

The Assembly met at 13:30.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRESENTING PETITIONS

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I stand today to present petitions on behalf of citizens of Saskatchewan who are very concerned about the increase in long-term care fees. And the petition reads as follows, Mr. Speaker:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to immediately reconsider the exorbitant fee increases for long-term care services in Saskatchewan.

And the signators on this petition, Mr. Speaker, are from Humboldt.

I so present.

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I also have a petition to present on behalf of residents of Saskatchewan concerned about the long-term care home costs. The prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to immediately reconsider the exorbitant fee increases for long-term care services in Saskatchewan.

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

Mr. Speaker, the signatures on this petition come from the communities of Willowbrook and Yorkton.

I so present.

Ms. Draude: — Mr. Speaker, I too have a petition to present today on behalf of people who are very concerned about the long-term care home increases in this province. And the prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to immediately reconsider the exorbitant fee increases for long-term care services in Saskatchewan.

The people that have signed this petition are from the very good city of Yorkton.

Mr. Gantfoer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too rise on behalf of citizens of Yorkton who are very concerned about the exorbitant increases to long-term care rates. The prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to immediately reconsider the exorbitant fee increases for long-term care services in Saskatchewan.

I so present.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also have a petition to present to do with long-term care home rates. The prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to immediately reconsider the exorbitant fee increases for long-term care services in Saskatchewan.

The signators, Mr. Speaker, are from the Deputy Premier's constituency of Yorkton.

Mr. Stewart: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise this afternoon to present a petition signed by citizens concerned with proposed fee increases for long-term care services. And the prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to immediately reconsider the exorbitant fee increases for long-term care services in Saskatchewan.

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

Mr. Speaker, this petition is signed by individuals from the communities of Weyburn, Ogema, and Pangman.

Mr. Elhard: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to present a petition on behalf of signatures gathered on . . . from citizens in the Eastend area concerning the crop insurance premium hikes and coverage reductions. And the prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the provincial government to halt its plan to take money out of the crop insurance program and hike farmers' crop insurance premium rates while reducing coverage in order to pay off the provincial government's debt to the federal government.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

I so present, Mr. Speaker.

Ms. Eagles: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I too rise today to present a petition on behalf of citizens of this province who have very deep concerns regarding the long-term care home increases. And the prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to immediately reconsider the exorbitant fee increases for long-term care services in Saskatchewan.

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

And this petition is also signed by the Deputy Premier's constituency of Yorkton.

I so present.

Ms. Bakken: — Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present a petition on behalf of the citizens of Saskatchewan who are concerned about the raise in long-term care fees. And the prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to immediately reconsider the exorbitant fee increases for long-term care services in Saskatchewan.

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

And the petition is signed by residents of Fillmore, Midale, Weyburn, and Pangman.

I so present.

Mr. Brkich: — I have a petition here, Mr. Speaker, with citizens opposed to possible reductions in services to Davidson and Craik health centres.

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to take the necessary steps to ensure that Davidson and Craik health centres be maintained at their current level of service at a minimum, with 24-hour acute care, emergency, and doctorial services available as well as lab services, public health, home care, long-term care services available to users from the Craik and Davidson area and beyond.

As duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

Signed by the good citizens from Davidson, Craik, and Regina.

I so present.

Mr. Wiberg: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition this afternoon about citizens who are concerned about the attack by this government on those that are already vulnerable in our society. And the prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to immediately reconsider the exorbitant fee increases from long-term care services in Saskatchewan.

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

And, Mr. Speaker, this petition has been signed by the good people from Prince Albert.

I so present.

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also would like to present a petition from citizens concerned about the exorbitant fee increases for long-term care services. The prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to immediately reconsider the exorbitant fee increases for long-term care services in Saskatchewan.

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

The signatures on this petition, Mr. Speaker, are from citizens from Borden, Vanscoy, Radisson, Cando, and Biggar. Thank you.

Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I have yet another petition about the deplorable state of Highway No. 15, and the prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to use a portion of its highway budget to address the concerns or the serious conditions of Highway 15 for Saskatchewan residents.

And as is duty bound, your petitioners ever pray.

And not surprising, yet again, the signatures are from a lot of areas, Mr. Speaker, which demonstrates how much this highway is used. They're from Davidson, Humboldt, Unity, Luseland, Young, Watrous, Nokomis, Saskatoon; Chilliwack, BC (British Columbia), Airdrie and Drumheller, Alberta; and Winnipeg, Manitoba.

I so present.

READING AND RECEIVING PETITIONS

Deputy Clerk: — According to order the following petitions are hereby read and received as addendums to previously tabled petitions being sessional papers no. 7, 10, 11, 16, 18, 23, 24, and 31.

NOTICES OF MOTIONS AND QUESTIONS

Mr. Hillson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I give noticed that I shall on day no. 28 ask the government the following question.

To the Minister of Health: how many patients per day on average were added to the waiting list for MRIs in 2001; how many patients per day on average received MRIs in 2001; at the projected rate of procedures to be done, how long will it take to bring the waiting list to within a four-week waiting period?

Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I shall give notice on day no. 29 and ask the government the following question:

To the Minister of Agriculture and Food: are silage trucks in the alfalfa dehy industry in Saskatchewan required to use clear fuel or can they use farm fuel?

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly, a group of Saskatchewan public servants who are touring the legislature and are now seated in your gallery.

Now these participants, Mr. Speaker, are employees from the departments of Government Relations; Agriculture, Food and Rural Revitalization; Health, Legislative Assembly administration, Industry and Resources, Social Services,

Justice, Environment, Highways and Transportation.

And I'll ask that all members of the legislature join me in welcoming these members and thanking them for their good work on behalf of the people of Saskatchewan. And I look forward to meeting with them after question period.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker on behalf of the official opposition, I too would like to welcome the public servants to the Assembly. I hope they enjoy the proceedings this afternoon, and a few of my colleagues are looking forward to meeting with you a little later on. So welcome.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Elhard: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker through you and through all the . . . or to all the members of the Assembly today, I'd like to introduce the grade 12 class from my home community of Eastend, Saskatchewan.

This class has . . . the teachers of this class anyhow, have made this an annual pilgrimage and this particular class is benefiting from the very deliberate and conscientious efforts of their teachers, Marie Hanson and Shelley Morvik. And we'd like to welcome them, as well as the bus driver, Curt Humphrey, who also happens to be the best backhoe operator I know.

And we'd like to welcome them to the Assembly today. Hope they enjoy the proceedings. We've already warned them about what to expect during question period. They should be well prepared. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, to you and through you to the members of this Assembly, in the east gallery, I'd like to introduce 23 grade 5 students from the Grenfell Elementary School. They're accompanied by their teacher Constance MacKenzie, bus driver Garry Cole, and a number of parents.

Mr. Speaker, I had the privilege of meeting with the students for a few moments on Monday, just to sit down and discuss the role of government and the role of MLAs (Member of the Legislative). I found the discussion very informative, but I found out, Mr. Speaker, as well, that while the students were interested in the role of government and their MLA, they also kind of wanted to know a little bit about agriculture, about farming. That was very interesting

This group of students, as well, Mr. Speaker, was part of the D.A.R.E. (Drug Abuse Resistance Education) graduation program in the community of Grenfell that I attended in January. So I want to congratulate them. I look forward to visiting with them for a few moments later this afternoon. At this time, I'd like to invite members of the Assembly to welcome the students from Grenfell.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Elhard: — Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. In my introduction earlier, I neglected to mention a rather important element of the visiting students from Eastend today. Among the 15 that are represented here, we have two that are exchange students. And I'd like to introduce the exchange students from Germany and Brazil. And unfortunately I didn't get both of their names before the session today, but if they'd like to stand today, we'd like to recognize them in a special way.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Goulet: — Mr. Speaker, on the west gallery on the front row, we have a special visitor from Cumberland House. Her name is Francine Chaboyer. She is trained to be an RCMP (Royal Canadian Mounted Police) special constable. She'll be starting the auxiliary program on, I suppose, tomorrow — on April 19.

Mr. Speaker, the word in Cree for police is simagunis. And the word, simagun, means spear point. So that indeed as we look from tradition to the modern-day history, she'll be a modern-day spear point protector of the people. So I would like everybody to please welcome Francine, and I would say . . .

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

And I would like all members to say, Ta wow, and welcome.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Canadian Soldiers Killed and Injured in Afghanistan

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is with great sadness that I stand before the Assembly today. Four Canadian soldiers were killed and eight injured during a training exercise in Afghanistan. These fallen and hurting soldiers were members of the Third Battalion of the Edmonton-based Princess Patricia's Light . . . Canadian Light Infantry.

My thoughts, and I'm sure the thoughts of all the members of this Legislative Assembly, are with the families, friends, and loved ones of these brave soldiers whose armed service led them into the war against terrorism. These individuals served their country with valour in a struggle for justice and freedom.

The cause of death and injury appears to be a terrible accident, and I understand that an investigation is underway. But that does not lessen the pain the families feel for their loss. The casualties of war set a sombre tone especially when they are your own. Although the war is miles away, it affects many Canadians.

We must applaud the efforts of men and women who unselfishly have put their lives at risk or given their lives to defend our freedom and our way of life.

I know that all Canadians today, including the members of this Legislative Assembly, offer their condolences to the families of the deceased soldiers and wish a speedy recovery to those injured. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(13:45)

Tribute to Canadian Soldiers Serving in Afghanistan

Hon. Ms. Higgins: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The British poet and soldier Siegfried Sassoon wrote from the trenches of World War I that, quote:

Soldiers are citizens of death's grey land
Drawing no dividend from time's to-morrows.

Sadly, what was written nearly 90 years ago is still true today as we've learned from the overnight news from Afghanistan.

Mr. Speaker, as the MLA for the constituency which includes the Canadian Forces Base 15 Wing Moose Jaw, I speak on behalf of the government, joining the member from Rosetown-Biggar, in expressing our grief at the death of four Canadian soldiers and the injury of eight others.

We're especially concerned that one of the injured is originally from Cupar, Saskatchewan where his family still resides. Master Corporal Curtis Hollister is reported to be in stable condition in Germany, for which, Mr. Speaker, we are very thankful.

Mr. Speaker, the tragic circumstance of the four deaths does not soften our nation's loss nor diminish the sorrow of their families. And it is, of course, to the friends and families of these young soldiers that our sympathies go out.

Mr. Speaker, you and I, most of the members of this Assembly are parents. Most of us are fortunate that our children have not left home to be placed in harm's way. We can only imagine the anguish of parents who have had to wait for further news upon hearing the first announcement.

As we have said before in this House, we are proud of our Canadian men and women who are serving their nation in a hostile environment a world away from home, and we support them.

We wish the injured speedy recovery, the whole Canadian contingent a quick return home, and we pray for eternal rest for the four soldiers and solace for their families. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Master Corporal Curtis Hollister

Mr. Hart: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, as the member from Moose Jaw has indicated, Master Sergeant Curtis Hollister of Cupar was one of those soldiers that were injured yesterday in Afghanistan in that unfortunate incident.

Curtis' parents, Val and Len Hollister of Cupar received the word of their son's injuries last night when a Chaplain informed them, about 2:30 in the morning, that he had sustained neck and face injuries from the Air US (United States) bomb. His parents were told that his injuries are non-life-threatening and that he is

being transported to a hospital in Germany. His parents have also asked me to tell people and the media that they would not like to have calls at this time because they really don't have a whole lot of information as to Curtis' condition but they certainly will be willing to talk to anyone tomorrow.

Mr. Speaker, if I could at this time, I'd like to tell you just a little bit about Curtis Hollister. Curtis is a pleasant, polite young man that it's a pleasure to meet. He's always been a very decent young fellow when he was growing up. He grew up on a farm only a few miles from our farm. Our middle son is one of his best friends. They played hockey together; they played fastball together. Curtis also refereed those two sports and whenever a coach needed someone to referee that extra game Curtis was always there to ref for them, Mr. Speaker.

So the thoughts and prayers of all the residents of Cupar are with Curtis and his family and especially with those families who have lost their loved ones, Mr. Speaker. We are all looking forward to the day when Curtis returns home safely and we can take off those yellow ribbons that are up all around our town and we can take them down, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Special Librarians Day

Ms. Hamilton: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A few years ago the Library Association published a list of 12 ways libraries are good for the country. Reason no. 12 was libraries preserve the past, which is true enough.

I would add a 12(b) to that list: libraries help us define the future. Libraries like the invaluable corner of knowledge we have right here in our Legislative Building, staffed by the incomparable Marian Powell and her intrepid staff of ink-stained wonder workers.

You guessed it, Mr. Speaker, it's that day again — International Special Librarians Day, the one day of the year in which we publicly acknowledge and express our gratitude for the incredible load of knowledge that passes each year from their hands to ours.

Mr. Speaker, a moment ago I used the phrase ink-stained. The theme of this year's Special Librarians Day is Expanding Global Knowledge Frontiers, and in light of that theme I suppose I should have come up with something more current. How about IT (information technology)-tinted?

Well although my phrasing may need work, Mr. Speaker, they do not. Our special librarians are expert at every form of gathering information for us, whether it be in dusty hard copy or any of those brand new knowledge portals by which the global knowledge frontier is explored and defined for us.

Once again, Mr. Speaker, our virtual hats are off to Marian and her staff.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Samuel McLeod Awards for Business Excellence

Mr. Wiberg: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last evening, April 17, 2002 the Prince Albert Chamber of Commerce held its annual Samuel McLeod Awards for business excellence, 2001.

Mr. Speaker, Sam McLeod was chosen as the model and hence the naming because of his commitment to Prince Albert. When the La Colle Falls hydroelectric project failed, Sam McLeod literally held the city of Prince Albert together for two years in order that the restructuring that was necessary could be put in place to prevent civic bankruptcy.

Nine businesses in Prince Albert were honoured, Mr. Speaker, for their commitment to business and community excellence. And I wish to list them for our Assembly. New product or service went to Mortgage Alliance Company of Canada; investment to Cyr Contracting; new business to Prince Albert Alarm Systems Ltd.; community involvement went to the Scotia Bank; the service industry award went to Adams Institute for Learning; marketing, Mr. Speaker, went to Palm X Route Accounting; job creation to Humpty's Family Restaurant; and the business of the year went to Ashly Cabinets, Mr. Speaker.

