information to actually reach the Minister of Highways.

Yesterday the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool announced its list of closures of elevators. That was the only change, Mr. Speaker. We knew it was coming it was just a matter of which particular elevator it was going to happen.

Mr. Speaker, I find it extremely surprising that the members opposite who have a very close relationship with the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool, you might say, Mr. Speaker, that they work hand in glove, would not have had this information prior to the announcement yesterday.

But perhaps they didn't. Perhaps that relationship is no longer as close as it once was. Perhaps, Mr. Speaker, it's simply a matter that the government opposite really doesn't care what happens in rural Saskatchewan. Because that certainly seems to be the direction that they have been going.

The member from Regina Northwest, I believe it is . . . Regina Qu'Appelle, the farmer from downtown Regina, talked about the per capita costs of highway construction in this province. Mr. Speaker, the amount of highways in this province hasn't changed in likely 30 or 40 years. The number of people in this province certainly hasn't changed in the last 60-some years. In fact it is reduced by 1,600 people last year. So the per capita costs for highways hasn't changed.

The governments in previous years, Mr. Speaker, all faced — all faced — those kind of costs. The difference is though, Mr. Speaker, is the priorities of this current government, which is not to fix highways and the acceptance, Mr. Speaker, of the

responsibilities of government. This government does not accept responsibility for any — any — of its actions. Doesn't accept responsibility for highways, doesn't accept responsibility for health care, doesn't accept responsibility for taxation levels, doesn't accept responsibility for education.

Mr. Speaker, this government likes to use the terms for itself of — NDP. Mr. Speaker, in reality today in Saskatchewan, that means no darn pavement. That's what it means. No pavement in Saskatchewan. That's the direction that they are going, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I will be supporting the amendment put forward by my colleague.

Do the federal government hold any responsibility in this, Mr. Speaker? Well, they certainly collect lots of taxes from our drivers for using the roads, and they do bear some responsibility, Mr. Speaker. They do, indeed, and it's their responsibility to put the money in.

However, it's the responsibility of the provincial government to do likewise, and they have been failing miserably, Mr. Speaker, in meeting their commitments to the highway structures.

Two hundred and nineteen million . . . no, \$199 million is the nine-year average for this government putting money into highways, \$199 million. The previous administration, Mr. Speaker, averaged \$219 million and that's not even taking into account inflation in the last ten years. So you can see in comparison, Mr. Speaker, that this government is failing in their responsibility. It's a matter of priorities.

Today this motion has been brought forward, not, Mr. Speaker, I repeat, not to help the highways in Saskatchewan, but to help their failing campaign in the Wood River constituency.

Mr. Speaker, I will be supporting the amendment as put forward by my colleague.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to take a few minutes to enter into this debate on a very important issue in my constituency, the constituency of Canora-Pelly, and in fact in that entire east-central side of the province, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, we know that transportation of products and transportation of grains especially from farm families is going to be very, very important as we move through changes in not only Saskatchewan, but right across Canada.

Mr. Speaker, the announcements yesterday by Saskatchewan Wheat Pool, as indicated by my colleague, should not be a surprise. We knew that there were 260 approximate closures that were going to take place and they were going to take place over a period of time.

The part that has come as a shock to many communities who have continued to lobby over the last number of months to try to impress upon Saskatchewan Wheat Pool that there should still be a type of service provided to many communities went

unnoticed yesterday.

And in fact the announcements of the actual places where these elevators will close — and they will be closing in the months of November and December — came as a great surprise to many of those communities and those individuals, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, we on this side of the House strongly, strongly — I say that very emphatically, Mr. Speaker — suggest that there must be a collective, co-operative approach to transportation in this country and in this province. And we look at what farmers have been saying over the last little while and what companies, grain companies like Saskatchewan Wheat Pool have been saying and what they're doing, and we know that we have to restructure.

Because I want to inform the House, Mr. Speaker, that in the constituency of Canora-Pelly there were, prior to about three or four years ago, there were 16 communities that had Saskatchewan Wheat Pool elevators in them — 16, Mr. Speaker. Over the last few years the communities of Rama, Mikado, Sheho, Insinger, Amsterdam, Stenen, and Gorlitz have had their Pool elevators closed, and they are either sitting vacant right now or in fact they have been destroyed and buried.

Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool announced that further closures will take place in the communities of Hyas, Pelly, Sturgis, Preeceville, Theodore, Buchanan, and Invermay.

Mr. Speaker, do you know that that now brings to a total of 14 communities that will no longer be served by Saskatchewan Wheat Pool elevator?

What's left in the Canora-Pelly constituency? Two communities being served by the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool, that being the community of Canora and the community of Foam Lake.

Mr. Speaker, yesterday's announcement is going to be a shock to many because now all of that grain, that every one of these communities that I identified, that was being handled at a local level with a short distance of transportation, now has to be put on larger trucks and it has to hit the pavement, Mr. Speaker. And I don't say that figuratively. Every one of these trucks now has to travel larger distances to go to one of the other centres that has an operating elevator.

Mr. Speaker, there has not been a lot of competition in this constituency from many of the other grain companies like Pioneer or UGG (United Grain Growers) or Cargill or Parrish & Heimbecker — they're not present. So the farmers really don't have a choice — they have to put their grain on the vehicles and start moving them.

So it's very, very important, I think, Mr. Speaker, that the Minister of Highways and Transportation . . . And I say transportation because we have a good railway system in the Canora-Pelly constituency. It serves the entire constituency right now. And if we look at what has happened yesterday and if we don't take action — and I say, collectively, we, meaning the provincial government, the federal government, and local municipalities — if we don't take action now to ensure that there will be a railway system that can be used by other grain

companies, by farmers who might ship their grain through producer car systems, these kinds of changes need to be looked at now. Because you know, Mr. Speaker, full well that if a rail line is ripped up, the chances of that rail line being put back four or five years later is probably nil.

And that's why, Mr. Speaker, this motion is very, very important. It is important to indicate to the provincial government and to the federal government that they do have a responsibility, that there are communities and individuals that are looking at this. And these are not just rural communities, Mr. Speaker. Urban communities, urban communities like Yorkton and Melville that are served by farmers, need to know that indeed there is a transportation system that meets the needs of everyone not just the agricultural producers.

And my colleagues have spoken quite adequately on the condition of highways, Mr. Speaker. But I want to emphasize to the Minister of Transportation that there is a need to broaden that. There's a need to look at the entire transportation system in this province, to look at it quickly, because these closures are effective November or December of this year, Mr. Speaker. They have been accelerated.

So we need to look at that because the communities that will lose these elevators also know that they will lose other businesses as the grain is transported to other areas, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I will be supporting the amendment because I think it addresses that whole need to look at it from a provincial point of view, for the province to take responsibility for highways and transportation in this entire province. Thank you very much.

The division bells rang from 11:44 a.m. until 11:54 p.m.

Amendment negated on the following recorded division.

Yeas — 22

Elhard	Heppner	Krawetz
Draude	Boyd	Gantefoer
Toth	Eagles	Wall
Bakken	Bjornerud	D'Autremont
McMorris	Weekes	Brkich
Harpauer	Wakefield	Wiberg
Hart	Allchurch	Stewart
Kwiatkowski		

Nays — 28

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

The division bells rang from 11:56 a.m. until 11:57 a.m.

Motion agreed to on the following recorded division.

Yeas — 50

Trew	Hagel	Van Mulligen
MacKinnon	Lingenfelter	Melenchuk
Cline	Goulet	Lautermilch
Thomson	Lorje	Serby
Belanger	Nilson	Crofford
Kowalsky	Sonntag	Hamilton
Prebble	Jones	Higgins
Yates	Harper	Axworthy
Junor	Kasperski	Wartman
Addley	Elhard	Heppner
Krawetz	Draude	Boyd
Gantefoer	Toth	Eagles
Wall	Bakken	Bjornerud
D'Autremont	McMorris	Weekes
Brkich	Harpauer	Wakefield
Wiberg	Hart	Allchurch
Stewart	Kwiatkowski	

Nays — nil

The Speaker: — Why is the Deputy Premier on his feet?

