

The Assembly met at 13:30.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRESENTING PETITIONS

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise on behalf of citizens of Saskatchewan concerned about the government's shoddy treatment of the Saskatchewan snowmobile industry. And the prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the provincial government to recognize the financial savings that could be made by contracting the Saskatchewan Snowmobile Association to groom provincially owned trails; and obtain funding for this through the sale of provincially owned grooming equipment, mandatory trail permits on Crown land and provincial parks, and the attachment of trail permits to snowmobile registration.

And, Mr. Speaker, there are over a dozen petitions here and they are signed by citizens of Dodsland, Kindersley, Regina, Saskatoon, Christopher Lake, Regina, Birch Hills, Murray Point, and Moose Jaw.

I so present.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I stand today to present a petition on behalf of citizens of Saskatchewan who are concerned about the increase in long-term care fees. And the prayer on 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 signatures on this petition, Mr. Speaker, are from the communities of Humboldt and Bruno.

I so present.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too rise today to present a petition on behalf of people who are concerned about the increases in the long-term care rates.

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 who have signed this petition are from Lintlaw and Kelvington.

Mr. Gantfoer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too rise this afternoon on behalf of citizens from across this province concerned about the exorbitant fee increase for long-term care services. 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.

The signatures on this petition this afternoon, Mr. Speaker, are from the communities of Wadena, Margo, and Kuroki.

I so present.

Mr. Stewart: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise this afternoon to present a petition on behalf of citizens concerned with fee increases for long-term care. 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 is duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

Mr. Speaker, this petition is signed by individuals from the communities of Rose Valley and Weyburn, Saskatchewan.

I so present.

Ms. Eagles: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I too rise today to present a petition from citizens that are deeply concerned over this government's treatment of senior citizens. 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, Mr. Speaker, this is signed by citizens of Kelvington and Nut Mountain.

I so present. Thank you.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to present a petition today. 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 in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

These petitions, Mr. Speaker, come from the good communities of Weyburn and McTaggart.

I so present.

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise on behalf of concerned citizens on the issue of long-term care fees. The prayer of their petition 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 petitioners today are from the communities of Leroy, Endeavour, and Preeceville.

I so present.

Mr. Brkich: — Mr. Speaker, I have a petition here with citizens who wish to halt crop insurance premium hikes and coverage reductions.

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.

Signed by the citizens from Findlater, Craik, Bethune, and Holdfast.

I so present.

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also have a petition from citizens concerned about the increase in long-term care home fees. 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.

From citizens from Wadena, Kuroki, Rama, and Lintlaw. Thank you.

I so present.

Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I again stand today with a petition about people that are upset 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 of the serious conditions of Highway 15 for Saskatchewan residents.

And yet again, the petitioners are from all over the province, showing how well-travelled this highway is. It's signed by people from Nokomis, Kelliher, Blaine Lake, Regina, Young, Simpson, Semans, Imperial, and Three Hills, Alberta.

I so present.

Mr. Hart: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I reside today to present another petition on behalf of constituents concerned about the massive fee increases for long-term care. 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.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

And signatures to this petition, Mr. Speaker, come from the communities of Cupar and Southey, and I might add that the majority of them are seniors.

I so present, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Allchurch: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also rise in the Assembly today to bring forth a petition regarding our senior increases, or long-term care increases on seniors. And the petition 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 . . .

Oh, this is the crop insurance one. Sorry, this one's regarding crop insurance. I have so many petitions, Mr. Speaker, I didn't know which one I was grabbing.

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.

And the signatures on this petition, Mr. Speaker, are from Chitek Lake, from Victoire, from Parkside, Shell Lake, and Shellbrook.

I so present.

Mr. Peters: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition signed by farmers of Saskatchewan concerned about the increases in crop insurance fees. 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.

Mr. Speaker, the petition is signed by folks from Luseland and Unity.

I so present.

READING AND RECEIVING PETITIONS

Deputy Clerk: — According to order the following petitions have been reviewed and are hereby read and received as addendums to previously tabled petitions, being sessional papers no. 7, 23, 24, 31, and 59.

NOTICES OF MOTIONS AND QUESTIONS

Mr. Hillson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I give notice that I shall on day no. 33 ask the government the following question:

To the Minister of Labour: regarding the Dorsey report on the workmen's compensation board, when will the government respond to the recommendations contained in the report?

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Mr. Stewart: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Hon. Assembly, three individuals seated in your gallery, Mr. Speaker — Jonna Kaipainen, Maelys Varillon, and Darryl Walls.

Jonna is from Finland. She's an exchange student who came to Chaplin in September. She's a grade 11 student and she is on Chaplin's silver honour roll. She'll be leaving us in July. And later in life, Jonna would like to go into medicine, and at this time in her life she sees herself working in Third World countries.

Maelys is from France. She came to us in January to Chaplin, and she'll be leaving in July as well. Maelys is also on the silver honour roll at Chaplin School and would like to become a judge later in life.

Both young ladies came to Canada through the student travel schools program, STS, Mr. Speaker. They're both avid skiers and made a trip to Banff in February with the STS program.