Also, Mr. Speaker, the chamber recognizes a business for long-standing exceptional business success and community commitment. This legacy award, Mr. Speaker, went to Anderson Motors.

So congratulations to the Jones family for their success and commitment to Prince Albert. Mr. Speaker, I ask that all members please join me in congratulating all the nominees and winners at last night's gala festivities in Prince Albert.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Building Independence in Saskatchewan

Mr. Prebble: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to share some good news with the Assembly. Members of the legislature will be aware of our government's building independence program. And that program, Mr. Speaker, has now provided extended family health benefits to more than 20,000 low-income working families with children in Saskatchewan every year. And more than 6,000 low-income working families each year receive income supplements under the plan, Mr. Speaker.

Now these financial supports are helping more and more families pursue training and employment as an alternative to social assistance. As a result, Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to report to this Assembly that Saskatchewan Assistance Plan caseloads are down 2,309 cases, that is 7 per cent less from March of last year.

Mr. Speaker, we've now had 88 consecutive months of decline in the social assistance caseload and the current March SAP (Saskatchewan Assistance Plan) caseload is the lowest since 1992. Now, Mr. Speaker, our building independence strategy is the most significant reform to welfare in Saskatchewan in the last 30 years. And it's a set of reforms that stands in marked contrast to the slash-and-burn strategies of the Saskatchewan Party who say that they're going to take \$50 million away from

the Department of Social Services including the building independence program. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ORAL QUESTIONS

Funding for Education

Ms. Draude: — Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Premier.

Last night the Saskatoon Public School Board was fussed . . . face . . . to look at really tough decisions. One of the decisions they had to look at was firing 44 teachers. And the reason why? The answer's really simple, Mr. Speaker. It's because the Saskatoon Public School Board doesn't have enough money to maintain its staff.

They don't have enough money because the tax base in which they're getting their funding has taken a beating from this NDP (New Democratic Party) government. People are leaving Saskatchewan in record numbers. We have the worst job loss record in all of Canada for the last decade. Education taxes are going up and teachers are being fired.

Mr. Speaker, the disaster is a direct result of the NDP's failure to grow the province of Saskatchewan. What steps is the Premier taking to grow the province of Saskatchewan, to stop the loss of teachers, to stop the loss of students, and to stop the loss of jobs from this province?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Melenchuk: — Mr. Speaker, when we talk about records with regard to education and we talk about our increases to the foundation operating grant, well we've had increases over the past three budgets that have totalled over 20 per cent, Mr. Speaker.

The members opposite in their '99 campaign promised no new additional dollars for funding. So when they talk about what would be cut or what would be downloaded to the property tax base, they are the worst offenders, Mr. Speaker. Because we have a priority for education and we have been putting dollars behind that priority, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Draude: — Mr. Speaker, obviously the Minister of Learning has not listened to the SSTA (Saskatchewan School Trustees Association), he hasn't listened to the STF (Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation), and he hasn't listened to the school divisions. Because they know they're not getting the money they need to fund learning in this province.

Yesterday, Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Learning made it official finally. He's decided to join the NDP. And today, true to form, the newly minted NDP Minister of Learning is falling right into line with the NDP colleagues and he's breaking election promises.

It's fair to say, Mr. Speaker, that those promises were made when he was Leader of the Liberal Party.

Well, Mr. Speaker, the minister himself at that time said that promises were nothing more than political rhetoric. But the people of Saskatchewan know better.

Why is the Minister of Learning breaking his election promises to increasing funding to education? And why is he forcing the public school division to fire as many as 44 teachers? And why is he causing the Education department to be in the same state of chaos as the Liberal Party of this province?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Melnychuk: — Mr. Speaker, I think the only group in chaos in this province is the members opposite, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Melnychuk: — And I can tell you why the members opposite are in chaos, because they call themselves a coalition, a coalition of malcontents — former Liberals, former Conservatives. And now their spiritual leader, Bill Boyd, has left, Mr. Speaker. They are left with no leader, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Melnychuk: — And when we talk about this coalition and what it has done for education, Mr. Speaker, it has done more for education in the last three years of any government in the previous 10. And last year we had the largest increase in our foundation operating grant in over 15 years. That's what we're doing for education in this province, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Draude: — Mr. Speaker, if this new Minister of Learning would care as much about education as he does about politicking around this province, maybe our students and our teachers would have a better chance.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Draude: — Mr. Speaker, maybe the NDP's Minister of Learning needs to learn . . .

The Speaker: — Order, please. Order, please.

Ms. Draude: — Maybe, Mr. Speaker, the new Minister of Learning needs to look at last year's budget. Last year the NDP and Liberal budget for NDP education was \$514 million. It's right here in black and white, Mr. Speaker. This year, K to 12 education is \$502 million.

Mr. Speaker, the funding for education isn't going up, it's going down. And now the Saskatoon Public School Board is being forced to consider firing 44 teachers in the city of Saskatoon.

Mr. Speaker, will the NDP's new Learning minister explain why his government is cutting K to 12 education and forcing Saskatoon and other school divisions to fire teachers in this province?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Melnychuk: — Mr. Speaker, it's incredible that the member opposite can stand on her feet and ask these questions.

When she went to the electorate in the last election and her campaign brochure was presented to the electors in Kelvington-Wadena, not one word on education — not one word. And then when they got together and designed their platform, Mr. Speaker, guess what they said they would do for education, post-secondary, K to 12? They said they would freeze spending — not one dime, Mr. Speaker.

And they have the incredible audacity to get up in this House and say why aren't we doing more, when all they said was we're going to cut taxes 20 per cent, we're going to throw a little bit into highways, and everything else frozen. The Popsicle party, Mr. Speaker, everything frozen. No money for education.

(14:00)

Ms. Draude: — Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, may I remind that minister in Learning over there that in the last election his Liberal Party had only three people get . . . actually came to the Assembly under his education budget and under his education platform period. Mr. Speaker, not only is the NDP education fund . . .

The Speaker: — Order, please. Order, please. Order. Order, please.

Ms. Draude: — People of Saskatchewan did not appreciate the Liberal platform on education. That's why there's only three of them in this House, and now there's one.

Mr. Speaker, not only is the NDP education funding cuts forcing the Saskatoon public school board to consider firing teachers, they are also being forced to consider another property tax increase.

Mr. Speaker, the minister in Learning has promised to get things so screwed up that the Saskatoon public school board and possibly many other school divisions in this province are going to have to increase property taxes and fire teachers, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, will the minister in Learning admit that the NDP government is downloading education costs onto property taxes and forcing school divisions like the Saskatoon Public School Division to fire 44 teachers?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Melnychuk: — The education budget was increased by 7.2 per cent this year, Mr. Speaker. And with our Education Infrastructure Financing Corporation there's been an increase of 65 per cent of dollars available for capital and building, Mr. Speaker.

And when we roll out our capital plan and we talk about what facilities we're going to be building in the province of Saskatchewan soon, guess what? I will be going into . . .

The Speaker: — Order. Order.

Implications of Increase in Long-Term Care Fees

Mr. Gantefoer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Premier. Mr. Speaker, the Saskatchewan Party is receiving many letters, calls, and e-mails from Saskatchewan seniors who are very upset about the NDP's massive increase in long-term care rates.

I know the Premier is getting the same message. The NDP tries to pass off the increase as only affecting those wealthy, high-income seniors.

Clearly, this is not the case. Anyone with a monthly income of more than \$994 is going to see their rates go up. Some of the rate hikes are as high as 148 per cent, Mr. Speaker, and seniors are being left with only 10 per cent of their income to buy other necessities like prescription drugs. It's a tremendous burden on Saskatchewan seniors in the final days of their lives.

Mr. Speaker, will the Premier reverse his decision? Will he cancel this massive rate increase?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, it's quite amazing. I think the members opposite took my advice yesterday and got some better advisers. They gave the question to the Health critic so I got a very reasonable question. So I thank the members opposite for doing that, and I thank the member for his question.

In this budget this year we are increasing the amount of money for long-term care by \$10 million, up to \$337 million. That's how much money is being spent for 8,900 seniors in our province who receive long-term care — \$337 million.

What we have done in this budget is we have gone to some of those seniors and said, we would ask that you pay some more for this particular service. But instead of paying 76 per cent of the total costs for the whole province, we're now paying 74 or 73.9 per cent. Mr. Speaker, we believe and we're . . . we want to care for our seniors.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Gantefoer: — Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker there hasn't been anything wrong with the questions from the opposition. The problem is the answers, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Gantefoer: — Mr. Speaker, I'd like to read from one of the letters that we've received, and I quote:

My father has been in the nursing home for the last three years. It began with a heart attack, then a stroke, then Alzheimer's. My mother has remained strong, going to the nursing home every day and dealing with the once shared responsibilities solely on her own.

When this budget was announced, she was devastated. This budget leaves \$166 a month for drugs and personal expenses. My mom pays over \$320 a month for these

expenses alone. This will take all of the money my dad saved in RRSPs and retirement funds. This government is now taking away everything my parents worked so hard for. This is a cowardly action.

Mr. Speaker, will the Premier reverse his decision and cancel the NDP's attack on Saskatchewan seniors?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, I don't think it's fair to Saskatchewan people that the members opposite are fearmongering among the seniors.

And what I would say to those people who are listening on the television, who get this information, is that we have a phone number in the Department of Health at the income assessment unit. We actually have three numbers, and I will read them to you right now. Phone either 787-5023; or if you live in Regina, 787-3543; or the toll-free number, 1-800-667-4884.

If you have specific questions about how the present policies affect your status if you go into long-term care, these people will very carefully explain the answers for you. If you're concerned about what the new policies will say, they will help you deal with that as well.

It does not serve anybody to have the health critic, who I respect — he goes around and he does a very good job in what he's doing — it doesn't help to have him, but for sure it doesn't help to have the Leader of the Opposition to raise fear among our seniors in this province.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I would like to read from another letter dated April 14, 2002, and I quote:

Please advise how tax-paying senior citizens will be able to cope under the proposed formula. Our drug bills, eye care, and dental care supplies are between 6 and \$7,000 a year. We have been hard-working citizens all our lives, and therefore have been highly taxed. Now in retirement we will be left destitute. Is this what the taxpaying seniors deserve?

Mr. Speaker, to the Premier. Is this what Saskatchewan seniors deserve, or will the Premier admit he made a mistake, and instead of providing phone numbers, will he cancel this attack on Saskatchewan seniors.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, there are programs that we have to deal with those extraordinary costs or extra costs that happen for some of the other kinds of things that affect your income.

And what we do is we work together with the individuals, and it's not fair to the people of this province that the members opposite create a level of fear among everybody around our program.

We have \$337 million in the long-term care program. We also have other parts of the program that will assist people who run into difficulties. That's how we operate. That's how we do things.

What we want to make sure is that, in the long term, our system will be sustainable. We've asked some of our citizens in this province who have a few more assets and income to pay a little bit more. That's what this is about and we're going to continue to work with the people of Saskatchewan to develop a very good system for everybody.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Bakken: — Mr. Speaker, it is the NDP that instilled the fear in this province on seniors, and it is real fear — not this side of the House.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to read from another letter that we've received.

My dad is currently at Pioneer Village. He is 82 and suffers from dementia. My dad worked hard all his life. When he finally needs the help of the health care system, after having paid taxes all his life, what do you do? You decide that people in long-term care should have their fees raised an exorbitant amount.

At \$4,100 in income a month, charging \$3,875 leaves \$225. My dad's drug costs are \$250 a month. He needs clothes and other incidentals for about \$100 a month. And to top it off, he has to pay income tax to the provincial government and the federal government.

Hard to believe an NDP government would not think such a ridiculous increase through.

In effect . . .

The Speaker: — Would the member put the question please?

Ms. Bakken: —

My dad deserves more than having a government take away all his monthly income.

Mr. Speaker, is the Premier listening? Will he cancel the NDP's attack on our seniors?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, this Premier, this government, is carefully listening to the people, and we will work with . . .

The Speaker: — Order, please. Order, please. A little more order, please.

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, our programs are designed to listen to the people who have the concerns and deal with those particular problems. And that's what we're going to do.

But I think that what we also have to recognize in this whole

process is that we are looking about the . . . at the long-term sustainability of our whole system of health care.

And what we're also looking at is, how much money can we afford? And some of the seniors that I have talked to have said, well let us pay some more if we can afford it because we want to contribute to the whole system.

And I think the members opposite have said that they're going to . . . they wanted to freeze the whole health care system, social services, all those things, and basically try to collapse everything.

We don't want to do that. We've set out in our action . . .

The Speaker: — Order, please. Order, please. Order, please.

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, we've set out in our action plan where we're going, and that includes providing good care for the people of the province.

What we've done in his particular instance is ask some of the people who have some income, that they would share that income to pay for the cost. We're not taking their assets; we're looking at their income.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — Mr. Speaker, here are some excerpts from a letter from a lady in Swift Current:

I was shocked that the government was so heartless, picking on the most helpless patients to try and balance their budget . . .

My husband . . . has Alzheimers and a heart condition . . . I had no choice but to put him in a nursing home.

. . . There are dental problems at times, which are not cheap and we both wear glasses so those things have to be looked after . . .

I'm trying to keep up our home, but at the rate things are going I might be forced to sell it . . .

The rest of our dollars will be gobbled up by the government for nursing home care.

Would the government stop and reconsider the blunder they have made?

Mr. Speaker, will the Premier do that today? Will he stop and reconsider the blunder this government has made and stop the attack on Saskatchewan seniors?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, what we will do is we will listen carefully to the concerns that individual people will have, and we'll work with them to see how our various programs will work to provide the kinds of services that they need.

I remind everybody that the average cost in a nursing home for

this year is estimated to be \$50,000 per year. So even the person who has a large amount of income and pays the top rate of \$3,875, they still receive a subsidy around this long-term care.

So what we are trying to do, Mr. Speaker, is ask those people who have a little more income than some of the others to share that income in this particular way.

What we are doing is asking all of the people of the province to help us deal with the budget issues we have this year. It's our goal to make sure we have a good health system, good health care system for everybody.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(14:15)

Ms. Eagles: — Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And no matter what kind of a spin the minister wants to put on it, the seniors of this province recognize that this is a government that is out to gouge every last cent out of them.