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — Mr. Speaker, by leave of the Assembly, I move:

That the Speaker, on behalf of the Legislative Assembly, transmit the copies in verbatim of transcripts of the rule 46 motion and debate with respect to the increased pressure on Saskatchewan rural road systems due to the accelerated consolidation of the grain handling and transportation, to the Prime Minister of Canada, the federal minister of Highways and Transport, and the federal minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board.

I so move, seconded by the member for Meadow Lake.

Leave granted.

Motion agreed to.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

WRITTEN QUESTIONS

Mr. Yates: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Being an open and accountable government, we are extremely happy to table the response to question no. 197.

Mr. Speaker, it's a very simple answer so the members opposite can understand it.

The Speaker: — The answer to question 197 is tabled.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

**Bill No. 1 — The Farm Financial Stability
Amendment Act, 1999**

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — Seated to my right, Susie Miller, the assistant deputy minister, who is acting . . . no, not acting, assistant deputy minister; and seated to her right is our acting director of agriculture research — and I always have trouble pronouncing — Mr. Grajczyk; and seated to my left Merv Ross, inspection and regulatory management.

Clause 1

(1200)

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Minister, welcome to you and to your officials. With respect to The Farm Financial Stability Act, I'm wondering, Mr. Minister, what implications or what kind of impact do you think this piece of legislation will have on the stability of the farm community in Saskatchewan these days.

Obviously there are farms that are under a great deal of financial stress right now. They're going through a period of time where there is very, very low commodity prices. I certainly recognize that this will have an impact and have a — we all hope — a positive impact.

Have you any way of gauging what kind of impact it will have on farm producers in the province?

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — If I could, I would quote from a note here I have from the department which basically says:

The amendments to the Act are required to strengthen the procedures where the associations are winding down.

That's one element. Or where a guarantee has been paid.

So in essence by strengthening the procedures, the risk to the association, the lender and the government will be reduced.

So the amendments will also facilitate the joint purchase of commodities, a common business practice in the custom operating of feeding and . . . in the feedlot operations.

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Minister, I'm sure your office is getting calls, and certainly our office is getting calls as well, with respect to the situation in agriculture.

I was over to the Farm Progress Show and I'm going over again later this afternoon, and I think you've had opportunity to attend the show as well. And there are many farmers, obviously, in looking at the latest innovations and the latest equipment but they are also certainly troubled about the situation in agriculture. And it's — as you and I both know — it's a kind of a double-edged sword. On one hand, we recognize that there is a limited amount that governments of all type can address and help in agriculture. On the other hand, they really see no other way to turn. They are doing everything.

And you go to the Farm Progress Show over there, and you'll see very clearly a lot of the latest technology and a lot of the innovations. And a lot of the sort of direction that agriculture is

going is to move in the direction of trying to plant a whole new range of crops, trying to diversify into speciality crops, trying to diversify into various livestock opportunities. I believe that our producers are doing the absolute most and best they possibly can to help their own situation along.

But I wonder if you might, as Minister of Agriculture, care to comment on what kind of timeframes your department feels we'll be looking at in terms of this continued down cycle. Are there any opportunities in terms of price escalation as we move through the summer months?

I follow the commodities market as many other . . . as all other farmers do very closely. We are not seeing much of changes in prices these days. The drought situation in the United States, which was predicted earlier on, really isn't materializing. A lot of the Midwest is receiving adequate rainfall. And as a result of that, corn prices and soybean prices really haven't moved all that much — a little bit; not much.

There's still some potential for a run-up but it appears to be diminishing almost daily. So that means we are going to be . . . we will continue to be in this low commodity price cycle for it appears some time.

And I wonder what your department's analysis of that is? Is that accurate? Are we looking and will continue to look for low commodity prices for some time, or is there any optimism in terms of price escalation, Mr. Minister?

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — I think the member from Kindersley has fairly described the situation in the grains and oil seeds. And I think we really have to remember there are a number of different components to the agricultural scene in Saskatchewan which dictate whether or not our farm families are making a decent living.

If you look at cattle for example, those who grow . . . I think, at the present time our cow herd is about 1.1 million. Those people who are well established in cattle are actually having a very, very excellent year; not only are the prices strong but the grass conditions in the spring were excellent for calving. So the cattle producers are doing as well or better than normal.

Hog prices have gone up very dramatically from some of their low prices, although they've come off a little bit in the last few weeks. But the hog producers are doing well, those who are established.

Now within any of these components of course, in cattle and hogs, even though the prices are stable, you would find some producers who struggle, as you would understand is always the case.

But in the general area of livestock, even in some of the new, more, let's say, exotic areas of elk and bison, the whole area of deer, they seem to be doing extremely well. And this weekend we're going to be going to Weyburn where the bison association is having an event, and I expect there to be lot of optimism in that particular sector.

If you go to northern Saskatchewan wild rice, our wild rice producers have moved very dramatically into organic. And

simply by labelling their product, which is obviously organic but it just hadn't been used as a sales mechanism, by labelling all of the wild rice from northern Saskatchewan as organic, they are getting some nice premiums as they sell it into other parts of Canada and the United States.

But if you go to the grains and oilseeds which is what your question is about, you are absolutely right there is a continuing issue of prices and support in other countries.

And far from removal of subsidies, I was seeing some reports on subsidy in the United States, and when you and I were Ottawa last fall we were using the number of 56 cents in a dollar in the US (United States), that has gone up by 2 points to 58 cents on a dollar . . . no it's gone from 36 to 38. But in Europe the increase has been even more dramatic.

Now our subsidies have also gone up in Canada, from 9 per cent to 11, but the issue of subsidies is not going away and continues.

Now in terms of the commodity market in Chicago which sets the price for a lot of the world grains and oilseeds, I think you're right again where there was an expected drought.

In fact today, if you look at much of the Midwest, you'll find that what is driving the market, vibrating up a tiny bit, is actually too much rain where some of the diseases are now settling in to the corn — and mildew and that kind of thing — which almost 180 degrees, where it was a big concern of drought and now it's too much moisture in several of the areas.

And this has also affected bean prices which were expected to stay well above \$5 — in the 5.50 to \$6 — and they have dropped off and I think some of the futures are now below \$5 and are trading around 4.85. The people who trade in commodities, and I keep in close contact with them, expect bean prices in the States, which then influences canola, to drop to probably around 450 during harvest time.

But there is also a growing group of traders who are saying it will bottom out in October or November, and there is the potential of some pretty significant increases as you end the year and go into next year. But to put any faith in those kind of long-term, turnaround predictions is a very, very difficult way for farmers to make decisions.

So to make a long story short on the commodity prices, I think there is some ray of hope but there is nothing on the immediate horizon that would say the need for subsidies will go away quickly.

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Well that underscores the need for some degree of government intervention. As you know, I'm not a very strong proponent of intervention into the economy, certainly by government's of any stripe, but we have a situations . . . and I'm speaking not only to you, but the larger question and larger audience, I suppose, when we say from this side of the House we certainly have concerns in that area.

We feel we would like to see the marketplace work as much as possible. But when the marketplace is so influenced by forces that are not related to the marketplace, government intervention

from not just the United States but the European common market and other countries as well, it distorts it to the point where commodity prices have virtually collapsed in many areas and many commodity areas.

And at that point, you know, you have to start questioning, I suppose, whether or not government has a role to play. And I have, and you know I think we all wrestle with this question; how much is appropriate, where is the right balance and those kinds of things?

I know the Premier has made statements earlier in this whole ag debate over the last number of months that he felt the appropriate level was a level similar to or meeting with the expectations in other countries like the United States.

And I'm wondering from your department if you could outline for us what kind of intervention that would be. I think you would find, Mr. Minister, that we're not talking about tens of millions, we're not perhaps even talking about hundreds of millions. We're into very, very large numbers very fast.