Here's another letter, Mr. Speaker. I quote:

My grandmother is 89 years old and is handicapped with a prosthetic to replace her leg. She still has to pay for her prescription medicines, transportation by Regina Paratransit, personal toiletries, haircuts, clothing and shoes, and dentures, and a \$20 fee for medical supplies although she does not use this service.

The proposed increase would leave her with less than \$200 per month for all of these personal needs. Surely the Government of Saskatchewan can avoid putting this financial and emotional stress on seniors who have given a lifetime of diligent work and dedication to this province. Please consider the proposed rate increase.

Mr. Speaker, will the Premier do that? Will he consider . . . reconsider and cancel this attack on Saskatchewan seniors?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, I appreciate all of the members raising these issues because that's the kind of thing that they're supposed to do. We're listening and we will deal with the individual concerns that are there.

But what is especially galling right now from that member is the fact that she was the constituency assistant for Mr. Grant Devine and that she was part of that government that put our whole province in a situation where we are having to make some very difficult decisions.

And so what we have done over many years is work and work and work to make sure that we can have a long-term sustainable health care system.

And no matter how much they want to distance themselves for those people, that's where they come from. That's what they would do to our system.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Equitable Provision of Medical Procedures

Mr. Hillson: — Mr. Speaker, Susan Schmidt was suffering from dizziness, severe headaches, and fatigue. Her daughter told . . . her doctor told her she needed an MRI (magnetic resonance imaging). She was then told that she was on a 12-month waiting list. That's right, Mr. Speaker — 12 months to get an MRI.

While not rich, Susan did what anybody not on welfare would do. She went out of province, paid \$1,000, and received an immediate MRI. Unfortunately, the test revealed a serious health problem.

Now the Minister of Health says he will not reimburse her because she didn't have prior permission to go out of the province. Apparently she was a bad person for going to Edmonton instead of waiting 12 months to have it done here.

This is two-tier medicine at its worst. One tier for those prepared to go out of province and pay out of their own pockets and an in-province tier that the bottom is falling out of.

Since the Minister of Health will give no help, what does he advise patients to do? Should they suffer in silence while waiting for treatment in Saskatchewan? Or should they go out of province and pay out of their own pockets?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, one of the things that we need to do in our system is make sure that we rely on the professional advice of the medical doctors and all of the other very capable people within the system.

We have set up in our province a method whereby if people require the services on an urgent basis, the doctors have the . . . can bring those cases forward. And what we also have is if people need to go out of the province for any particular test, that they can get prior approval. That's a system that provides equity across the whole system.

But what we also have to look at is how do we provide services in a way that allows for everybody to have access to the funds. That is a major difficulty, because there are not enough funds from that member opposite's party — the federal Liberal Party . . .

The Speaker: — The member's time has elapsed.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ORDERS OF THE DAY

WRITTEN QUESTIONS

Mr. Yates: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. By leave, I would table responses to written questions 105 through 124 and, once again, like to thank all those civil servants who have worked very hard to come up with the answers to these questions.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Responses to questions 105 through to 124 have been tabled.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

SECOND READINGS

Bill No. 24 — The Powers of Attorney Act, 2002 Loi de 2002 sur les procurations

The Speaker: — Order, please. Order, please.

Hon. Mr. Axworthy: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to move second reading of The Powers of Attorney Act, 2002.

Mr. Speaker, in December of 1997 the Steering Committee on the Abuse of Adults in Vulnerable Circumstances, a group made up of representatives of community agencies and provincial government departments, presented its report and recommendations to the government. The recommendations of the committee followed extensive community consultations respecting the abuse of vulnerable adults.

Mr. Speaker, in response to that report, this government introduced amendments to The Saskatchewan Evidence Act in 1998 aimed at facilitating the participation of vulnerable adults in the justice system.

The steering committee also made a number of recommendations respecting adult guardianship and the financial abuse of vulnerable adults. In response to those recommendations, Legislation Working Committee was formed in May of 1998.

Mr. Speaker, this Legislation Working Committee has developed new legislation relating to adult guardianship and has now turned its attention to new legislation respecting powers of attorney.

Mr. Speaker, I'd just like to inform you of the hardworking community agencies represented on this committee and contributing to this work: the Saskatchewan Association for Community Living, the Alzheimer Society of Saskatchewan, the Autism Resource Centre of Regina, the Schizophrenia Society of Saskatchewan, the Canadian Mental Health Association, Saskatchewan branch, the Saskatchewan Association of Rehabilitation Centres, the Saskatchewan Seniors Mechanism, Senior Power of Regina, the Seniors Education Centre in Regina, the Council of Canadians with Disabilities, Saskatchewan Voice of People with Disabilities, the Office of Disability Issues, the Native Counselling Services, Regina General Hospital, Capacity Assessment, Department of Psychology at the University of Saskatchewan, Regina and District Personal Care Homes Association, Elmwood Residences in Saskatoon, Family and Friends of Cosmo and Elmwood in Saskatoon, the Saskatchewan Association of Health Organizations, System-wide Admissions and Discharge at the Regina Health District, Long Term Care at the Regina Health District, the wills and estates section of the Canadian Bar Association, Saskatchewan branch, the Law Reform Commission of Saskatchewan, the Royal Bank, the Sherwood Credit Union, and Credit Union Central, Mr. Speaker. All contributing, all contributing to this terrific work.

Mr. Speaker, a consultation paper on enduring powers of attorney was prepared by the Law Reform Commission for the working committee. The committee sent this document to about 250 persons and groups throughout the province and incorporated many of their responses in the legislation. Consultees included persons with legal and financial expertise, and organizations working with or representing seniors and persons with disabilities.

Mr. Speaker, the proposed Act will replace The Powers of Attorney Act, 1996. The proposed Act will codify the law respecting enduring powers of attorney and provide protection against financial abuse of persons granting powers of attorney.

Mr. Speaker, an enduring power of attorney is one that remains in effect upon the incapacity of the . . .

The Speaker: — Order, please. Order, please. Would the minister maybe kindly revert back a sentence or two so that it can be heard on record?

Hon. Mr. Axworthy: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'll go back to the beginning.

Mr. Speaker, the proposed Act will replace The Powers of Attorney Act, 1996. And this proposed Act will codify the law respecting enduring powers of attorney and provide protection against financial abuse of persons granting powers of attorney.

Mr. Speaker, an enduring power of attorney is one that remains in effect upon the incapacity of the grantor and the use of such a power of attorney allows an individual to appoint a trusted person to make decisions on his or her behalf when he or she is no longer able to do so.

This Bill provides that the grantor of the power of attorney must be an adult with the capacity to understand the nature and effect of an enduring power of attorney. And in order to make a power of attorney an individual must understand that he or she is giving the attorney decision-making authority respecting their financial affairs.

To guard against financial abuse of grantors, the Bill includes limitations on who may act as an attorney under an enduring power of attorney. In order to act as an attorney, one must not be an undischarged bankrupt; a person who has been convicted of a criminal offence related to violence, theft, fraud, or breach of trust in the last 10 years may not act as an attorney unless there's been a pardon, or the fact of the conviction has been disclosed to the grantor and the grantor, while he or she has capacity, has consented. No one in the business of providing care service to the grantor may act as an attorney.

Mr. Speaker, this Bill contains provisions respecting the appointment of more than one attorney and of corporate attorneys. These provisions will clarify the law in this area and ensure that grantors of powers of attorney have the flexibility they need.

Another provision that provides flexibility to grantors is one allowing for the use of contingent enduring powers of attorney. Those powers of attorney come into effect on a future date or on occurrence of a specified contingency. Mr. Speaker, often the

contingency will be the incapacity of the grantor.

The Bill contains provisions respecting how to determine when this contingency has occurred, and the consultations of the steering committee indicated that such a provision will be welcomed by many consumers.

Mr. Speaker, the Bill clearly sets out the procedures required for valid, enduring powers of attorney. They're to be in writing, dated, signed, and independently witnessed. The Bill also sets out the authority and duties of an attorney. Attorneys must act honestly, in good faith, in the best interests of the grantor, and with the care reasonably expected of a person with the attorney's experience and expertise.

The Act will require accounting in some circumstances. Anyone who charges a fee for acting as an attorney will have to provide an accounting. As well there's always a duty to account to the grantor. In some circumstances, accountings may be requested by persons named by the grantor or by family members of the grantor, and they may be directed also by the Public Trustee or by the Court of Queen's Bench.

The Bill also specifies when the authority of an attorney under an enduring power of attorney ends. An authority will end on a date specified in the power of attorney on written revocation, on death of the grantor, on death of or incapacity of the attorney, on the written resignation of the attorney, on the attorney being prohibited from acting under the law, on the appointment of a property decision-maker for the grantor or the . . . or attorney, on the attorney and the grantor ceasing to be spouses, or pursuant, Mr. Speaker, to a court order. The certainty provided by this section will be welcomed both by attorneys and those dealing with them.

Mr. Speaker, the Bill provides protection for third parties who rely — there's more, Mr. Speaker — the Bill provides protection for third parties who rely on powers of attorney in good faith. It also protects attorneys in some circumstances if the attorney did not know of the existence of the circumstance and could not, with the exercise of reasonable care, have known about it.

Mr. Speaker, these provisions will be welcomed by lawyers, by consumers, and others who deal with enduring powers of attorney. The protections against financial abuse will please those who work with vulnerable adults. The legislation will provide clarification and guidance respecting powers of attorney, procedures, and the authority and obligations of attorneys, and a number of provisions will provide flexibility to those making powers of attorney.

Provision of a non-mandatory form will be welcomed also by customers, Mr. Speaker.

So, Mr. Speaker, in closing, let me thank the legislative . . . Legislation Working Committee, congratulate them for a work . . . for a job well done, for all of their input.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to move second reading of An Act respecting Powers of Attorney.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(14:30)

Mr. McMorris: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, Bill No. 24, an Act representing powers of attorney is quite an extensive Act. It's . . . it is quite a bit . . . and it was obviously witnessed by the minister with his fairly long description of the Bill. It was interesting to hear the minister talk about the number of organizations and groups that he has met with and talked to prior to introducing this Bill. Some 250 people and groups he had mentioned he had had the opportunity of talking to.

Unfortunately, we on the opposition side haven't had that much opportunity to talk to a number of groups as to how this will affect them.

On the surface it looks like it's going in the right direction. I think any time you start dealing with power of attorney — and I just know from my own self — I've never had an opportunity or the occasion to experience the whole range of issues that can take place around being granted power of attorney, or around a person that will have to give up the . . . the ability to give up the power of attorney to someone else.

So, Mr. Speaker, there's a lot of issues here that the minister talked on, and on surface seem like they make perfectly good sense. But unfortunately until we're able to talk to a number of those groups, and a number of people that have had more exposure to this sort of . . . to the whole subject of power of attorney, Mr. Speaker, I would move that we would adjourn debate on this Bill.

Debate adjourned.

Bill No. 25 — The Cost of Credit Disclosure Act, 2002

Hon. Mr. Axworthy: — Mr. Speaker, I rise today to move second reading of The Cost of Credit Disclosure Act, 2002.

This Bill will protect consumers against unfair credit practices and provide them with accurate and comparable information enabling them to make better informed credit decisions.

The proposed Act applies to virtually all lending by provincially regulated lenders, including credit unions and retailers, who offer credit to individuals for borrowing for personal, family, or household purposes.

The Bill significantly broadens the scope of the existing legislation. In addition to consumer loans, the proposed Act also applies to mortgages, credit card transactions, leases, lines of credit, and credit offered by retailers.

Mr. Speaker, this Bill contains new requirements for the information that lenders must disclose to borrowers, both before and after the consumer enters into an agreement. The Bill prescribes the information that must be disclosed for different types of credit, as well as the timing and delivery of disclosure statements.

In addition, the proposed Act prescribes the manner in which annual percentage rates, and non-interest finance charges are to be calculated and disclosed. The proposed Act also restricts the

kinds of charges that can be imposed upon borrowers.

Specifically the Bill allows consumers to prepay all non-mortgage loans without penalty, and provides an additional right of refund of certain non-interest finance charges when early repayment of a loan is made. In addition, the proposed Act contains specific requirements as to the content of advertising for credit.

Mr. Speaker, this legislation is uniform legislation that fulfils Saskatchewan's commitment under the 1994 Agreement on Internal Trade. The provisions contained in this Bill are harmonized with the legislation that has already been passed in Alberta, British Columbia, Ontario, and Nova Scotia. In addition, Manitoba and New Brunswick, we understand, will be introducing harmonized legislation this spring.

The federal government introduced new regulations governing banks in September of 2001.

Mr. Speaker, extensive consultations have been conducted with respect to this legislation. Canada-wide consultations were conducted by the Uniform Law Conference and the Consumer Measures Committee in 1996 through 1998. In addition, Saskatchewan has consulted with a large number of stakeholders over the past two years including consumer groups, representatives of credit unions, retailers, and other lenders.

Mr. Speaker, one issue that has not yet been determined is the manner in which this legislation will deal with lending for farm related purposes. We're continuing to consult with a number of stakeholders on this issue.

We're proposing that the new Act come into force on July 1, 2003, thereby allowing financial institutions and other lenders sufficient time to amend their documents and procedures to conform with the new legislation.

Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to move second reading of The Cost of Credit Disclosure Act, 2002.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, this is a fairly large and comprehensive Bill dealing with a large part of our economy and our society and how the economy and society is funded.

It deals not just with business, Mr. Speaker, but it deals with consumers and how they buy their automobiles and how they buy their deepfreeze and their fridge and whatever else it might be.

Mr. Speaker, it has a large impact on our financial institutions and all of those groups, Mr. Speaker, in society that provide interest, that provide financing for various purchases. And we need to take a look, Mr. Speaker, at just how this is going to affect that kind of borrowing, that kind of lending.

Mr. Speaker, will . . . some of the effects of this particular Bill, such as the prepayment of non-mortgage loans prior to the agreed time, what impact will that have on the interest rates being charged on those kind of loans because, Mr. Speaker, those loans predetermine, in some cases, the amount of interest

that will be paid on a deposit or on an investment from which that loan is drawn. If that prepayment is made early, then the person who has put their money on deposit or has invested in that lending institution that would provide that loan, they're not going to be getting the rate of return that they had — they had — been promised. And so it's going to have an impact, Mr. Speaker. When that becomes riskier, when there's less certainty in that area, my fear would be that that interest rate would then rise.

So in this effect, Mr. Speaker, of the Bill, may very well be to raise the interest costs to consumers. And I wonder if the minister has thought about that. So we need, Mr. Speaker, to talk to the third parties that are involved in this — the lending institutions, the retail institutions that provide credit on their purchases, Mr. Speaker. We need to talk to the consumers to determine what they think of this Bill, and whether they have had any concerns about the possible increase in interest rates because of some of the functions of this particular Bill, Mr. Speaker.

So I would move at this time that we adjourn debate on Bill No. 25.

Debate adjourned.

ADJOURNED DEBATES

SECOND READINGS

Bill No. 10

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Osika that **Bill No. 10 — The Tax Enforcement Amendment Act, 2002** be now read a second time.

Mr. Wiberg: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise this afternoon to make a few comments about Bill No. 10, The Tax Enforcement Amendment Act.

Certainly, Mr. Speaker, we have an Act here that's set out some rules that have been in place for a lot of years. And as we're all aware in the House, Mr. Speaker, since the early- to mid-'90s, tax collections have risen in the province but unfortunately the regulations surrounding it that were in legislation, that are in legislation, have not kept up to the massive increases that have taken place in the last several years in property assessment.

Mr. Speaker, there are many areas in rural Saskatchewan and certainly for a large part also in urban Saskatchewan where assessment has risen to a significant degree. In the old Act, Mr. Speaker, there were actually two rules in force in regards to the enforcement of tax collection.

If a piece of property, Mr. Speaker, is assessed at under \$2,000, the taxing authorities throughout Saskatchewan can simply, on their own accord, when the tax arrears are risen to a point where it's become unmanageable are simply able to proceed at their own pace to be able to do a collection on those tax dollars.

Mr. Speaker, if the assessment of property is over \$2,000 under present legislation, then what needs to happen is that a local

government then must proceed to the Provincial Mediation Board to seek approval, to begin with, in order to proceed with the process, to advance the process to . . . for the collection of unpaid property taxes.

Now when we first looked at this Bill, Mr. Speaker, and then began to send it out to those people who have the most interest in it — and that would be the municipalities, both urban and rural and northern, Mr. Speaker — our first glance at it, we thought well this will be a great idea, some changes need to take place. Property assessment has risen at a significant increase in the last several years. And probably the base for whether a municipality can be able to proceed on their own without going to the Provincial Mediation Board needs to be changed.

And so when we looked at this Bill, you would think that the government would have seen fit to raise the limit so that it would ease the pressures that municipalities are going to place upon the Provincial Mediation Board so that there'd be a lot less unpaid tax challenges having to be taken to the board, so that municipalities then would be able to proceed, as soon as they deem it reasonable, for unpaid taxes.

But one of the things that we noticed in the preamble from the minister, the minister for Government Relations, whereas that even though they're looking at changing this Bill, certainly we want to make sure that everyone understands, Mr. Speaker, that the changes that are going to be made are based upon requests from urban municipalities, from northern municipalities, from rural municipalities throughout the province, that the \$2,000 limit is simply not acceptable any more.

But in the preamble, as I mentioned earlier, Mr. Speaker, there is no mention of approval from any of these municipalities. The SUMA (Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association) is not . . . there's been no indication from SUMA whether this is a good Bill. There's no indication from SARM (Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities) whether this is a good Bill. There's no indication from the urban municipal authority . . . administrators authority whether this is a good Bill. There's no indication from the rural municipalities administrators association whether this is a good Bill.

And so then it began to leave us wondering, Mr. Speaker, if those people who are most intimately involved in the tax collections for their own governments, for school boards throughout the province, then why is the government bringing a Bill that does not seem to have the approval of these many, many associations throughout the province?

Now I guess this is where the problem for this government is going to begin, Mr. Speaker. They say they want to change the limits. And certainly when you take a look at having a limit of \$2,000, and probably back in the '70s there were many properties assessed at \$2,000 in this province, Mr. Speaker, when we look under today's circumstances especially in today's cities, in towns, in rural settings, farmland, there are no longer any properties in those jurisdictions assessed at less than \$2,000.

There are still, unfortunately, some small villages, some hamlets, some northern municipalities that have properties assessed at less than \$2,000. And so then they would probably

see that these changes would not be that significant.

However, Mr. Speaker, should the changes that could be reflected here would be of an upward, would be of an upward assessment, Mr. Speaker, we could find a lot of favour with that. It would certainly ease the pressures that would be brought forth on the Provincial Mediation Board.

Imagine, Mr. Speaker, in today's circumstances because the assessment limit is \$2,000 almost every time that a municipality needs to enforce The Tax Enforcement Act they're going to have to go to the Provincial Mediation Board because virtually all properties other than those that I've already stated are going to be in excess of \$2,000.

So when the government was first approached by SUMA and SARM to take a look at this Act to see if some adjustments couldn't be made certainly the government agreed, I would assume because they're bringing the Act forth, that what's going to happen is that this has to be looked at and changes are going to have to be brought forth.

And so as we understand it, we're talking with the municipalities throughout the province, Mr. Speaker, is that they at first showed some excitement that this was going to finally happen, that there would be fewer opportunities where they'd have to take advantage of the Provincial Mediation Board. Unfortunately, imagine their dismay, Mr. Speaker, when they found out that on examining the changes that the government is bringing forth, there is no clear direction as to what's going to happen.

(14:45)

In fact what it says here, Mr. Speaker, is that they're not going to define any specific limit. In fact what this Bill talks about, Mr. Speaker, is that what they're going to do is remove the limit from legislation. They're going to put it into regulations so that the cabinet, at their whim, will make a determination of where the limit is going to be; where The Tax Enforcement Act is going to be enacted and how it's going to be enacted; whether jurisdictions have been able to start out on their own for tax enforcement or whether they're going to need to seek approval from the Provincial Mediation Board.

So what is that limit? Is it going to be 5,000, is it going to be 10,000, is it going to be 15,000, is it going to be 20,000? Well, Mr. Speaker, as we read through the, read through the Bill, in fact what it could be is zero. It could be zero, Mr. Speaker. In fact, what could happen is that in this Act every single tax enforcement that will need to take place in the province will have to go through the Provincial Mediation Board.

That kind of fuzziness that is going to be left out in the open has a great deal of concern for urban municipalities, for rural municipalities, and for northern municipalities. And certainly, we have also found out that it is a great deal of concern for the administrators — whether they be urban or rural or northern — that without that definition being in legislation, they're very concerned that what's going to happen because of the . . . if, and I say if this Tax Enforcement Amendment Act, 2002 is brought . . . is enacted, is that they're going to be left at the indiscretion of a cabinet.

And maybe what they should have is the . . . this Bill, as brought forth by the Minister of Government Relations, should have laid out definitively what the change was going to be and left it in legislation.

This is what we're beginning to hear when we see legislation such as this, Mr. Speaker, a directional change by this government to remove pieces of legislation from the books and turn them over to regulation. What that means, when you take a look at an Act such as this one, Mr. Speaker, is that from now on, members of the House are not going to see the changes that are extremely relevant to the people of Saskatchewan brought forth for debate so that perusal can take place and solid debate, Mr. Speaker, on the relevance and the importance of the changes that a government would like to see take place.

So when we see a Bill like this brought forward, where a government is talking about taking legislation and replacing it with regulations, is leaving the people . . . and certainly with all the discussions we've had out there, it's leaving the people of Saskatchewan with a great deal of consternation that again the government is going to be enacting upon them — behind closed doors, in dark rooms — some ideas that they really are significantly opposed to. Why, Mr. Speaker, cannot these remain in legislation? Why can't the people of Saskatchewan know in an upfront and honest manner what is going to be happening to their taxation in this province?

And I think that municipalities out there are going to be, on an annual basis, Mr. Speaker, extremely concerned that one day in every spring they're simply going to receive a note in the mail from the Minister of Government Relations, or whatever they may call it at some given time in the future, is that this year, next year, the year after, whatever year it may be that the limits are going to be adjusted.

They could go up, they could go down, they could go all around — very much like the government, Mr. Speaker.

So, Mr. Speaker, I think because of the great deal of concern out there, this government should have put a lot more thought into this Bill. Certainly they indicate, and the minister has stated that in his remarks when he opened debate, that there was a lot of organizations out there very concerned about the \$2,000 limit. It needed to be addressed. Times have changed. And certainly the government appears to be addressing that change.

But again, as I've stated, this government is very reluctant to make changes and would rather take over and behind closed doors and in dark rooms prefer to run this province in a manner that is not open for public debate.

So, Mr. Speaker, I guess we need to stop and spend some time in debate today to understand that these type of Bills where legislation is being taken off the books that . . . and put into regulations where the cabinet is going to be able to at their whims, be able to make changes that are going to be drastically affecting municipalities — urban, rural, northern, throughout Saskatchewan — I think needs to take some extensive time to address.

So, Mr. Speaker, I know that the government is very keen in hearing debate and I'm glad that I had the . . . been given the

opportunity today to do that so that the Minister of Government Relations can hear from this side of the House some of the concerns that are out there are that the people of Saskatchewan, who on first looking at this Bill, thought well it's a government going in the right direction, but on very close examination sees that it is a government that instead of doing what is appropriate is actually doing nothing more than something. It is a government who brings forth bills of something and they're going to do stuff.

So here we have again a Bill that talks about . . . wants to make changes, doesn't have the heart to do so, is afraid that should they put something in place that they're going to lose some control of what's going on in municipalities throughout the province. We know that when you take a look at Bills like this it certainly does not line up with the recommendation that was in the . . . brought forth by the cities of the province when they wanted changes brought forth to urban municipality legislation.

What's recommended here, of course it certainly doesn't line up with what rural municipalities have been talking about, Mr. Speaker, and certainly the government in their deliberations and consultations with the administrators of the province whether they be urban administrators or rural administrators or northern administrators, this is not exactly what they were looking for. What they were looking for was a definitive piece of legislation that would allow them to become more independent from the Provincial Mediation Board. There's no clear indication, Mr. Speaker, that that's going to happen under this legislation.

And so then I think what's important at this time, Mr. Speaker, that a significant amount of time be set aside to work with the people of Saskatchewan to ensure that what's in this Bill is going to be appropriate, that municipalities are going to get what they need, and it's at this time I would like to adjourn debate.

Debate adjourned.

Bill No. 11

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Osika that **Bill No. 11 — The Urban Municipal Administrators Amendment Act, 2002** be now read a second time.

Mr. Wiberg: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure again to rise this afternoon and make a few comments on Bill No. 11, The Urban Municipal Administrators Amendment Act, an Act that's been brought forth at the request of urban administrators, Mr. Speaker. And I'm certain . . .

The Speaker: — Order, please.

Mr. Wiberg: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for . . . And certainly I enjoy the encouragement from the members of the government for my getting up to say a few words about this Bill. It's always encouraging when we get their participation. It's not often we get their participation in this Assembly.

Now certainly the minister for governmental affairs said that what's going to happen here is they want to bring a Bill forth that responds to the . . . some requests from the urban municipal

administrators. And that's appropriate. It's not often that this government actually brings forth a piece of legislation at the request of citizens of Saskatchewan that actually falls in line to some degree.

As we take a look at the comments that were made by the minister for Government Relations, is that urban municipal administrators throughout the province were seeing some loopholes in legislation that helps to regulate them so that they can also be self-regulators and be able to provide the professional development that is required for urban municipal administrators throughout the province.

So, Mr. Speaker, as we take a look at this Bill after looking at some of the other ones that have been brought forth in the last couple of weeks, Mr. Speaker, we wanted to be awfully careful that we peruse this Bill very, very closely. It's important that the people of Saskatchewan had a chance to take a look at this Bill, how is this going to affect them.

The urban municipal administrators administer a large portion of local tax dollars throughout the province. And the people of Saskatchewan are going to want to know that this professional organization is going to have the tools that are necessary in order to maintain their professionalism and that this association will be able to provide the services that are necessary for their membership.

So imagine, Mr. Speaker, as we went through this Bill, The Urban Municipal Administrators Amendment Act, 2002, that we were pleasantly surprised that this Bill looks like it could be upfront and certainly probably providing just some housekeeping changes that were necessary for the urban municipal administrators.

So in our due diligence — and certainly on this side of the House, Mr. Speaker, we are very concerned about due diligence — and it's one of the things that we like to remind the government on a constant basis that due diligence is an appropriate process to do when you're in government.

The Urban Municipal Administrators' Association was pleased with this Act; that it's taking care of some of their concerns out there certainly. And when we take a look at the proposal from cities throughout the province for changes to municipal legislation, this was part of it. There are some changes here that will help move things along for urban municipal administrators throughout the province.

And so . . . But the . . . And the questions that we do have left I think need to be more appropriately addressed by the minister, and I think it would be more appropriate then that at this time we move this Bill along to Committee of the Whole.

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

Bill No. 14

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Sonntag that **Bill No. 14 – The Vehicle Administration Amendment Act, 2002** be now read a second time

Mr. Wall: — Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to enter the debate on Bill 14, The Vehicle Administration Amendment Act, 2002.

And, Mr. Speaker, it's . . . while it's an Act that hasn't received a lot of public attention, I'm sure it will both throughout this session here and as SGI (Saskatchewan Government Insurance) outlined some of the measures that are in this particular Bill. And certainly there are some elements of the Bill that the official opposition Saskatchewan Party certainly finds encouraging that the government is pursuing.

The bulk of the Bill and the most substantive changes for Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, have to do with the new technology that is available called the ignition interlock — a device that is attached to a vehicle's ignition system. And this particular device renders that vehicle inoperable if the driver has been drinking past the legal limit. The driver must blow into the interlock system before the vehicle will start.

It's a great piece of technology, I think everybody would agree, and the use of it in the province of Saskatchewan, according to the minister responsible for SGI, has been significant in the only four months it's been available with a . . . I believe he said in his second reading speech, Mr. Speaker, that 134 devices have been installed in vehicles with offenders paying all of the cost to have this there.