And that, I think, is the kind of demonstrable differences and hurt that there is in Canadian agriculture as opposed to the American agriculture situation, or even more on the international scene with the ECC.

So we certainly are at a huge disadvantage. We understand that there are limits and that there is a certain amount of taxpayer resistance to continued putting money into agriculture.

On the other hand, if you look at it . . . if there were any other area that we were so impacted on, governments would be acting. No question about it in my mind.

For example, if the automobile industry in Ontario was affected in this fashion, I think you would see Ottawa acting, and I think you would see Ottawa acting extremely decisively and quickly.

If you saw the American automobile industry, as an example, deciding that they were going to corner . . . or they were going to try and gain more market share on the international scene, they decided to subsidize their automobile manufacturers to the tune of 40 per cent and put our producers of automobiles at a disadvantage of about 40 per cent, how quickly would that industry dry up? Or how quickly, more appropriately, would governments act in that regard? And I think you would see that they'd be acting very, very quickly.

But when it comes to agriculture unfortunately, and as a producer I think we all share some responsibility in this area, it's been an ongoing, continued problem for a long, long time — for years and years and years. And we understand and I understand that people grow weary of this debate that we continue to have and how we do . . . how we continue down that road.

And I know members on your side of the House, and I've had lots of opportunity to speak to them — and this is not meant as any kind of a slam against them — I think that there is resistance. And there is a resistance on this side of the House at times as well. There's certainly resistance in the communities that we represent all across Saskatchewan.

I think we have to do a better job collectively, all of us — this side of the House, your side of the House — of explaining this situation, to try and gain some sort of support for the plight that farmers are faced with.

And frankly, I think that when we have situations where assistance comes forward, I think we can do better in terms of communicating how that assistance is arrived at or why it's being put forward and all of those kinds of things.

So, Mr. Minister, when we look at The Farm Financial Stability Act here, I think this is an area where we can put forward our best foot in terms of pointing out the differences, pointing out the significant disadvantage that producers are faced with here in Saskatchewan and in indeed all of Canada when it comes to agriculture. And I would appeal to you, and you can count on members on this side of the House being prepared to assist in those efforts.

We think that the industry is worth working with. We think the industry is worth attempting to intervene to a point, and a point that is necessary.

So, Mr. Minister, at this point, Mr. Minister, and Mr. Chair, we would conclude our questions with respect to this piece of legislation.

The Chair: — Oh, committee members, and Minister, I apologize that . . . there's a House amendment to clause 1. And before I call clause 1, I have to recognize the Minister of Agriculture to introduce the amendment to the Bill.

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — Yes, it's my understanding that in the short title of the Act, rather than being cited as The Farm Financial Stability Amendment Act, 1999, the amendment would read, The Farm Financial Stability Amendment Act, 2000.

And I would so move.

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 1 as amended agreed to.

Clauses 2 to 12 inclusive agreed to.

The committee agreed to report the Bill as amended.

**Bill No. 2 — The Animal Identification
Amendment Act, 1999**

Clause 1

Mr. Stewart: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Minister, I'd also like to welcome your officials, incidentally, and thank them for attending today.

I understand that this animal identification referred to will be accomplished by the use of conventional large, plastic ear tags. Do you know if that's true, sir?

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — I think you're referring to the national identification program, which really has nothing to do

with . . . it's not related to this Bill.

Mr. Stewart: — Well that really answers my question. Thank you.

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — Mr. Chairman, if I could, I would move the amendment to clause 1, just while we're on clause 1.

And it's the same as in the previous Bill — and I apologize for this — but rather than the title being The Animal Identification Amendment Act, 1999, I would make a motion that we amend that to be Animal Identification Act Amendment, 2000. I so move.

Amendment agreed to.

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Minister, we've been hearing from some folks in the livestock industry, not necessarily the representatives of the industry, but people, producers within the industry, some degree of resistance or hesitancy with respect to this tagging program.

Have you been receiving concerns and complaints with respect to this? And what is the . . . Could you explain to the Assembly the nature of their concerns and how your department intends to handle the concerns that they may have?

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — I think there — and I don't say this in any negative way — but I think there's some confusion about this Bill.

We have had no concerns about changes to this Bill from either organizations or producers. I think what the concern is, under the national identification program, that there are concerns about some of the potentials within the national identification program.

But under this Bill, the changes that are being made here are not related to that. And I think this is, because of the title of the Bill, I think there's an assumption that this has something to do with the national identification program, and I assure the members of the committee that it doesn't.

Clause 1 as amended agreed to.

Clauses 2 to 6 inclusive agreed to.

The committee agreed to report the Bill as amended.

**Bill 24 — The Department of Agriculture
Amendment Act, 2000**

Clause 1

Mr. Boyd: — Mr. Minister, just . . . I believe just one short question with respect to this piece of legislation. In section 7.1, which is a new section under this Act, it states that, in part (a), that:

. . . the minister may, on behalf of the Government . . . acquire, by purchase or otherwise, personal property, including securities.

What does that mean? What exactly is meant with the word “otherwise”?

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — I think the example that best would explain why this section is needed is, from time to time through department and department agencies, we may get involved in research and development. Let’s use the example at Innovation Place where we use taxpayers’ dollars to be working within a patent right or in terms of the research and development, and then that goes on to be patented and there actually becomes a profit stream. It allows for the ability, not necessarily, but the ability for a revenue stream to come back to the taxpayers as a result of money that would have been put in at the front-end, in terms of research and development.

And I might say, it’s a relatively common way that governments are now trying to get some return on the investment that’s made within research and development.

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Chair, Mr. Minister. So we can be assured then, that by purchase or otherwise, doesn’t mean expropriation.

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — The member will know that that will not be the issue, that there is no attempt or means within the legislation for us to want to, or even conceive of that kind of an option.

Clause 1 agreed to.

Clauses 2 to 18 inclusive agreed to.

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would move the committee report the Bill without amendment; and if I could by leave, to ask the committee to introduce guests.

The Chair: — I’ll conduct the vote first.

The committee agreed to report the Bill.

Leave granted.

(1230)

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — Mr. Speaker, Mr. Chairman, with us today, a group of Mennonite brethren from Elma, Manitoba who are here to take in Farm Progress. And I think it’s an example of how Farm Progress and the people who have managed this operation for 23 years, have come together from Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, to put on a world-class agricultural show and I just urge anyone who hasn’t had a chance to go there to go out and look around.

But seated in the Speaker’s gallery and I just ask them to stand when they’re introduced; Sharon Giesbrecht, Shauna Giesbrecht, Cynthia Giesbrecht, Johanna Giesbrecht, Matthew Giesbrecht, Donelda Goohsen, Raquell Goohsen, Kendall Goohsen, and Vincent Penner.

And I would like all members present to join with me in welcoming our friends from Manitoba here today, and I’m sure

that they will enjoy their stay in Regina and in the province of Saskatchewan.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

Bill No. 42 — The Cattle Marketing Deductions Amendment Act, 2000

Clause 1

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. We have a few questions that we might want to ask on this Bill, Mr. Chair.

But I would also beg the indulgence of the Assembly to welcome the guests in the . . . with leave of the Assembly as well, please.

Leave granted.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. On behalf of the official opposition, we too would want to welcome our visitors from Manitoba to Regina and certainly to the province. The Farm Progress Show attracts people from indeed around the world and all the Prairie provinces.

I’m sure that the members of the colony will be very interested in the innovations that there are at the Farm Progress Show. I hope you have had a good trip to Regina, and a good stay, and we would wish you a safe journey home. Thank you.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

Bill No. 42 — The Cattle Marketing Deductions Amendment Act, 2000 (continued)

Clause 1

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Minister, with respect to this piece of legislation of dealing with the sale of, and the proceeds from collection of the levy that is being placed on the sale of cattle, livestock, certainly we feel on this side of the Assembly that it’s important that producers have a role in the research and development in their industry.