(15:00)

You could see the merit of this sort of a system, especially for offenders who need their vehicles to continue to make a living in the province of Saskatchewan. And now there is a system in place that ensures they, indeed, will not be operating their car under the influence of alcohol. But it does allow them to use their car and their trucks to do their work and provide for themselves and for their families.

There's some significant changes to the existing provisions governing these ignition interlocks in this particular Bill 14. For example, it extends the program's availability to repeat offenders. Previously, only first-time offenders were able to use these ignition interlocks and the program . . . the Bill quite rightly extends the availability of this technology to repeat offenders, citing some success with that kind of expansion in other jurisdictions.

Mr. Speaker, the Bill also appropriately lays out consequences to those who try to get around the equipment, the apparatus. For those who try to get around the provisions of the ignition interlock program, the Bill outlines some penalties for that and that too seems reasonable.

And also, Mr. Speaker, there is a process set out in the Bill for those people who might feel aggrieved by a decision made by authorities with respect to the ignition interlock to appeal to the Highway Traffic Board.

Some other changes include clarifying provisions around failing to stop for a peace officer, as an offence that is now listed and is listed as part of those offences that can result in a statutory driver's licence suspension.

Mr. Speaker, the other substantive portion of the Bill has to do with medical conditions and here we do have some questions in the opposition.

The monitoring of medical conditions receives special attention in the Bill and while the Bill does . . . takes some positive steps in terms of streamlining the medical certification process so . . . especially for those commercial drivers who need a speedy and efficient system with which they can be certified from a medical perspective. The Bill does take some positive steps to streamline that and they indicate that some of those streamlining procedures have been endorsed by the Saskatchewan Medical Association.

But there is a change as well, Mr. Speaker, that does, I think, warrant some further discussion and some further debate and that change is as follows. And that's: as of January 1, 2003 periodic medical reports — medical certifications if you will — will be required of commercial drivers in the province of Saskatchewan.

Now the rationale the minister gave for this particular change is that these kinds of medical reports are needed if drivers, commercial drivers, wish to operate in Saskatchewan but more specifically in the United States. And it's an interesting provision. Certainly we would want our government doing whatever it could to ensure that commercial drivers in our province are enabled to compete for work anywhere in Canada and certainly in the United States.

We understand that it's important to ensure that sort of uniformity in the regulations between Saskatchewan and the United States. I come from a family in the trucking industry, Mr. Speaker. My father has been in the trucking industry since he was a teenager. He started out on his own and he's been in various kinds of trucking industries . . . he started with cartage or general freight and ended his career 40 years in self-employment and in trucking in the furniture moving business, Mr. Speaker.

And my brother followed in his footsteps and is involved and he too is in the furniture business and also in grain hauling. And his licence to do that of course has enabled him to do some other work as well in agriculture, unfortunately in Alberta, but in agriculture nonetheless.

So we're very aware, Mr. Speaker, of the importance of ensuring that our drivers, truck drivers in the province of Saskatchewan and operators and all commercial drivers can ply their trade in the United States. What the minister did not elaborate on in his speech however is what particular provisions in the United States require these periodic medical reports.

And it's interesting that the minister also didn't cite any other Canadian provinces with which we'd be making our regulations uniform. So we'll want to ask the minister questions about that. We will want to ensure that he has consulted with the trucking industry here in the province of Saskatchewan and other commercial drivers to ensure that this doesn't put them at an unfair advantage, this particular regulation.

Mr. Speaker, because of the questions that we in opposition have on that front specifically, on the medical condition

reporting in Bill No. 14, at this time I would move that we would adjourn debate.

Debate adjourned.

Bill No. 4

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Sonntag that **Bill No. 4 — The SaskEnergy Amendment Act, 2002** be now read a second time.

Mr. Wall: — Well thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the Crown corporations critic for the opposition, it's also a pleasure to offer a few comments on this particular Bill.

You know, Mr. Speaker, for the most part this Bill is fairly positive. It's intended, for the most part, to enable the oil and gas industry to be . . . have a little more flexibility, a little more self-reliance in terms of getting natural gas to various parts of . . . of energy oil and gas fields in the province of Saskatchewan.

And you know, Mr. Speaker, the minister in his speech, in his second reading speech, focused on that, understandably so, it's a fairly popular part of the Bill. But, Mr. Speaker, the concerns the opposition has is not what the minister had to say about the Bill because frankly, on that count, we'd be in agreement.

The concern the official opposition has with Bill No. 4 is what this minister did not say in his second reading speech. There are provisions in this Bill that he just rushed right over, Mr. Speaker. There are significant elements of this Bill that he didn't even bother to mention, he did not even reference in his second reading speech.

And I know that the former minister of Energy — I know the former minister of Energy and Mines, the member for Regina South, probably advised him on that, because that member is very politically astute. And that member would know that you'd want your minister to stand up and outline what elements of the Bill are good for the oil and gas sector, but to avoid any reference at all to those parts of the Bill that the people of the province would find odious, that the people of the province would object to. And so I have no doubt that the member for Regina South offered that very good political advice to the minister.

But what is often politically good advice to any government doesn't really serve a public purpose, Mr. Speaker. And so I would like to comment a little bit on one specific element of this Act that, I think it's fair to say, the opposition has some significant problems with.

Mr. Speaker, there is a section of this Act that governs exactly how much SaskEnergy can spend in a commercial transaction before they need any sort of cabinet approval. That is the way The SaskEnergy Act is currently worded.

Now, Mr. Speaker, this particular Bill though, sets out to change all of that. And the change can be found in, I believe, Mr. Speaker . . . well we'll find the section. But the change can be found specifically to the restrictions that the previous Act

placed on SaskEnergy. Anything over and above \$200,000 that they wanted to spend, that they wanted to . . . (inaudible) . . . the Crown corporation, they needed the permission of the cabinet. And it was set out in legislation, and frankly, I think rightly so.

And, I mean, I know that limits on these things have to change from time to time. You know, limits might get dated in terms of the amount you spend. But the setting of limits in legislation — that concept I don't think has to change, Mr. Speaker. And that's what this Act, that's what this Act sets out to do.

Mr. Speaker, it's section 19 that the Bill No. 4 presently before the Assembly sets out to amend:

Subsection 19(4) is amended by striking out "\$200,000" and substituting "the amount fixed by the Lieutenant Governor in Council".

So what we have currently, Mr. Speaker, is an Act that says to SaskEnergy look, up to \$200,000 go ahead, make the decisions you need to make to operate the Crown corporation. Not an insignificant amount of money by most people's standards. And not a huge amount of money, granted, by the standards of a large gas corporation operating in Canada in the province of Saskatchewan. It sets that limit out in legislation.

This Bill, this provision of this Bill that the minister didn't mention in his second reading speech, removes the limit and just says, well we'll just let cabinet set it. And, you know, were the opposition a little bit more comfortable with who exactly the cabinet is in the province of Saskatchewan, we might have less of a problem with this particular provision of the Bill.

But given the track record of the government, given the track record of the NDP as it relates to Crowns, and given their track record very, very, very recently in terms of their willingness to disclose large-scale expenditures, like the \$1.7 million buy in to a brokerage company in High River, Alberta — and we saw more of it this morning — they're simply not willing to force SGI to report to the committee on a significant transaction basis.

Because of that kind of intransigence in terms of wanting to do the right things with these Crowns, I don't think the people of the province of Saskatchewan are very comfortable with members of this Assembly basically letting the cabinet set behind closed doors, and in privacy and in secrecy, letting them set the limit that SaskEnergy can spend without so much as deigning to come across Wascana Lake and ask the cabinet.

Mr. Speaker, I think the people of this province like the fact that there is a legislated limit that SaskEnergy can spend. I think they like that.

And you know, we've looked through other Acts. We've looked through . . . I've looked through other Crown corporation Acts. And you know what, Mr. Speaker? There are precious few references like this across government.

So here is the one good example in the NDP family of Crown corporations of this body — this Legislative Assembly and the taxpayers' representatives — being able to say, look, SaskEnergy, up to \$200,000, go ahead and run the business; we trust you. And over \$200,000, we still trust you but we think

you need approval; we think you need to come to the people's representatives for approval.

The minister didn't reference that at all. He didn't mention it at all in his second reading speech, and I think that should be of concern to the people of the province. And it's certainly a concern to us. It's why we continue to talk to groups, understanding the importance of the changes they made to the oil and gas industry, but not wanting them to slip in a quick change that the people of the . . . would not serve the province, under the guise of an Act that may be quite positive here to the oil and gas industry.

So as a result of that, Mr. Speaker, I'd move that we adjourn debate.

Debate adjourned.

(15:15)

COMMITTEE OF FINANCE

General Revenue Fund Highways and Transportation Vote 16

Subvote (HI01)

The Chair: — I invite the Minister of Highways and Transportation to introduce his officials and if he wishes, make a brief statement.

Hon. Mr. Wartman: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Before I introduce my officials I'd like to give a brief overview of the successes we've achieved in the Department of Highways and Transportation as well as our plans for this fiscal year.

The key to success is having a good plan. And we have such a plan. As *Leader-Post* columnist Murray Mandryk so accurately detailed in his column last year regarding the 2001-2002 budget, and I quote:

What the public and other stakeholders appear to appreciate about this year's budget is that there appears to be a long-term plan for the province's highways network.

I couldn't have said it better myself. And I would like to commend the two ministers who preceded me in this portfolio and did so much to move this plan forward. I would like to commend the hon. member from Meadow Lake and the member from Saskatoon Nutana.

I have had the good fortune to see this plan in action first-hand on the province's roads and highways. In fact one of my first duties as minister was to open, with the Premier, the newly twinned 21-kilometre section of Highway No. 1 West at the Alberta border in the Cypress Hills constituency. A couple of weeks later I was able to highlight the centre line rumble strips installed as a safety pilot project on Highway 11 northeast of Saskatoon in the Rosthern constituency. And last month I was in Kindersley constituency to open a lighting safety project on a 1.6-kilometre stretch of Highway No. 7 in the town of Kindersley.

I had hoped that the former member from Kindersley would have been able to attend that grand opening of the lighting project. I thought it would have been a very good opportunity for him to see the light. He wasn't able to be there and I assume now that he did finally make it there a few weeks ago.

And so I'd like to invite any of the members opposite to go and take a look at that, considering the results. That light project is really impressive . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . That's exactly it.

It's by driving these roads, meeting the people who live in the rural and urban areas that I hear what great work we have been doing. And I have been getting significant feedback, Mr. Chairman. I have also heard that there's lots more work that needs to be done. My government listens to the people of Saskatchewan, Mr. Chairman, and we will continue to listen and move forward with our plan to build better highways.

In 1997, we committed to spend \$2.5 billion over 10 years on highway improvements. We had the vision and mission for this money but we also knew that we couldn't spend a quarter of a million dollars a year right at the very start of this program. We knew that we would need to ramp up this funding to fix our roads faster and we wanted to do this in a fiscally prudent manner. So that's exactly what we did.

In 1999, we stepped up our spending and dedicated at least a quarter of a billion dollars each year over four years to fix our roads. But even this quarter billion dollars over four years was not enough.

In 2001-02, this government announced an historic high budget of \$311 million. You'll see from this year's budget that we know we have a good thing going because by the end of this fiscal year we will have invested 885 million of that \$1 billion target. We are also well on our way to exceeding the 2.5 billion in spending over 10 years.

So what does this show us? It demonstrates our ability to listen and to act in a proactive fashion. It also shows my government's ability to manage a massive economic undertaking in a time when other provinces are drastically cutting their transportation budgets.

In 2001-02 we committed to spending \$900 million over the following three years. This year's budget of 300.3 million shows our government is committed to a long-term strategic plan that builds better highways and makes our roadways safer.

With this year's budget we will be at 68 per cent of the way to meeting the \$900 million target. So what will the people of Saskatchewan get for \$900 million? They will get a better, safer, and more sustainable transportation system that supports economic and social development.

For example, here are a few of the things we accomplished last year. We paved and opened 68 kilometres of twinned highway. We resurfaced almost 315 kilometres of provincial highways, and we upgraded over 300 kilometres of rural highways. And we started construction of a second North Saskatchewan River bridge and the associated roadways at the Battlefords.

We're going to add to this impressive list with a host of new activities this year. Paving and reconstruction crews will work on more than 700 kilometres of highways. We're going to twin 24 kilometres on Highway No. 1 West in the Cypress Hills constituency. And we'll also do twinning work on Highway No. 16 through Lashburn in the Lloydminster constituency.

We'll continue to upgrade 800 kilometres of TMS (thin membrane surface) roads and upgrade primary pavements to a 20-year life cycle. You can add resurfacing another 370 kilometres of rural and primary highways to our list of accomplishments as well as making safety improvements to intersections, bridges, and short-line railway crossings. And, Mr. Chairman, our lighting projects are making this province safer for everyone.

Mr. Chairman, we'll also be improving northern roads, highways, and airports. And while we're doing all this work, we'll be creating hundreds of jobs for road builders, construction crews, private engineering firms, and summer students.

Meeting these levels of historic budget targets isn't just about spending taxpayer dollars. It's about having a vision. And our vision is to transform Saskatchewan's transportation system to meet the social and economic development opportunities of the 21st century. We continue to achieve this vision by focusing on a sustainable transportation infrastructure, strengthening economic development and serving social needs, and the safe movement of people and goods.

Before we move on with this business of estimates, Mr. Chairman, I would also like to take time . . . take this opportunity to recognize the member for Cypress Hills and his tenure as the department's opposition critic. The member for Cypress Hills has been the Highways critic for the last three years and as such I have found him to be thoughtful and challenging, a respectful gentleman. And I look forward to having him as the opposition critic for many, many years to come.

Mr. Chairman, I would now like to introduce the department's officials who will be assisting me with the estimates debate. I would like to introduce to you Mr. Harvey Brooks, who is deputy minister; Barry Martin, assistant deputy minister of operations; Don Wincherauk, who is assistant deputy minister of corporate services; and Carl Negggers, assistant deputy minister of policy and planning.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I look forward to answering any questions or replying to any comments that the members opposite may have regarding this estimates package. Thank you very much.

Mr. Elhard: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman, I'd like to open up this first session of estimates for the Department of Highways and Transportation by acknowledging the kind comments of the minister, although they weren't all kind, I might mention. And we will address the issues as we get through the estimates today, I'm sure.

The fact of the matter is that the minister has had his role now for about six months, I believe. And within the next three

months we will see his tenure be among the longest of all of the most recent ministers. And I think that by now he will have been brought up to speed by his department and his officials, and I think that he'll be asked to provide us some very clear and definitive answers this afternoon.

I appreciate the fact that the officials are here today; I'd welcome them to the Assembly, and I look forward to a good afternoon of question and answer.

As the officials will know, and probably as the minister recognizes, I do tend to emphasize philosophy and policy more than I do specific numbers. But I think there are some individuals on this side of the House who have questions that will directly be attached to numbers, and I will step aside now and allow my colleague from Rosthern to open up the questioning this afternoon.

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Welcome to the minister and his officials. It's always an interesting time to get into a discussion in estimates on Highways. We had the minister read his prepared speech on where he thought his philosophy was and what they were going to do. That in itself was interesting. I think he must have been worried that we weren't going to ask where he was going to go in case we were really convinced that they weren't quite sure where they were going to go.

I think the best statement on Saskatchewan highways was — as indicated by some of this government's own highway signs. Coming back from Medicine Hat some time ago, there's a number of signs that sort of indicate that you're coming to Saskatchewan. And we won't comment on the quality of the highways in Alberta because I think everyone knows what they're like. But you just come to the Saskatchewan border and there's one big sign just says, "Saskatchewan." And then you drive about another 200 yards, and you hit two or three major holes in the highway and there's another big sign that says, "Naturally."

Just bizarre. This government actually put up signs right beside the holes saying, "Saskatchewan," "Naturally." That's what they expect. It's truly amazing that they advertise the conditions in this province in such a negative sort of a light.

The questions in the House during question period for the last two or three weeks haven't been, Mr. Chairman, based on highways in particular. And it's not that there aren't concerns in highways but it's that this government has created such a disaster with their budget, with their situation in health — and we had that today and we'll see some more of that in the days to come — the situation in education, utilities, the way they mismanage the Crowns. We just haven't been able to get around to highways yet but I'm sure we will by the time October shows up, Mr. Chairman.

Having said that, as my colleague mentioned, some of us have some specific questions and I do have a few specific ones. Most of them have been raised by my constituents and so I'm just bringing these forward on their behalf particularly.

The first one, and I'm sure the deputy minister is going to be very aware of this one, is Highway 312 had some work done on

it last year, and everyone appreciated that work because it was very much needed. I don't think there's any question that when you look at secondary highways, Highway 312 is obviously among the busier ones. And so to have that one identified as a highway that needed some work on it I don't think surprised anyone.

But that highway and the work that was done up to fall and freeze-up lasted most of the winter. Now we've got some major holes developing. In fact in some cases there's holes that are long. A few of them that stretch halfway across the highway, maybe a foot to a foot and a half wide and they get deeper every day.

So I guess the question I have, because as soon as I get home I'll be asked this by everyone I meet on the street is, what are the plans for 312? What sort of timelines are on that?

(15:30)

Hon. Mr. Wartman: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for this opportunity to answer the member's question.

A couple of pieces. I would like to comment just a bit on the entrance to Saskatchewan. And I know it's a bit ironic that we have the sign up there, "Naturally," and that he encountered a hole. But you have to have the connections. And I think the member from Cypress Hills, who lives over in that country, will understand that Saskatchewan is a holey land. And so when people come in it is natural that they would experience that.

We are doing our very best to patch the holes that are in highways all across this province and I think from the feedback we're getting from the public, we're doing an excellent job on that in a timely manner.

So, yes, they will encounter the odd hole. But I think you have to look at it a little more philosophically as the member from Cypress Hills said, recognize that you're entering a holey land when you come out of Alberta into Saskatchewan.

So thank you for that notice that there is some work to be done there.

Now I'd like to also speak directly about Highway 312 where there has been some work done. The contractor still has work to do, but up until May 15 we will be responsible as a department for patching that. But there's over \$200,000 worth of work left to be done on there by the contractor. So it's our expectation that that road will be raised in standard. It is an important road for the area and that work will be underway after May 15. Thank you.

Sorry, Mr. Chair, excuse me, there were two of the staff that I did not introduce earlier, and the officials here. And I would like to introduce Fred Antunes, who is to my right and behind me. And I'm just going to have to make sure I get Fred's title right here — director of operations and planning and business support. And then directly behind me in the third row is Cathy Lynn Borbely, the leader of the budget development. And I thank them for attending and apologize for not introducing them in the first part.

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Minister, and welcome to the officials that you introduced as well.

I'm glad to see that . . . We had hoped, from people in the area, that that work would be on 312, but we just weren't sure because with budget situations and that whether it was going to be left to have some work done on it. I think your reassurance there is going to be good news for the people of that particular area.

The department did some . . . or had some people do some work on possible entrances to the communities of Hague, Osler, and Rosthern, sort of setting the stage for twinning that will be down the road sometime, and I'm not going to ask you when that twinning will take place because obviously that's a fairly major project and you have Highway 1 and Highway 16 to look at first. And for my part, I've always supported finishing off Highway 16 and Highway 1 before you get on to this one. So we're quite satisfied with that particular direction.

I'm wondering on those three entrances. I think, I believe a statement came back to all of the town councils that they had sort of assessed those entrances and now the decision was made and when twinning happens, this is the way the entrance situation is going to be.

I'm wondering how carved in pavement that answer really is. Or can communities, if they want to, come back to Department of Highways and say, we have some other ideas, we just really don't want to lose those entrances, or some other situations that are there? Or is this now the final plan and is basically taken care of?

Hon. Mr. Wartman: — One of the key pieces of all the work that we're trying to lay out is to try and make it as safe as possible, and that's what is happening with those particular intersections. We've had Clifton Associates consultants do the basic work and line out what at this point the best options are in terms of safety, in terms of preparing for future highway development.

And I think it's important to note that there is still time and room for people to put forward alternative ideas, and we're open to consult until we've basically got all . . . everything laid out, ready to work at it.

And I think at this point we're still willing to take some ideas. If there are new ideas that are brought forward and we can fit those in and make sure that the entrances are as safe with an alternate plan, then there's a possibility of adopting an alternate as well.

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you. Because I think at least two of those communities may want to have some further discussion on that, because as we know and as you've said, this work was not done by Department of Highways; you had an engineering firm look at those. And as you know, engineering firms love grandiose plans. Having worked on town council, I'm quite aware of some of that mentality that's there. And sometimes in an effort to have the perfect, most grandiose plans, things get rather convoluted.

I think a good example might be when we look at the

Grasswood situation. It is no doubt a safer entrance at this point than it was before. However the access to the Grasswood service station complex, particularly one that takes you way around the west side of the service station must make people's heads just spin a little bit and say someone must have been able to come up with a better plan than that.

And so this is what I'm somewhat concerned about, that we have a grandiose plan which there's no question it's safe, but sometimes there are plans that can be a whole lot simpler and still be more functional for everyone concerned, particularly in those communities that do have, do have things in their community that are very much a business activity.

As you well know, Hague has been a community that's had a number of active car dealerships, has a very active lumberyard and construction business, has two vibrant service stations, and removing them from that entrance is going to be a major economic hit to that community.

Rosthern, for example, has . . . with its proximity to Seager Wheeler, the Station Arts house — which is a drama and a tea room on the side — and also, as I said, its proximity to other things such as Batoche, Fort Carlton, and those sorts of things, there's a lot of tourists that have a desire to come in and do a lot of business in town. If we have some access that becomes quite far removed, we will have those business districts die as we see as happened on a lot of the communities between here and Saskatoon where the highway just goes by and there's sometimes a rather weak entrance that's there.

But anyways, I'm glad to see that there's some opportunity for change and I hope Highways doesn't kind of close the book on that too quickly.

Couple of specific questions on Highway 11. One that I've had asked to me by a number of long-distance truckers, particularly people driving for NRT (Northern Resource Trucking) in the large trucks that use Highway 11.

There's a stretch north, just north of the town of Hague to about Rosthern, halfway to Duck Lake, that has some very serious jarring ruts, sort of, straight across the highway. And you notice it when you come from Saskatoon, the highway is good. As soon as you get through Hague, there seem to be these sharp ruts across. Is that because there was a different type of construction used there? Or why is that sudden difference in the quality of highway for that stretch of about 10 to 15 kilometres?

Hon. Mr. Wartman: — A couple of comments first. You were talking about the consultants' plans and I think it's really important to remember that we don't just take a consultant's plan in and then just immediately implement what the consultants have said.

One of the things that I've discovered, Mr. Chairman, as I've gotten to know the department and how it works is just how frugal and what good managers our own engineers are. So that, when we receive a report by the consultants, it may in fact be a little extravagant . . . a little more extravagant than what we could handle.

But our engineers do a very good job of tailoring that to what

our resources are and I appreciate the stewardship of the department in terms of extending those resources as far as they can be stretched.

And to the member, I also would like to just ask a question in terms of the ruts. These ruts are going across the highway — and are there visible cracks with those ruts as well?

Just small cracks in them? Okay. One of the things that does happen in those, where those cracks come in . . . And they can happen anywhere from the changing temperatures and then depression begins to build. And there is a type of patching that can be done. You can't do it when it's too high. And those . . . When the department determines that they can do that patching, they'll get out there and do a particular type of patch that holds in that kind. And that particular piece of highway will not be as rough any longer. Okay.

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you for that. Having driven semi down that particular stretch myself, I'm quite aware that if you sit in a semi, particularly if it's one that doesn't have all the fancy bells and whistles for being a comfortable ride, you get quite a jar out of that. And I could see your official sort of identifying exactly what was going on there and I think he understands the situation.

You mentioned putting in the rumble strips on Highway 11 and I think in the interim, between now and when the divided highway comes in — because as your own numbers will show, that's an extremely busy highway and very much so during the summer — I think those rumble strips will provide some sense of safety for the people who just don't pay much attention, and there are those.

On my way home from the legislature here two weeks ago, I passed an individual driving on that divided stretch — driving fairly straight I might say — reading a book. And I was trying to decide if I should slow down and get her licence number and phone it in to the police and do something with it, and I thought well, she'll probably find out that she shouldn't be doing that.

I did keep my eye on the mirror because I was convinced that car would end up in the ditch but it didn't — like I said, driving amazingly well, reading a book. But that rumble strip is the kind of thing that can just catch people who are not paying full attention.

But I do have one question. It was raised by one of my constituents. And when I looked at it, the question makes sense so I hope there's a good answer for it.

Those rumble strips that are going down the middle of the highway — and most people are used to the ones that go on the shoulders; this one goes right down the middle and it will go for a stretch and then quit — lines up perfectly or overlaps totally the yellow strip. And the question was: why aren't those rumble strips between the yellow strips instead of on the yellow strips because by being on the strip, it to some extent lessens the illumination or the reflection you would get at night from the yellow strips? So why . . . what's the rationale about having it right on the coloured part instead of in between the coloured part?

(15:45)

Hon. Mr. Wartman: — I thank you for your comments on the rumble strips. And we do have high hopes that they will certainly increase safety on that piece of road, I think not just for people who are inattentive but . . . well I guess you're inattentive if you're falling asleep. But that was one of the pieces as well that was raised, that for people who are falling asleep to hit that centre line rumble sure is a jarring kind of a thing.

The other piece just in response to the question about the paint. In this first year while they have just been ground out they are rough and of course more absorbent, so they will take more of the paint in but the flecks in the paint should still be fairly reflective and of course we've got that harder edge on the ridge there. It should reflect back more. But it's our expectation that when they are painted this year, the buildup of paint . . . there should not be any loss. If there has been, there shouldn't be any loss in reflectivity.

It's important to note that we've also had some very good support from some of those groups that look at the province and try and see how our roads are, how our safety is. And the Canadian Automobile Association of Saskatchewan said that they fully support this pilot project to improve motoring and travelling conditions on Highway 11.

CAA (Canadian Automobile Association) Saskatchewan communications and marketing director, Maureen Murray, has said this recently. So we have hopes that this will make it safer as we work towards a time when we can possibly twin that piece. Thank you.

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you. I'm still not quite sure exactly why they're there but there is a bit of an answer so we will pass that on to the individuals that asked the question.

The community of Hepburn which is just off of Highway 12, they do have their access which is probably about 2 miles I believe, 2 and a half miles that's a paved access. What is the commitment of the Department of Highways to that access road from Highway 11 to the community of Hepburn?

Hon. Mr. Wartman: — I think my ears are mumbling a little bit. I thought at first you said the community of Heppner and I thought you were more famous than you actually were. So we checked and the community of Hepburn, the access there is a regular TMS road that would receive the regular kind of maintenance that a TMS would. Just, the department will look at it, when there is need it will be maintained.

Mr. Heppner: — I would like to thank the minister's officials for those answers. I don't have a lot of questions because, as most people know, the highways in my constituency are better than almost any other constituency has in the province of Saskatchewan. And that's because our population is growing and we have good people who take very good care of their highways. Someone asked, from the other side, why, and that's the answer.

But we do appreciate that. The dividing that was done on both Highway 11 and 12 a couple of years ago was much appreciated

by the members of the constituency. In fact they thought enough if it that at that particular time I voted in favour of the budget because it had in there the dividing of those stretches of roadway.

I'm not sure this year if the government could pave enough roads in Saskatchewan for me to vote in favour of the budget. But at that time it was something that I felt needed to be done and I did it and had a lot of support from the community for that. So thank you again, Mr. Minister, for the time you gave to me. And I'll turn it back to my colleague from the Southwest.

Mr. Elhard: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The previous member from Rosthern, as he spoke, suggested to me that he's prepared to accept the credit for the wonderful highways in his constituency and . . .

You know I think it's important, in spite of the partisanship of this House and of our system, I think it's important to give credit where credit is due. And I think . . . I want to say that to the minister and to his department officials because there have been some times when I've felt it was fully appropriate to criticize and take issue with the way the department was operating and how the government was managing that department.

But I have been the benefactor of some decisions made by the government and the department, and my constituents have been the benefactors, and I think we, for the record, would like to make that noticed here today.

The member from Rosthern, I think I heard some laughter when I referred to him previously as the previous member from Rosthern. Is that a . . . was that a little mistake I made . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Well I retract that statement if I could right now.