We do see from time to time, though, there is some degree of resistance in terms of how far that goes. I, as a producer, not a livestock producer but many of our members are, I think it’s generally felt that producers do have a responsibility to help and assist in terms of levies for research and development within their industry.

But I think they also feel that the general taxpayer benefits from the industry as well, and that there was a responsibility in that area. And I know that there’s a balance there and I think no one’s . . . we’re not suggesting that there is an improper balance here. What we are suggesting is, is that we have to continue to

ensure that that balance is maintained; that producers don't bear an unreasonable share of the responsibility in terms of research and development into the future.

Certainly in the cattle industry we recognize and understand that government can only go up to the line, shall we say, and not wanting to cross the line and find themselves in a position of trade retaliation particularly from our neighbours to the south when it comes to assisting in their industry.

Mr. Minister, I think that basically outlines our thoughts in that whole area and we want to be very much on the record of supporting the fact that there needs to be research and development into the industry, and that producers have a role in that assistance type of program.

But we also want to be on the record of saying that we believe that the taxpayers in general have a role to play as well.

So, Mr. Minister, at this time I think that would conclude the areas of concern in this piece of legislation.

Clause 1 agreed to.

Clauses 2 to 12 inclusive agreed to.

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — First of all, I'd like to thank my officials and members of the opposition, and move that the committee report the Bill without amendment.

The committee agreed to report the Bill.

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Minister, just before your officials leave I would want to, on behalf of the opposition I want to thank them for their assistance and thank the department for a very good job — an ongoing job that they've been doing for agriculture in this province — and thank the Minister of Agriculture for his answers.

Bill No. 25 — The Irrigation Amendment Act, 2000

The Chair: — Before I call clause 1, I'll recognize the hon. minister responsible to introduce his officials.

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Seated to my left is Micheal McDougall, general counsel; and to my right is Bill Vavra, senior technician, irrigation administration.

Clause 1

Mr. Brkich: — Mr. Chairman, I want to welcome the minister here and his officials. I just have a few questions on this Bill.

I'd like to ask about, I believe it's section 78. We've had some concerns brought to us that this section could prevent individuals bringing lawsuits against Sask Water or divisions of Sask Water such as SPUDCO (Saskatchewan Potato Utility Development Company). Could you clarify that, if that's true or not?

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — I think the short answer to your question is no. This section applies only to irrigation.

Mr. Brkich: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Does that mean that for the irrigation end, no lawsuits can be brought forth if . . . let's say if a pipe leaks and the soil is deteriorating, maybe being turned into alkali. Does that mean then an irrigator can't bring a law suit against Sask Water if he believes that Sask Water initially is doing damage to his land or crops?

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — If at any time it's shown that Sask Water or the corporation has been negligent they absolutely have the right to sue. The intent of this legislation though is as follows: is that once the soil has been tested and approved for irrigation and a certificate has been issued, unless it's shown that as I said that Sask Water has proven to be negligent in granting that certificate, then there's not an ability to sue. But this is not unlike any other pieces of legislation with respect to liability.

Mr. Brkich: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. I believe that's some assurance given to the people out there because they always want some protection, not that anybody's looking to sue unnecessarily, it's just if damage is done and caused by Sask Water they would like an avenue to recourse to get some money or have the problem rectified.

In section 24 it states:

“Where the Corporation establishes the irrigation district pursuant to section 6.1, the Corporation shall name the initial members of the district board”.

My question to the minister is, why should a new water district give the control of the initial membership to the government?

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — The intent of this amendment is that — working with the province and the community — is to create or establish a transition board so that the irrigation works can actually get up and function until such time as a duly elected board can then operate the district.

Mr. Brkich: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Can you give a time frame how that would work? And would you be consulting with people in the area how they can get on the board?

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Absolutely. Consultation would take place with the communities, as does occur now. In terms of time frame, it would be impossible to put a time frame on that. It would largely be up to the communities as to how long it would take.

Mr. Brkich: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. On that end of it, I just hope it would be very quickly because usually people in the irrigation area would like to take control or have the board of that.

On section 29, another section there, I think it deals with a little bit on future water district . . . I believe it deals with liability. It seems like the water district would assume . . . it seems like would assume 100 per cent the liability if there was any damage done basically of the water quality, which the district doesn't have any control of I don't believe.

Could you clarify that a bit more?

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — First of all, I just wanted to say to the member that there are already 18 districts currently that function under this structure, and they have no problem at all.

But clearly the intent as well is that the districts will be resuming responsibility for water quality.

(1245)

Mr. Brkich: — I'm just looking . . . I believe it reads, "accepts sole responsibility for the quality of the water supplied for irrigation services." How about if the water . . . like say the water, they really don't have control over the quality of water though. Coming maybe out of a lake, the quality could change maybe due to something that Sask Water has done — maybe building a dam, bringing another channel in — it could affect the quality of water.

Why should the district assume a hundred per cent responsibility? Would you be looking at taking some responsibility, especially if the body of water that it was being irrigated from, if there was more water being moved into it from another area that might affect the quality of that certain body of water?

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — To the member, the same way as the province would be responsible if it was shown to be negligent, the district board as well — in the circumstances, the scenario that you describe — they too would not be liable unless it was clearly shown that they'd been negligent or derelict in their duties.

Mr. Brkich: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Just one more comment and maybe a quick question on this Bill.

I know that you had consulted with some irrigation associations. And they, when I talked to them, said that they were fairly happy with some of the amendments you brought in. One of the things though they had mentioned to you was they would like to see in the future a mediation process maybe brought in — an independent mediation process because there is, over the province, different disputes with Sask Water — maybe not at the high irrigation level but at lower levels and possibly with some district boards.

I think they conveyed that to you and I will maybe mention that again, that they would like an independent mediation, maybe board, that look at problems if there is problems between Sask Water and an irrigation board, that there would be an independent board that could look at that problem.

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — I think the member makes a fair point and we recognize the concern. What we're doing right now is to work with SIPA (Saskatchewan Irrigation Projects Association) to see what sort of a mechanism or resolution we can find to their concern and hopefully that will address the issue that you raise.

Mr. Brkich: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. And I believe on this Bill I don't have any more questions. I want to thank the officials and thank the minister.

Clause 1 agreed to.

Clauses 2 to 27 inclusive agreed to.

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Just before I do that I want to thank the hon. member for the questions and I want to thank my officials for their assistance here today as well. Mr. Chair, I would therefore move we report the Bill without amendment.

The committee agreed to report the Bill.

THIRD READINGS

Bill No. 1 — The Farm Financial Stability Amendment Act, 1999

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — Mr. Speaker, I move that the amendments be now read the first and second time.

Motion agreed to.

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

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

Bill No. 2 — The Animal Identification Amendment Act, 1999

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — Mr. Speaker, I move the amendments now be read a first and second time.

Motion agreed to.

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — Mr. Speaker, by leave of the Assembly, I move the Bill be now read a third time and passed under its title.

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

Bill No. 24 — The Department of Agriculture Amendment Act, 2000

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 24 be now read a third time and passed under its title.

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

Bill No. 42 — The Cattle Marketing Deductions Amendment Act, 2000

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 42 be now read a third time and passed under its title.

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

Bill No. 25 — The Irrigation Amendment Act, 2000

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 25 be now read a third time and passed under its title.

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

COMMITTEE OF FINANCE

General Revenue Fund Saskatchewan Water Corporation Vote 50

The Chair: — Before I call the first subvote, I'll invite the hon. minister responsible for Saskatchewan Water Corporation to introduce his officials.

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Seated immediately to my left is our president, Clare Kirkland; to my left and just behind Clare is Dave Schiman, manager of financial services; seated directly behind me is Wayne Phillips, vice president of utility and engineering operations; and seated immediately to my right is Wayne Dybvig, vice president, water resource and infrastructure management.

The Chair: — Thank you, Minister.

Subvote (SW01)

Mr. Brkich: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to address a few questions. First I'd like to welcome the minister and his officials here today.

I'd like to talk about . . . ask questions about the pipelines around the Lucky Lake, Riverhurst area. There's been complaints about leakage on them. That the early breakdown of the metal of the pipe not lasting as long as they were guaranteed to.

Who is going to be responsible for replacing the pipes and also for the damage that's done to the water that's been leaking from them?

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Thank you. Before I answer that question, I'll just have a page take this over to you. These are the questions that you asked the last time we appeared in Committee of Finance and they're there for you.

With respect to the leakage that you refer to, we're currently investigating each situation. We've been fixing them and repairing them as they occur.

And we're doing some engineering studies right now to determine why there are problems, why the problems are occurring. And once we've determined that, I think then that would determine who is liable for the breakdown. But until we determine that, it would be a bit difficult for me to answer the question.

(1300)

Mr. Brkich: — Mr. Minister, I'll just read you one little piece here. Like, the farmers who draw irrigation from the pipelines, they pay into a fund for operating costs and repairs and eventual replacement. They're just worried that they want no part of paying for problems arising from the line's construction. I'll just make that statement and hope you'll take that in note. If there is a problem with constructionally . . . if it shows that

there is a problem with construction.

Another concern that has been brought to us is about supply camp channels that run across people's land. I believe you're trying to sign agreements with them. And there was one particular one, there was kind of a . . . I think it was signed six years ago. Before that you used to pay crop damage every year and you decided to pay a lump sum. You've been, I believe, kind of pushing towards that with all the producers that canals run through their land, which most of them have signed on.

They signed the agreement, but the agreement states that Sask Water is to keep water at a minimum level. But however, on this particular case — I can pass it over there if you like it — however, for the past few years the levels have been high, up to seven feet at times. And this particular person feels that . . . he's worried about who really monitors it, and what you call minimum level and what he calls minimum level.

Do you have any guidelines along that?

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — If the member is agreeable, we would request that you submit the specific concern to us; and we'll look into it and then deal with you directly on it, if that's okay with you.

Mr. Brkich: — Thank you, Mr. Minister, I will with this particular case.

But there's also a few others that I really think that maybe made formal complaints. But they — talking to areas or people in certain areas — they were worried that some water, some years, would run a little more than usual; some years a little less. So something you can take into consideration on that.

Do you have any new money coming up to the C&Ds (conservation and development authorities) for drainage projects for this upcoming budget year?

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — There'll be new projects funded this year but the level of funding is relatively the same as last year.

Mr. Brkich: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Another question on the C&D boards — were you . . . is there any indication or do you have any feelings of moving them under RM (rural municipality) administration? Or do you intend to keep them as they are or giving them maybe a little more power?

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — We've been working with the C&Ds on this sort of an issue . . . or on this issue and other issues. If there are specific changes that the C&Ds would want, we would want those to come from them. But we have a committee going, reviewing this and a whole host of issues. But the change, if it were to occur, would probably come from the C&Ds directly.

Mr. Brkich: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. I think they'll be happy to hear that.

I want to ask about . . . there's a dam I believe at Avonlea that has caused some concerns for some people there. They're worried that there is some damage has been done to it over a number of years. But they would like some work did to it — possibly raised. And I believe on the surface, some

work done to it, because they're afraid one day it just may break.

An Hon. Member: — Burst.

Mr. Brkich: — Or burst, yes.

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — A very good question. We're undertaking design work this year, and reconstruction and repairs should begin — should begin — next year. It will probably take several years to do it, but it will begin next year.

Mr. Brkich: — Thank you, and the residents there will be happy to hear that.

Another question I would like to ask you. Do you have any operations outside of Saskatchewan, or do you send any consultants outside of Saskatchewan or outside of Canada on any projects involved with . . . that Sask Water is involved in?

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — To the member. With respect to projects, we have no projects outside of the province; with respect to staff involved in projects nationally or internationally, yes we do, but they are on a cost-recovery basis and at no cost to the taxpayers of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Brkich: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Are you looking at . . . have you had any requests for new C & D districts throughout the province?

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — None of the officials here are aware of any new requests for the creation of any new C&Ds.

Mr. Brkich: — Thank you, Mr. Minister, Mr. Chairman. I don't know, I can't remember if I asked this question before, but I know there was two areas that were brought to my attention since the last time I believed we talked.

I think one was called a Sherwood C&D, they were looking at a drainage area just outside of Regina. And I think there was another area around Tuxford, Marquis area, that have been looking to try and get either an irrigation project set up through there, because there is extensive water through there that probably can be used for irrigation instead of trying to channel it somewhere else.

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — For the member's interest, you were wondering whether you had asked this question before. I don't think you have, but don't apologize for that — I've probably given you the same answer on a number of occasions on other issues as well.

With respect to the Sherwood conservation district, there's design work taking place right now, and depending on how that comes out, we may be providing funding for that. But that's not yet determined. You may not have this confused but we think maybe you do.

The other question that you refer to is not C&D, it's an irrigation district. And that's . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Okay you did have it correct. That's in the Marquis-Tuxford area and

there's very, very preliminary meetings taking place right now. But there's not much more that we could add to that other than what I've just said.

Mr. Brkich: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Yes, I guess I should have clarified a little more. I think they just wanted to make sure there are meetings, that you are looking at it, because they feel that it is a very good area to develop irrigation. The land there is very good; water close by that can be . . . channels can be run there. So I hope you take that area into consideration.

Moving to administration, what was the total amount of annual salaries for the last fiscal year for Sask Water? And this year is there going to be an increase or decrease?

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Okay to December 31, the salary in administration was 11,686,255, and there will be a decrease this year, in the year 2000.

(1315)

Mr. Brkich: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. I think most taxpayers would be happy to hear that.

Moving on to . . . I believe you have a . . . going through here, do you have a program called the rural water quality advisory program? I know there has been numerous concerns with hog operations going up and just the pesticides, the spraying. I know I've had a few calls. I don't know if this falls under your department or if it falls under Health, but I know that there has been numerous calls — not numerous but a number of calls to my office worried about water quality.

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — The member correctly identifies, we do have the rural quality water advisory program. It was started in 1997. The cost per test is \$100, which is subsidized by the corporation.

The way it works is that we would go out and do the testing. We would actually do the testing ourselves to ensure that a proper sample was taken. And once it's tested that we would then go back out and meet with the individual to go through the process as to tell . . . so as we can describe for them what was found in the tests and recommendations about what they could do to improve their water quality if it is so required. And so far we've done about 700 tests.

Mr. Brkich: — Mr. Minister, on that one, just on — another question here, I guess I wasn't quite listening — on administration, could you give me that total figure again for last year?

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Yes, of course — now, you did ask that question twice — 11,686,255.

Mr. Brkich: — I just have to double-check that. On 11 million just for administration, how much of that is salaries? I take it when you do that you're also working all your buildings, rent, ownership, and that, I hope, in the 11 million? That wouldn't be just salaries, I hope?

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — No, that is just salaries.

Mr. Brkich: — Eleven million dollars? To me that sounds fairly high. How many people do you have working for Sask Water, spread out through the province?

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — We have about 240 employees working for the corporation. By the way it's listed as one of the larger corporations in the province, and I think last year was in the top 20 in terms of sizes of corporations in the province of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Brkich: — Was there any profit showing on this corporation then, since it's fairly huge?

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — If you're asking any specific year, obviously over the years there has been profit from the corporation since it was incorporated in 1984. But last year, I think the member will know based on questions he's asked me before in this House, that last year to December 31, 1999, there was an operating loss of 9.688 million.

Mr. Brkich: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. How about this year, do you forecast, I guess, any decrease in that 9 million loss? Or do you increase some revenue this year?

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Well those are really questions . . . well that's really a question for next year's estimates. We would anticipate . . . let me respond this way, by saying we would anticipate a substantial improvement in the bottom line for the year 2000. Some of that will be contingent on the transition of moving the division for responsibility with respect to potatoes to the Crown Investments Corporation.