The member from Rosthern did bring up the issue though, of rumble strips, and while there is no doubt increased safety is the result of the implications of that addition to the highways in this province, I notice that it's happening at sort of in stages. It's something that's showing up in areas where we've got reconstruction or repaving.

But I'm wondering if the minister would be prepared to tell us, over and above the benefits of safety, what the costs of instituting that particular program are to the department.

Hon. Mr. Wartman: — Mr. Chairman, just for clarification, were you meaning the shoulder or the centre line rumble strips?

Mr. Elhard: — Well why don't we have the costs for both.

Hon. Mr. Wartman: — We don't have that detail with us at this time but we'd be happy to either provide it to you in letter form, or if you would like to have that brought forward for . . . back for estimates again and do it then.

Mr. Elhard: — Mr. Chairman, that would be fine, to the minister. The rumble strips that I'm most specifically interested in right now, though, would be the ones on the outside, the ones that are perforated in the pavement. I understand that that is a whole new approach to rumble strips in this province, that

we've never used those until just recently. But I also assume that it comes with some cost because you have to have a machine that will put those rumble strips in place.

So what I would like if the minister can provide it either now or later, the cost of the equipment that was purchased to put those rumble strips in place, the means by which they are propelled because I assume that there is a piece of equipment that propels those items, and overall the added manpower that those types of rumble strip programs would cost or would be necessary for the implementation of that program.

So if that would be part of your response in the future, I would appreciate that. If you can provide some insight into that now, maybe even how many machines you've got, I would appreciate that.

Hon. Mr. Wartman: — My officials inform me that we'll provide all of that in the same answer.

Mr. Elhard: — Mr. Chairman, to the minister, I know that there is probably some rationale on the part of the department for having made the purchase of those machines for the department's use, but I'm also aware of the fact that in other jurisdictions those types of machines are purchased by private contractors and the program is contracted out. The rumble strips are contracted out to private contractors who frankly make that part of their operation and would be able to provide that type of service in this province.

So would you be prepared to give us some justification for the decision to do it in-house as opposed to having contracted that particular type of work, especially when there are contractors who are on the site often doing the repairs and the construction as is.

Hon. Mr. Wartman: — We believe that there is a mix, actually, of how this happens. There is a small grinding machine that's mounted on a BobCat, that during the winter months when the marking crews would normally be off, they are able . . . it's just part of the good stewardship of trying to make sure that people have their jobs, you're able to keep them on through the year. And with this program they're able to get out and do the grinding in the winter months.

When we're doing new paving, we're just going to check in terms of the process there. But at this point, until we have it confirmed, we don't want to say clearly how much is done by contractor or how much is done by our own crews.

But currently . . . And with the limited amount that we're doing, it's being done in the winter by our crews on the older sections of highway.

Mr. Elhard: — Mr. Deputy Chairman, through you to the minister. Can I take it from your answer then that there are two different ways these rumble strips are brought into use in this province — like, the department does some itself, but there are some private contracts that are let with the use of these rumble strips as part of the contract?

Hon. Mr. Wartman: — I think when we give you the answer on, detailed answer on the costing and that, we will give you a

clear answer in terms of the contracting as well. And the officials are just saying that that needs to be clarified and we want to make sure you get a clear and accurate answer. So we'll give that to you at the same time.

Mr. Elhard: — I will look forward to that response, because I think that, you know, it's rather important to know how much of that type of work is being done in-house and how much is being contracted out, and maybe the relative costs and the relative merits of doing it that way.

Let's return to the more ethereal, the more philosophical. You know, that's really a tough thing to attach to engineering in any respect. Having sat through a seminar the other day, everything in engineering is ethereal. But it's supposed to come down to numbers and that's what we will ultimately look at in this session of estimates and in future sessions as well.

But in your opening statements, Mr. Minister, you outlined for us what you said was sort of the plan, the overall scheme of things, the direction in which the department was going. And in developing your statement, you talked fairly specifically and restrictively, I would say, in terms of the amount of money the department has spent, what the department is committed to spending, what the government has in terms of a long-term expenditure plan.

But would you describe for us more of what you envision for the department in terms of philosophy and direction. What do you want to see your department be? What do you want to see your department accomplish on behalf of the people of this province over the next year or two?

(16:00)

Hon. Mr. Wartman: — Thank you for the question. And I think . . . I would like to start with acknowledging a statement that is attributed to the member opposite, Mr. Chair, when he was at a meeting in Moose Jaw where he said, if it were his to do, it would be quality not quantity.

And I think that in Saskatchewan, given the nature of our province, we have to seek to do both — both quality and quantity. And that is because with the far outlying areas, as the member will well know, those people also need good, safe transportation.

And it's one of the challenges in this province where we have a widely dispersed population that we need to make sure, to the best of our ability with the resources we have, that we try and keep all the roads up to a standard that will make transportation safe. That certainly makes the responsibilities of this department very, very complex.

The other piece that we have that we're really focusing on, other than making safe transportation possible, to make sure that communities get what they need in terms of access for schools, hospitals, the major components of social living.

And to that extent, we have over the history of this province, we've got the thin membrane surface roads. Those roads have been built to provide a dust-free, mud-free surface. But over the years, the change in transportation patterns have put more stress

on those roads, those thin membrane surface roads, than what we had ever anticipated they would see. The change from rail to road has really taken a lot more out of them and continues to take more out of them than what we had anticipated.

But we still seek to make sure that those people from around the province, particularly in the outlying areas, have opportunity to drive on mud-free, dust-free surfaces. And to that extent, the department has worked at maintaining those, patching those where possible. You'll well know the difficulty of doing that when the heavy traffic continues over them.

And so part of the philosophy that we have been working on is the philosophy I think that is inherent in this province and that is that we are able to accomplish much more when we work in partnerships, when we work co-operatively.

And so we've been working co-operatively with municipalities, following guidance of our area transportation planning committees who live out there, who are looking at what the needs are, who are helping us to set the priorities.

And when we get those priorities set, we're able to work in partnership to set aside roads for heavy haul. That takes some of the stress off of the TMS roads. And when we patch them, the patches last for longer, and it's easier to maintain them once we've been able to have a partnership with the municipalities and shift some of the traffic off of those roads.

The other area that I think is very key and essential to our government's overall philosophy is that we are seeking to build a thriving economy in this province. As our Premier has noted on several occasions, we cannot have good social programs if we do not have good, sound economic development.

Basic principles of stewardship — we do not want to build out a huge debt and deficit in order to support social programs, and therefore we need to do what we can to encourage and enable economic development. One of the pieces of that is building the highways infrastructure, the transportation infrastructure, to meet those economic development needs.

Overall we are seeking to transform our Saskatchewan transportation system to make it fit the 21st century, the needs and the demands of the 21st century. And I think when we hear the report from the Action Committee on the Rural Economy we'll get a better sense of how we will meet those needs. And I think one of the pieces of work that they have done, this non-partisan body has done, that will be very helpful for all of us is their analysis of the economic situation in Saskatchewan — how our demography has changed and how we are going to meet the needs of the 21st century.

And so in working towards that, working with the municipalities, working with the area transportation planning committees and special committees, we're able to begin to focus on — and this addresses the question of quality roads — we're able to focus on those roads which are primary corridors, economic and social corridors. And we're able to . . . by putting more emphasis on those, we're able to begin to build and strengthen those roads.

One of the pieces which I know the member is familiar with —

he even dabbled into all the esoterics of engineering to get a good handle on how this process works — is we are engaging in a fair bit of research and development. And one of the pieces is Pavement Scientific International's work to try and strengthen . . . develop new products so that we can process this, so that we can strengthen the base of our roads. And that will enable roads that hopefully — and I mean we are still doing some testing on this — but hopefully roads that will last longer, that will cost less to build, and less to maintain.

And with the work that Pavement Scientific International and the department is doing together, we think that we will be able to meet some of those future needs. To that end we are going to be doing about 350 kilometres of research and development this year.

In our budget address, Connecting to the Future, we announced that we would spend 900 million in transportation over the next three years, doing strategic initiatives to enhance economic development.

You'll see the work that we have done in the North which was also emphasized, trying to improve northern roads, develop partnerships with companies in the North, to try and make sure that those economic opportunities in mining, logging, will be developed and that they'll have the proper infrastructure on which to develop.

These corridors are strategic in our province's development, and they're part of our overall philosophical approach to transportation for the 21st century.

Also I'd mentioned earlier the . . . that shift from rail to road which has had such an incredible impact on transportation. And in that same time, we saw the abandonment of branch lines, we saw the closure of elevators — we're continuing to see this. But we're also hoping that some of the short-line developments, and innovative means of grain handling, new logistics for grain handling will enable more use of those branch lines; that the short-line railroads and the CN (Canadian National) will look at this, the CP (Canadian Pacific) will look at this and they'll say there is a future here in these branch lines because of the new ways of grain handling.

And if that proves to be the case — and again, it's still to an extent in the research and development stages — but as that proves out, and we see some evidence already that it is proving out, I think we will see some of that load that has shifted to road going back to rail in some of those areas.

To try and draw some numbers out at this point would be premature but we are seeing some successful movement. And we're certainly seeing a lot of support.

We held a seminar here in the fall on producer car loading. There were over 300 people came out to this seminar. And I think there was more excitement around the potential that they were seeing there; more excitement around what some of the short-line railroads are doing; and I might add, more excitement around, and positive comment around, the wheat board and the role that the Canadian Wheat Board is playing in this . . . in these new developments in grain handling as well.

So to pull that into the overall picture of transportation, we are still providing support for short-line rail development. We provide through our loans to short lines so that they can purchase the rails and we're also providing advice through our short-line branch in the department.

I think one of the pieces that's very important in this as well is that we are continuing to encourage and ask for participation of the federal government in these programs. You'll probably be familiar with the prairie grain roads project, a program which really was an acknowledgment by the federal government that some of their decisions have impacted transportation in Saskatchewan very, very heavily.

And so having the \$106 million plus over five years that the federal government put into the Prairie Grain Roads Program is certainly helping somewhat to cover these increased costs and help us deal with the grain road corridors.

The problem is that it no way offsets the losses that have happened in rural Saskatchewan with the removal of the Crow rate and the benefits that were there for producers. But nevertheless I appreciate whatever dollars we do get from the federal government. It may not be as much as I believe it should be or our government or our people believe, but every bit helps.

And we see the same in the strategic highways and infrastructure program where the federal government has put I believe it's 600 million across the country and we get a portion of that. And we're able to put about \$4.6 million per year into our strategic highways. Basically that money goes into our twinning projects and I think there's some into the Battleford bridge on Highway 16 as well.

So it's to really try and strengthen our main corridors for economic development. You'll see work done on No. 6 Highway south this year and I think that piece is a very important acknowledgement that 59 per cent of our trade is north-south in this province. That 59 per cent of our trade is with the United States and we acknowledge that those corridors are very important — again both road and rail.

So our overall . . . to try and put the overall philosophy into a nutshell, it is to recognize clearly that we need to strengthen economic development and we need to care for the social development all throughout the province and make sure that even people in far-flung areas of this province have within the realm of good stewardship, have the best roads that they can possible have. Thank you very much.

Mr. Elhard: — Mr. Deputy Chairman, thank you to the minister for that fairly lengthy response to my question. Having listened to the response he's alerted me to at least six or seven additional areas that I need to cover. I don't think we're going to get time to do that today but there are a number of things there that we do want to discuss in greater detail, and I think that it's important that we get to those topics, if not today at another time in the future.

I was wondering if having laid out his views today, whether the minister could tell us if in some sense his own view of the role of transportation is different from any of his predecessors, or is he following pretty carefully the same line that the previous two

or three ministers have followed?

Hon. Mr. Wartman: — I think it is important to just comment briefly on how this government operates at least from my perspective. You've noted that I've been six months as minister in this government, though I am . . . I still consider myself to be quite a new member of the Legislative Assembly.

But my picture of how our government acts and how it has acted is that we really do act as a team and that we are building on the successes and the vision that has been there in the past. There has been a transition with our new leader, who has helped shape and clarify a new vision. But it's not . . . and I don't think any government, you can have a complete change because the people would be in chaos and disarray.

But I do think that there is a new vision that our Premier has helped shaped, which I'm very happy to see. But the work that we are doing as a department, I think, continues to build on the foundations that were laid by the previous government under Premier Romanow.

Under our current Premier, we see the needs for economic and social development. We see the work that has been done by previous ministers as part of that whole building towards that goal.

Commitments that we have made as we work towards fulfilling the mandate of our department, we had set before us and we have adopted the 2.5 billion, 10-year commitment which was made in 1997. And I'm happy to say that that goal will be exceeded early in the 10th year. The \$1 billion, four-year commitment which was made to accelerate the spending, we will realize that within 3.5 years. And these are picking up on the goals that have been made by previous ministers and I would also . . . I also think it's important to note that our province is continuing its commitment to accelerate the delivery of Highway No. 1 West twinning.

(16:15)

We have managed to move that ahead by four years from 2008 to 2004. And we are committed to fulfilling that goal and we are committed to fulfilling the goal to complete Highway No. 1 East by 2012. And still even with a somewhat reduced budget for this year, we're still able to see completing of our other trans-Canada Highway No. 16 by 2010. So we are building on the successes and the plans of our past ministers.

By 2002-3, by the end of this year, the province will have invested approximately \$78.9 million and opened 35 per cent or 134 kilometres of the 379 kilometres under the twinning initiative with only 40 per cent of the time elapsing.

So I think that gives an indication that though there are some changed priorities in our government with a new leader, there is still a consistency and a teamwork that says, overall we are building a thrive . . . we are building to try and establish a thriving province where we build the human capital, where we make sure that we have the infrastructure in place to build the economy, the industry and the economy of this province, and to support the social life that people have grown to love in this province — the rural life and the community life there.

So I think the commitments remain the same. The one thing that I can say is I'm happy that we've been able to accelerate some of those commitments and it is my hope that with good stewardship and the kind of work that we've had, that we will be able to continue to move ahead and hopefully get to some of the other projects that will help us to care for the transportation system of this province.