Mr. Brkich: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. I take it then SPUDCO is probably the main reason you've lost that much money.

Without SPUDCO . . . do you separate them losses? How much would Sask Water make without that division, or would it lose without that division?

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — On page 30 of the annual report that was tabled in the legislature, if you exclude SPUDCO, there was a small operating loss under non-utility of 226,000 and under utility of 594,000.

Mr. Brkich: — Thank you, Mr. Minister, Mr. Chairman. Do you have a channel clearing program? I know I've also had some calls from all over the province that over the years debris starts getting into channels and the water isn't flowing as good as it should be; it's starting to back up further back the line. They were wondering about . . . especially I guess in areas where there is probably no C&D.

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Yes, we do have a channel clearing program that is cost shared with local governments, with the RMs. The cost-sharing arrangement is 50/50. Last year the cost to Sask Water was \$227,307.

Mr. Brkich: — Were you going to increase that in this year's budget?

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — It would be very close this coming year as it was . . . to the amount that we spent last year.

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Chair. Mr. Minister, I have a couple of questions, very specific with the upper Assiniboine River basin.

Could you tell me and tell the people of Saskatchewan where that study is at the moment — whether it has been completed? And the moratorium that was placed on ditching in that entire region, is the report completed and has it been released to the public?

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — In agreement with Manitoba, the province of Manitoba, and the Government of Canada, it's been . . . the study's been extended to December 31 of this year. But there will be consultation meetings taking place between now and the end of the year with the public.

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you very much, Mr. Minister. And I would then trust that the moratorium is still in place until that study says something differently.

Mr. Minister, there have been a number of concerns that have been brought to your attention because of some of the difficulties with drainage, with land clearing, with the whole process of water moving from one area to another area through the different individuals' farmlands.

And you are very aware that a number of difficulties — I'll use that word — a number of difficulties have developed between Sask Water and many agricultural producers in my area. And not only in Canora-Pelly, but throughout that whole east-central side of the province.

Mr. Minister, you have copies of the letters that I have from farmers that have indicated that Sask Water has sent registered letters to farmers indicating that because of a complaint issued by someone, they now must fill ditches, numerous ditches, 17, 26 — more than that in some of the other letters that we have — and return the land to the position that it had in 1949.

Could you explain the logic behind that, Mr. Minister? Because many farmers have difficulty understanding why they, who just maybe became owners of land two or three years ago, are now having to reverse the process of development, of land clearing, and all the things that have happened, back to 1949 positions.

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — First of all, I want to make clear to the member that this isn't something that would be initiated by Sask Water.

All drainage requires the approval, first of all, of the corporation of Sask Water. Complaints are then investigated. And where . . . only where agreement can't be reached between landowners, then the corporation would determine whether or not a ditch block and reversion back to the original status would be required.

But this is a process again, to be clear, that is accepted generally across North America. So this is not unique to Saskatchewan in any way, shape, or form.

(1330)

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Well it may not be

unique to other parts of the world. But, Mr. Minister, the point I'm trying to make here is that you have . . . your corporation has dealt with complaints. They may deal with a farmer on one side of the road because there has been a complaint issued about that particular piece of land.

On the other side of the road, no complaint. No one has issued a complaint and Sask Water does not investigate. Sask Water turns a blind eye to the fact that there is "landscaping" going on to the tune of five-, six-, seven-foot ditches. Yet Sask Water officials do nothing about it.

On the other side, I have copies of a letter from Sask Water demanding that ditch blocks be put in place, or they will do it at the expense of the farmer and the farmer will be billed, on land that this person has done absolutely nothing to.

It has been purchased in the last three years. All of those things occurred in the 1960s, '70s, long before there were drainage restrictions. Now Sask Water is saying you must put in ditch blocks. Same time, water is flowing through other parts of the land.

It just seems that we don't have an organized plan to deal with the water that's going to move. Water is not going to sit and flood the entire province. It's going to move into the river systems that we have.

I think Sask Water has to take a good, hard look at its position that it's taking. And I recognize that if there is damage occurring and complaints are issued, they have to be dealt with. I think that's why we develop C&Ds — to ensure that there is conservation and development.

On one side Sask Water seems to turn an eye, blind eye; on the other side they're issuing registered letters demanding ditch blocks be put in place. Is that not a contradiction?

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — To the member. While there may seem to be inconsistencies, Sask Water only responds to complaints. So where drainage occurs on one side of the road as you describe it, and Sask Water receives no complaints, we assume therefore that the landowner downstream has no problem with that drainage. That's what we would have to assume.

But having said all that, I think you have raised legitimate concerns, and under the Water Management Framework agreement that we released — I guess it was last year — this was one of the action items that we definitely feel we need to respond to in the coming . . . I think it's next year there will be some response to that.

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Minister, and I encourage you to look at this because this is becoming a big problem. There is tremendous animosity between Sask Water officials . . . Sask Water workers out there in the field and farmers. And I think it's got to be dealt with very, very quickly because there is grave concern there.

And, Mr. Minister, one of my constituents raised this concern with you. And so did I, through my office, where now because Sask Water officials have issued that registered letter to an individual to indeed put in place dozens of ditch blocks on a

large parcel of land . . . The farmer in question wants to sell his land; has a potential buyer.

The potential buyer has now gone to a financial institution to secure a mortgage. The financial institution has determined — because of this registered letter that SaskWater has issued that there be put in place ditch blocks — they're refusing to finance that particular sale.

Now you have a farmer who wants to sell, and now because of Sask Water's regulations that just deal with portions of land, not with every farmer in that entire area, the farmer's sale is on hold and probably has been lost.

I know he has raised this concern with you, Mr. Minister, and he's unsure as to what the position will be that Sask Water has taken because he needs to have this resolved very quickly with the financial institution to indeed try to still have a potential buyer.

Could you explain what's happening? Not only with this specific case, but with all of those other cases whereby there may be a potential sale and now financial institutions are not going to provide mortgages because of what Sask Water has done.

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Well let me just say to the member, you absolutely can't have it both ways. I mean I appreciate the concerns you raise — and I won't name the individual — but we've been dealing with it. If we did nothing and allowed the drainage just to occur, we would probably have just as many people upset for no action.

So Sask Water and the officials . . . while I appreciate a number of the public will be upset with them, it's impossible for Sask Water officials out in the field to make everybody happy.

Again, I go back to the point that in the Water Management Framework agreement that we released last year, this is one of the items that we've identified that needs to have work done on it. At the end of the day I think it will still be difficult. While there's room for improvement, it will still be difficult to find a resolution that's going to make both sides of the issue of drainage — both the individual where water is being drained onto and those that are doing the drainage — where there is disagreement it will be very difficult for my officials to make both parties happy because these are very emotional issues.

Mr. Krawetz: — Mr. Minister, I have to ask you for what would be your interpretation of what is taking place.

When we see Sask Water officials issuing registered letters, and I quote from a letter here that says:

I received a registered letter from Sask Water that I and approximately 14 other landowners would have to fill in certain ditches. On December 30, 1999, it has ruled that all farmers in question must fill in their ditches as originally ruled back in October of 1996 when this particular situation developed.

Is that going to solve the problem? What we have is Sask Water saying to certain farmers where there have been complaints

issued: fill the ditches, put in ditch blocks, return the land to 1949 status.

We have other areas — ditching continues. This is not going to solve the problem. The water is still flowing. There are going to be . . . If farmers put in place ditch blocks, you know very well that the water will back up next spring. Didn't happen this spring because we didn't have the snowfall. But can you imagine on the year that we have a heavy runoff in the springtime and now ditch blocks have been put in place where water is flowing down through this particular farmer's land?

How many people . . . and the comments made by members of the Sask Water field representatives is: if you have a problem with the farmer, you have to issue the complaints up the stream. That's the response to the farmer. We're not going to help you solve the problem. We're going to help you by dealing with the complaint. If you want to issue a complaint about the 10 other farmers upstream, then we'll issue the letters that will require them to put in ditch blocks.

Where's it going to end, Mr. Minister? This is not the system that we need for the province of Saskatchewan. It's not a system that's going to help ensure that there is a degree of co-operation between neighbours, between farmers downstream, between the lakes and the different provinces — because you're very well aware that the water from the upper Assiniboine ends up in Manitoba to a great degree — we need to develop co-operation.

And what we're doing is we're singling out farmers because of complaints. We're not developing a policy that is good for everyone. How do you respond to that?

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — I appreciate the concerns that the member raises and that obviously is part of the reason that we engaged in the study with Manitoba and Canada with the Assiniboine study that you referred to earlier. We think that good watershed planning needs to take place. And again that's part of what we were talking about in the Water Management Framework agreement.

I think I would say generally though, that first of all the corporation is operating under the legislation that currently exists and it's a complaint-based policy that we have in place right now and it might not be perfect.

And maybe better watershed planning needs to occur, and I think I would acknowledge that it probably does. But at the end of the day if we, as a government or a corporation or as a legislature, determine that for the good of the community certain drainage projects need to take place, understand clearly — and I think the member will know — that we're not going to have everybody happy. Because those affected downstream or upstream — as a result of a good drainage project — it will affect them and they will argue adversely and we will still have people upset.

But having said that, I recognize the concerns you raise and we certainly are doing what we can to address those concerns.

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. I'd like to raise one final point, Mr. Minister. Your entire policy that you are

working with right now within the corporation, I don't think that it's also realistic. When we have letters that are issued that instruct farmers to reverse the process and bring it back to the 1949 level . . . I don't know what the land looked like in 1949. I wasn't born yet, Mr. Minister, but my dad tells me that the landscape was treed in our area; there was very little developed land. The situation was very natural, if you like.

Now if you're instructing farmers to go back to the 1949 landscape levels, what you're telling them is to basically undevelop everything that has happened for 50 years. I don't think that that's realistic. So while you say that your current policy suggests that you're only going to deal if there's a complaint, if the legislation requires changes, if the studies need to develop a new direction, I would encourage to look at this problem.

This is a serious problem and we must recognize, of course, that there are people that will be affected by water that is going to move through their particular parcels of land. And we have to ensure that there is adequate drainage; that there is a degree of safety involved so that in case of those floods in the spring, we have to deal with that.

But a 1949 base, I believe, is unrealistic. The farmers that have received these registered letters are saying, this is ludicrous, it is not realistic. And I would ask for your comments.

(1345)

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — I can appreciate the member's frustration, and understand that we're equally frustrated in trying to deal with these concerns.

We're only at this point though — I want to be clear — we're only in this position because we can't get landowners to agree on the issue of drainage right now. And maybe we need to change the legislation. And we actually think that we should change the legislation some to try and improve the situation that currently exists in the area that you're describing.

But again I just want to say that at the end of the day there will be no perfect legislation that's going to make everybody happy. But I acknowledge the concerns you raise. And we'll continue to do the best we can.

Ms. Draude: — Mr. Deputy Chair, Mr. Minister, and your officials. I appreciated your comments, although I know that with the legal drainage areas, C&Ds, it does overcome a lot of the problems that a lot of farmers have when there is drainage projects that are . . . in one case they seem to be violating another person's rights. Because I know the C&D seems to make a big difference in a lot of people's area and a lot of people's lives.

Mr. Minister, I know that this situation that I'm going to talk to you about is one that we've discussed before. But I'm wondering where the government is right now regarding the Water Appeal Board's inability to enforce decisions relating to flooding.

Right now the Water Appeal Board nor The Water Corporation Act provides any authority for Sask Water to enforce decisions

rendered by the Water Appeal Board. Sask Water enforces its own decisions as well as the Water Appeal Board's decisions. But on the other hand when Sask Water's decision is changed by the appeal board, it becomes a new decision and it takes precedent over Sask Water's, and now the corporation has no authority to enforce it.

Mr. Minister, you've said that you're going to be dealing with changes to this legislation probably next year. But in the meantime, we have people that have to go to the Court of Queen's Bench to actually enforce a Water Appeal Board's decision.

This is something that I know is a concern in this area. Are you working on it? Do you have a number of issues like this around the province? And what do you intend to do to deal with the problem?

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — First of all, I just want to say — I think the member probably knows this — the Water Appeal Board falls under the jurisdiction of the Department of Environment not under our corporation. I just say that parenthetically.

But we agree with the concerns that you raise, and that's why it is under review. In fact, you may know as well that the Provincial Ombudsman is also involved in assisting us in this review. Myself and the Minister of Environment, who is responsible, have already met with her to discuss some possible options.

One of the things I just wanted to make you aware of is that there are actually a relatively small number of appeals that actually go to the board, about 10 to 15 per year. And about 70 per cent of the time, the Water Appeal Board upholds the recommendation as made by the corporation.

But the essence of your concern is valid and that's why we have it under review right now.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. I am actually . . . I think there's a bit of a red flag being waved here when we know that the Water Appeal Board reports directly to SERM (Saskatchewan Environment and Resource Management). Is the interests of the farmers and the agricultural industry as a whole being addressed when the final decision is being left with SERM? I'm wondering how, if you've had discussions with the Department of Agriculture as well, how we can be assured that we're not just looking at one aspect of the concern and not looking at the agricultural aspect?

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — While the Water Appeal Board falls under the jurisdiction and responsibility of the Minister of Environment, they are a quasi-judicial board that deals with the appeals independent of SERM.

And I mean, to show their independence — this is public information — they actually, recently — now they weren't successful — but the board actually took the province to the . . . Sask Water, the corporation to court not so long ago. I guess it was about six months or so ago. But they do . . . they are very independent of the Department of Environment.

Ms. Draude: — Final question, Mr. Minister. So can we expect

changes to this legislation in the next calendar year?

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Yes, most likely in the 2001-2002 fiscal year. I'm not about to predict whether we have a fall session or not here in estimates. But in the next . . . in our next legislative calendar, let me put it that way, we would anticipate changes coming forward.

Mr. Elhard: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I was busily engaged in other things when the previous Bill was being discussed, so I want to raise some issues now that may have actually fallen under earlier discussions here, and questioning.

I want to refer again, though, to the 1949 standard that has been discussed. The issue is kind of important in my part of the constituency . . . or the province, I should say, because so much of what has transpired in terms of installation of dugouts and dams has happened in the last 30 or 40 years.

And I'm wondering if the return to 1949 standards is envisioned in any way as having implications for the area in which I live and other parts of the dry areas of Saskatchewan?

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — To the member, you actually make my point very well for me. The member earlier was talking about the corporation, where agreements could not be reached between landowners, they would have to be restored, and water and some of the ditches either cleared or dammed back up.

So it's not an issue there of too much water in your corner of the province. It's an issue of not enough water, most often, and they want the water kept there. So you can see that it's a very difficult position for the corporation to be in.

But again, having said that, I think what is most important is that we have good watershed management and good watershed planning and to . . . in that regard, you're really talking about the future.

And as a result of that, of the watershed framework agreement or I should say the . . . yes, the watershed framework agreement that we talked about earlier, we really want to address some of the very concerns that yourselves and some of your colleagues raised, so that we can hopefully have the majority of the landowners onside and accepting the changes that are taking place, so the majority of them are happy; and at the same time, protecting the environment and hopefully creating economic development in different parts of our province where it makes sense.

Mr. Elhard: — Mr. Chairman, thank you, Mr. Minister. As you can appreciate, the viability of a lot of the farms in the area would be severely undermined if there was any effort to compel them to go back to 1949 standards. It would probably lay a large part of the Southwest waste, frankly, and would make any cattle or farming operations very difficult to maintain.

I'd like to move over to the issue of water quality. I understand that that was a major part of the previous discussions on the Act that was dealt with earlier.

For my own sake though, for my own edification, is the issue of water quality a standard feature of all contractual arrangements

now between Sask Water and irrigation projects and water users?