Mr. Elhard: — Mr. Chairman. Through you to the minister, this is maybe a question that's beyond the realm of probability, but if money wasn't an issue, if money wasn't a limiting factor, what would you like to see the department achieve? What would you like to see accomplished by the department? What would be your priority?

Hon. Mr. Wartman: — I think we can answer that one fairly briefly. It seems to me, I believe clearly, that we're doing all the right things. We would just do them faster.

And one other small addition. I think in the North we'd probably have industrial hovercraft moving a lot of the goods. It would help in a lot of those areas, both environmentally, and I think particularly when you see the kind of difficulties that we run into with some of the all-weather roads — depending on what the weather is like — it might enable us to get things like gas to those more isolated communities.

So if money weren't a problem and if we could dream and we could see all the possibilities, we'd see what we are doing accelerated.

Mr. Elhard: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Through the Chairman, to the minister, you mentioned earlier in your . . . one of your previous responses that you're looking forward to the 21st century and the development of the transportation system in this province.

You alluded to the recommendations that will be forthcoming from the ACRE (Action Committee on the Rural Economy) commission, the implications for rural Saskatchewan and revitalization there. Some people would not . . . they'd say the engine of economic activity and growth is the Economic Development department.

Well I would say that the Highways department might play an important role in that scenario. If the Highways and Transportation department isn't the engine of Economic Development, it's certainly the tracks on which that engine is going to run.

But I guess I'm a little concerned when I hear you say that some of what you want to do in the future will depend precisely on what the ACRE report recommends.

Surely the department has a view to the future already in place — that you have a 5-year or a 10-year or even a 25-year plan in place. And if that's not so, I would be greatly troubled. If it is so, what influences will be brought to bear on that plan by any recommendations from the ACRE Committee?

Hon. Mr. Wartman: — Thank you. I appreciate the question from the member, Mr. Chairman. And I think it is indicative of the kind of government that we are that we seek to listen and

consult. I was very fortunate to be a member of the ACRE committee and so, of course, have some insight into where the committee was going. I also had the privilege of seeing a preliminary report at one of our area transportation planning committees.

And what I can say is that the work of the department over the years must have . . . the department folks and previous ministers certainly must have had their eyes and ears opened because much of what is being planned dovetails very nicely.

But I would also like to take us back to the member from Rosthern's question earlier on when he was asking about the entranceways at Hague and some of the other communities along there. And he was asking: well, you've had the consultant do the work and is it cast in stone? Well I think one of the wonderful pieces about doing long-range planning is that you can do long-range planning and you can continue to listen. And where you need to adjust, you adjust.

And you may put a proposal out to the public and say this is where we believe we need to go. And with that proposal out there you're going to get feedback. And it seems to me being responsible government, we want to hear that feedback, we want to listen to it and respond to it.

And so we not only . . . we're not passive in this matter, we also have structured committees that are out there, both ACRE and the Area Transportation Planning committees have been a part of that overall planning process to get feedback from the communities to understand what it is their goals and objectives are in building the economy of this province.

And so, though we have a long-term strategic plan, which I have noted — the 10-year, 2.5 billion — and talked about how those monies will be used out in the community, while we have that piece in place it is very, very important to continue to listen. And I think the member will know well from the kind of response to the pressures from the Maple Creek area that this government does listen and does respond.

And so we were able to accelerate the twinning process there because of the safety aspects, and I think the public raised those well, and the member helped in raising those. And our government I think responded accordingly by moving ahead the schedule.

And I think what we'll see is, though we have a long-range, overall plan that we're working towards that and includes those economic development quarters, it includes the safety and the social aspects, we certainly are listening for and watching for those areas where we need to adjust.

And I have to commend the work of these committees that are out there — ACRE and our area transportation planning committees — because they do bring that to us. We do get that understanding. And we do respond and adjust our plans accordingly.

We're looking at the way that we move ahead in our capital investments, our long-range planning process. We have a plan that targets maintaining our roads, maintaining our bridges. We're able to put more into maintaining and inspecting the

bridges this year. We've got a three-year capital investment program which illustrates the province's plan for improvements which will enable stakeholders such as the road building industry to plan ahead.

And I think that was one, again one of those pieces where we were listening to what the road builders were saying. And their need to be able to plan, not only for equipment purchases, but what can they do in terms of maintaining the manpower to do their work; what do they need to do in terms of purchasing equipment when they look ahead to where we're going.

And so in consultation with the road builders, we're also looking at the . . . having three-year plans laid out to the best of our ability within the resources that we have. And the response from the road builders to this point has been very positive that we've been able to put those plans out for them and help them to see what they are. They also do some critiquing. We listened to that and we're able to respond as well.

In April of 2001 the department committed to releasing a three-year capital investment program which will provide our stakeholders with the information that they need for their planning. And it is my belief that the very positive way that that has worked out for us will impact on our future planning. And we will continue to, over the many years ahead, lay out the plans in those . . . in that type of way so that our stakeholders can respond accordingly.

The department is now finalizing the three-year capital investment program which we will release in May of this year.

Mr. Elhard: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. And through the Chair to the minister: I'm looking at the Highways and Transportation budgetary figures as provided by the Minister of Finance in the budget brought down earlier this year. And having talked at length about transportation policy this afternoon and trying to get a feel for where the department is, where the government hopes to take the department, I notice that as a result of the budget this year that we're going to spend \$1,000 . . . I'm sorry, \$1 million less in transportation policy, in the area of transportation policy.

So could you tell us roughly what was expendable as a result of the reduction there of \$1 million.

Hon. Mr. Wartman: — Thank you for your question. Again to the member through the Chair, it is always challenging when you're doing a reorganization and trying to cut the administrative costs, to figure out where and how to do that most effectively. And I think the first thing that I would like to say is that we share in common, the member from Cypress Hills and myself, the view that quality over quantity is often a very important step.

And I have to say, with the quality of our policy and planning people in the department, even though we are going to be losing seven full-time equivalents and the budget is reduced by \$32,000, the quality of people there is going to make a difference. Now some of those FTEs (full-time equivalents), of course, are positions that were not filled and will not be filled.

And I think it's very important to recognize that there were also

some net transfers in just over \$130,000.

And basically what we see is that we'll aggressively pursue policy development in areas like grain transportation, strategic corridor development, regional rail development.

(16:30)

In the coming years we will be able to, with the department staff that we have, we will be able to meet the challenges and changes. I'm confident of that. I've seen the quality of work that they bring forward and I don't have any doubt . . . And I think it's very important, just in terms of the overall stewardship of government, that we do need to, where possible, reduce administrative costs to enable us to develop the program that we need to do for the province as a whole.

Mr. Elhard: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Through the Chair to the minister, I know how easy it is to make a slip of the tongue, especially in here. And when it gets recorded in *Hansard*, you have to live with it forever. But I think you referred to quality over quantity as being the important factor. And I'm sure you meant the opposite. Or maybe it was reversed again, who knows. Whatever the case — whatever the case.

You know, I . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Quality is what we need to look at. And I, you know, I don't think we can make that point too strongly because, you know, we hear anecdotally complaints about quality. And I think that that's something the department will take seriously — if they haven't in the past, I'm sure they will in the future. And I would encourage that.

You mentioned the fact that there are seven full-time equivalent positions that have disappeared as a result of budgetary cuts in the area of transportation policy which leads me to believe . . . or to request, how many positions are left? What number of people are going to be working on an ongoing basis in the area of transportation policy?

Hon. Mr. Wartman: — The total number of staff that we currently have now are 17. Primary losses were clerical and special projects — yes, special projects. And so the total number now that will be dealing with policy and planning are 17.

I'd like to just also share with you some of the sense behind the administrative reductions. Our stakeholders have been telling us that the department's administrative costs are too high. We've listened.

The department on its own initiative has taken steps to get a line on its administrative costs and to deal with those. We've created a wall between our administrative expenditures and our operational expenditures. And this again has helped us. We will not move money from the road to offset administrative pressures, but funding will be moved from administration to offset pressures in operations.

2002, we delivered \$61.6 million budget increase with no increases in administrative costs, which I think has been very significant over this past year. We actually absorbed over 2.3 million of administrative pressures and were able to reallocate administrative resources to hire five new compliance officers.

And I think that, too, has been very helpful in our program out in the communities. We reduced our administrative costs by 1.2 million, absorbed another 1.8 for 2000 . . . 2003.

In total, over the last two years we have reduced our potential administrative expenditures by \$5.3 million. This is a significant amount of funding and it's going to go to the road; it's going to go to the front-line operations every year. And I think this is again part of that attempt to give the best possible service and stewardship that we can for the people of this province.

The department aggressively pursues opportunities to improve business processes, review our programs, so that extra money can be directed to operational expenses — to get it out there on the road, to do the kind of work that we need to do to try and build for this, our 21st century. And I think that we've got some very, very good investments in the developments for this . . . for these years ahead.

Mr. Elhard: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. I appreciate that type of direction you're taking. Because I would concur that the view of the taxpaying public has been that government agencies of all types are top-heavy with administrative staff and that more effort needs to be made to streamline the numbers of people, certainly at the head office, so to speak, and that more effort be directed to the front-line services.

But in keeping with this discussion about personnel and the changing numbers of personnel, I looked at the full-time equivalent staff complement figures for this year that came with the budget. And I noticed that overall there's a reduction of 26 full-time equivalents for Highways and Transportation this year.

And if I remember correctly, last year with the increasing number of people hired by the government, as part of the 570 new people that were brought on board, 78 or 79 of them went to the Department of Highways — at least the full-time equivalencies were given to the Department of Highways.

And I'm just wondering, with that change that would be in excess of 110. The swing would be in excess of 110 FTEs from last year to this year. Can you tell us specifically where those people have gone, where the jobs have been removed or if it's just a matter of not filling vacant positions. Can you name the communities and the types of jobs that were involved and affected by this change in personnel numbers.

Hon. Mr. Wartman: — There is . . . You know as I may have reversed quality and quantity at one point, Mr. Chair, sometimes the numbers do get reversed as well. There were 89 added last year, okay, and 26 taken away here for a net of 63.8, roughly, of full-time equivalents. And those folks would be in front-line operational programs — surface preservation, highways and bridge construction, sign rehabilitation, and compliance.

And I think one of the other important pieces to look at is just simply how the seasonal employees are managed. Seasonal employees could be brought on a week later and come off a week earlier and that adds up to a certain percentage of full-time employment as well. And it's through those ways —

very clear management of the time — that we've been able to adjust and make the full-time equivalent reductions that you have there.

So if you have any further questions for clarity you can go ahead. But basically that's it. It's been managed this way. We've had reductions through the decreased budget of 12 FTEs, government-wide initiatives for administration, administrative costs — that's 14. So we do have those detailed and part of it is just simply the seasonal adjustments of staff as well.

Mr. Elhard: — If the minister would be so considerate, I would appreciate if you could break down the actual losses and where they were attributed to, on a paper, and make it available to me. That would benefit my own understanding of how the department personnel were managed in this particular area.

There are a significant number of additional questions I would like to approach in terms of the department's spending plans for the coming year. I've noted some significant changes in terms of amounts of money being spent in preservation of the system as opposed to construction of the highway system. And I think it's getting far too late in the afternoon to delve into that area, so we'll leave it for another time.

But in the meantime, I believe my colleague from the wonderful city of Swift Current has some questions of the minister and his staff and we'll turn the floor over to him at this point. Thank you, Mr. Minister.

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman of Committees, and to my colleague for allowing me to ask a quick question, if I can, on a constituency related matter. It's a question I think I asked last session and it follows up on a number of letters that would have come to the department and the minister — to be fair, perhaps not to the current minister but to your predecessor — on the No. 4 Highway immediately north of Swift Current and specifically at the Saskatchewan Landing.

There is a long-standing desire for a passing lane on a very steep hill just on the south side of the landing bridge, of the Saskatchewan Landing bridge. And the department was forthcoming last year and indicated that it's something that they have looked at in the past. And I think they even . . . your predecessor, Mr. Minister, sent out a letter indicating that, you know, they were evaluating this and, at the time, there was no current plans for that.

And I'm just wondering if I could get an update on that project and on any evaluation the department may have done on that particular project.

Hon. Mr. Wartman: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. In response to the question, a couple of pieces. First of all, it's not on for this year. The evaluation is ongoing and if you'd like further detail in terms of where the evaluation is, we'd be happy to provide that for you in a letter.

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. I would appreciate that, at your convenience, if you could provide that evaluation.

And just one quick final question on that same highway, on that

same No. 4 Highway. There was a request and an evaluation, I think, done by the department on the turnoff to Skyline Road. It's a turnoff right off of the No. 4 north of Swift Current. And we had some concerns because of quite a bit of traffic actually turning off and taking that turn to go west.

There was this request for some sort of . . . an expansion of the shoulder, at the very least, to avoid accidents with traffic that might want to come around. So . . .

Hon. Mr. Wartman: — I would like to thank the member for the question and note that we will get an answer to him by letter on that question.

Mr. Elhard: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I noticed the worried look on the Deputy House Leader's face across the way. I just would like to take a minute before we wrap up today's proceedings to thank the minister and his officials for coming today.

This has been I think a good start to our ongoing discussions through the upcoming weeks and we hope to get much more specific, much more direct, and have much more challenging material for you in the days to come.

Thank you very much.

The committee reported progress.

Hon. Mr. Hagel: — Mr. Speaker, I request leave of the House to introduce a motion related to sitting hours.

Leave granted.

MOTIONS

Hours of Sitting

Hon. Mr. Hagel: — Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the hon. member for Regina Wascana Plains:

That on Monday, April 29, 2002, notwithstanding rule 3(1), the Assembly shall adjourn at 5 p.m. so that the Standing Committee on Agriculture may be permitted to conduct its proceedings in the Legislative Chamber later that day.

Motion agreed to.

Hon. Mr. Hagel: — Mr. Speaker, before moving adjournment of the House and recognizing a good number of people who are here would like to scurry away to other responsibilities and obligations, we should probably bring to the attention of the members of the Assembly that today our Sergeant-at-Arms is celebrating his 54th birthday, I'm told, and so perhaps we would like to end with a rendition of "Happy Birthday."

(Hon. members sang.)

Hon. Mr. Hagel: — I note as well, Mr. Speaker, that not a single member shouted, speech, after we sang that.

The Assembly adjourned at 16:53.