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — All 18 districts that have signed on right now have a clause that says they are responsible for water quality, if that was your question.

Mr. Elhard: — Only districts that have signed on so far, is that what you said?

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Yes, that's correct.

Mr. Elhard: — So will that be a feature of each new contract as it's negotiated with the various irrigation projects?

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Yes it will.

Mr. Elhard: — How many of the irrigation projects to date have signed these new contracts? And supplemental to that, how many yet are to be negotiated?

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Eighteen have signed and another ten have yet to sign — another ten.

Mr. Elhard: — Mr. Minister, there is a small irrigation project south of Govenlock, in the extreme southwest of the province, and I understand that water quality has been a major stumbling block in their negotiations with Sask Water. Can you clarify for us where that negotiation is at, at this point? Or have they actually signed an agreement?

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — The current status is that we're still in discussion with them and we haven't signed anything yet.

Mr. Elhard: — Could you tell me whether negotiations are going well or not?

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — I think it's safe to say that there still is disagreement between us, if you're asking the status. Now unless we can get an agreement around water quality, the other option . . . and if Sask Water is required to retain liability and responsibility around water quality, then we would have to do a soil test on each individual landowner to determine whether or not it's compatible for irrigation.

And in some cases it might well prove then that irrigation is not appropriate in those specific cases and could well require a shutdown of some irrigation projects. And that's why we would far rather have an arrangement with the irrigation district that would leave them have responsibility with respect to this.

And again, you may not have been here when I answered the question, but it would have to be shown that the irrigation district was intentionally or deliberately . . . did something intentionally wrong before they would be liable with respect to water quality.

(1400)

Mr. Elhard: — Would you say that the situation is such that . . . could you characterize it as such I guess, that you've just not been able to assure the people of that particular project that their interests aren't at risk here. Is that part of the problem, or is

there a larger issue?

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Yes, I think it's correct to say we've not been able to assure them of that yet, and that's why we're continuing to be in discussions with them.

Mr. Elhard: — I understand that the issue of water quality has been the subject of some legal action that has been taken against Sask Water in the past. And I'm also told — although I have not verified it — that Sask Water has not been successful in winning those legal actions. Is that the case?

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — To the member, we have been sued — you are correct — and they were successful in that suit. And that's part of the reason in some ways why this legislation is here is to deal with that, those sorts of . . . I guess those sorts of situations.

What I want to say though is we've been talking about water quality, and to be clear and I think probably you understand this, but it's really not an issue of water quality — it's really an issue of water-soil compatibility is what it really is. It's not an issue of water quality.

But the cases you described — yes, they did sue, and they were successful.

Mr. Elhard: — I have no further questions at this time. Thank you.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to welcome the minister and his officials here today. I have a copy of the globals that you had provided us with, and I have a question in relationship to them. Your list of consultants used by Sask Water in the past year, I see a Ford, Danielle Charpier listed here, and freelance stories. Was this the explanation for SPUDCO's failure?

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — The answer is no. It has to do with the PAWBED (partnership agreement on water-based economic development) program.

Mr. D'Autremont: — And what is the PAWBED program, Mr. Minister?

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — It's federal, but it's the provincial agreement on water-based economic development.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. So why would you have to hire storytellers to participate in this program?

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Based on storytellers, maybe we should have hired you. No, I say that facetiously. To the member, it was only \$1,200 and it was simply communications around announcing specific projects as I understand it.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Okay, thank you, Mr. Minister. I wonder if you could give me a status on the Rafferty and Alameda projects? How much water is there? How much water is being stored there at the present time? How much water has been released in the last year?

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — To the member. Both the Rafferty and

the Alameda are both about 95 per cent full. They currently have — I don't know whether this is combined . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Combined would be about 500,000 cubic decametres in them right now.

There was no releases of water last year. There is a small release anticipated from both . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . There's a small release probably taking place from the Alameda next week to fulfill the agreement that we have with North Dakota.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. I wonder if the Deputy Premier has yet made his announcement as to the date that he will be walking across the water on those dams. And I'm informed by the member from Regina Albert South that he feels that there are a couple of other members over there that can accomplish the same thing at the time that the Deputy Premier does that. So has there been a date announced for the walking on water by the Deputy Premier?

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Not yet, but we'll let you know.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. We await with bated breath the announcement of that because I know that the media is very interested in that happening.

Mr. Minister, as you know, there was serious flooding in the Southeast last spring. And a number of the RMs down there, particularly RMs no. 1 and 2, 31, 32, 61, and 91 were very severely affected. Has there been any presentations from those areas to Sask Water for any drainage programs?

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — We are of the understanding that there have been a number of enquiries but nothing formal yet at all.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. I have one last item that pertains somewhat to your portfolio as well as to SERM. And that is dealing with the proposed recreational facilities on the Alameda dam in conjunction with the Souris Moose Mountain wildlife federation. They have been in negotiations with SERM for a property; also in dealing with Sask Water for water rights to those. I wonder what participation has your department had in those discussions?

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — We have provided a lease so that they could build facilities on that land.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Mr. Minister, did you say you are part of the lease agreement or you turned the lease . . . any leasing arrangements over to SERM?

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — No, we provided the lease.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Well, Mr. Minister, I have a letter from the Souris Moose Mountain wildlife federation stating that they have turned down the terms of that lease then, if it's with your organization, because the lease was non-negotiable. It sounds to me like it was an either take-it-or-leave-it situation, and that the department was not prepared to negotiate with it.

I thought SERM was those involved in this particular lease. I wasn't sure what your involvement with it was. If it is your department, why are you not prepared to negotiate with the

Souris Moose . . . the Souris Creek wildlife association to put in a recreational facility in that area?

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — My officials here weren't aware of a problem that existed. We would ask that you provide us with the information and meet with the officials and we'll try to . . . attempt to deal with it.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you very much. The Deputy Premier is worried about his stomach on this. I also have that problem on occasion.

The letter that I have here is to a Mr. Harvey Janke with SERM and it states:

Based on a meeting of January 25 this year, Souris Moose Creek does not agree with the terms of the lease, therefore we are not interested in signing due to the fact that the lease is non-negotiable. We feel we cannot accept the lease as written. Should these terms become negotiable, we are willing to renegotiate.

Souris Moose Creek Wildlife Association.

So, Mr. Minister, if you have any other information, you know, I would appreciate what you have; and I will try to ascertain from my side exactly what the problems were. And those are the questions that I have today.

Subvote (SW01) agreed to.

Subvote (SW02), (SW03) agreed to.

Vote 50 agreed to.

**General Revenue Fund
Lending and Investing Activities
Saskatchewan Water Corporation
Vote 140**

Subvote (SW01) — Statutory.

Vote 140 agreed to.

(1415)

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Just before the officials leave, I want to take the opportunity to thank again the members for their thoughtful questions. And I want to thank my officials for assisting us here today.

Mr. Brkich: — Mr. Chairman, thank you. I want to thank the minister and I want to thank the officials for coming here today.

The Deputy Chair: — Thank you all very much. We'll give an opportunity for the officials to step out.

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I move that the committee rise and report progress and ask for leave to sit again.

The committee reported progress.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With leave to introduce guests.

Leave granted.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And to you and through you, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to introduce 39 grade 4 students and their teachers and bus driver, to the legislature. It's just too bad that we're in the process of adjourning, but at least they got to see the floor of the legislature.

Would everyone welcome them here today, please.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — Mr. Speaker, I move the House do now adjourn.

The Speaker: — Hon. members, I want to wish you a very pleasant weekend and please come back safely when the House resumes 1:30 p.m. on Monday.

The Assembly adjourned at 2:17 p.m.

CORRIGENDUM

On page 2043 of *Hansard* No. 65A, Wednesday, June 21, 2000 please correct the following: “The fact is that in the last 12 months, 16,000 people have left Saskatchewan . . .” to read: “The fact is that in the last 12 months, 1,600 people have left Saskatchewan . . .”

We apologize for this error.