The girls are accompanied by Mr. Darryl Walls, a retired teacher at Chaplin and a recipient of the Saskatchewan Volunteer Award for sport, culture, and recreation in the year 2000 and is still very involved with Encounters with Canada.

I'm told that both girls are very popular in the Chaplin School and in the entire community. And I hope that all members will extend these three individuals a very warm welcome.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Humboldt Music Festival Rose Bowl Award

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to congratulate Kristen Theissing, the recipient of the Humboldt Music Festival Rose Bowl Award. This award is given to a competitor that has shown outstanding talent in musicianship in the festival.

Kristen is a 17-year-old grade 12 student at Humboldt Collegiate. She began singing lessons when she was eight years old and last year while in grade 11 Kristen decided to begin piano lessons.

After only one year of study she is already at a grade 4 piano level. Kristen is also studying theory and will be writing her grade 2 exam this spring.

Kristen has entered classes in the Humboldt Music Festival both as a pianist and a vocalist, winning various awards and scholarships over the years. She has been a member of her church choir and a soloist for various functions.

Kristen is an extremely dedicated young woman and works hard at her music studies and she will graduate from high school this spring and plans to pursue a music career at the University of Saskatchewan.

Kristen is a very worthy recipient of the 2002 Rose Bowl Award and I ask all members to join me in congratulating her on this achievement.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Minister of Agriculture Seeks Federal Aid

Mr. Forbes: — Mr. Speaker, now that everyone recognizes, except perhaps the members opposite, that Saskatchewan taxpayers cannot afford to compete with the combined treasuries of the United States and European Union, we want to recognize the work of our Minister of Agriculture as he goes to Edmonton to bring the concerns of our farmers and their families to the forefront with his federal counterparts.

Mr. Speaker, all reports indicate that this could be another year of drought. And although the warm temperatures are better than our winters, the long summer days are painful reminder of the problems that continue to plague and hinder the lives of many rural and farming families.

Our Minister of Agriculture will be meeting with Mr. Vanclief to add his voice to the chorus of the farm lobbyists for the \$1.3 billion in bridge funding, also known as trade injury relief, to help all Canadian farmers who are suffering from low grain prices caused by massive international subsidies.

This crisis has caused farm organizations, producers, and provincial ministers from across the country to agree that subsidies of American and European farmers are completely unfair and totally distort the market against Canadian producers.

Mr. Speaker, I respectfully ask that all members of this legislature use whatever tools at their disposal to assist the Minister of Agriculture. We want to remember what is important here is the survival of our farming families and of our province, not partisan politics.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Administrative Professionals Day

Ms. Eagles: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today, Wednesday, April 24 all across North America businesses large and small will be honouring some of their companies' most important people. Today is Administrative Professionals Day, Mr. Speaker, and all members of the House recognize those among us who day in and day out do their best to make our lives and our work that much better.

Mr. Speaker, members on both sides of the House know the vital role that administrative professionals play in our day-to-day lives. We know, Mr. Speaker, that without them our offices would definitely not run as smoothly as they should.

It's more than phones, letters, faxes, reports, mailing, and filing, Mr. Speaker. Our administrative professionals are the first voice that people hear when they call our offices. And they're the first face people see when they walk in. In other words, Mr. Speaker, our administrative professionals are essential in establishing a working relationship with constituents, colleagues, and outside contacts.

Mr. Speaker, at this time on behalf of the members on this side of the House, I'd like to recognize all those who are back in our constituency offices. We appreciate your hard work and dedication.

Also on behalf of the members of this side of the House, Mr. Speaker, a special thank you to our three administrative professionals — Leanne, Joanne, and Mavis — who work in our caucus office. These three special women are always willing to lend a hand and are only too happy to help out in whatever way they can.

Also at this time, Mr. Speaker, a special hello and get well wish is extended to Mavis — you are continually in our thoughts and prayers, and we're looking forward to seeing you soon. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Jones: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to join with my colleague across the way in recognizing the very important work that our administrative professionals perform for us on a daily basis.

As you well know, this particular day used to be called Secretaries Day. But we all know that secretaries do far more than purely secretarial tasks. And that's why a changing profession deserved a change in name; a new name that more accurately reflects the demands placed on administrative professionals.

During the information age, Mr. Speaker, administrative professionals are doing more and more for all of us. They are becoming our information managers. Behind every successful office, there is an efficient unit of administrative support staff making those of us fortunate enough to have support look good. Administrative professionals go that extra mile to make our offices run smoothly.

And while we're thankful for the support of our administrative

professionals every day, we do not often acknowledge just how much they contribute to the efficient running of our office. Today is the day when we can openly and officially express our gratitude to these professionals. Today we also acknowledge the teamwork that is essential and that no one person is more important than another. It takes a concerted effort for things to run smoothly in any office.

On behalf of my colleagues, Mr. Speaker, I wish to express our gratitude and appreciation for the work of our . . . all of our CAs (constituency assistant) and for the work of our caucus office administrative professionals — Gail, Jannet, Margaret, and Jean.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Students Win Drama Awards

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Drama is an integral part of our culture and first exposure to drama productions usually occurs at the school level. Today I rise to acknowledge two schools in the Kelvington-Wadena constituency who recently competed in regional drama festivals.

Wadena presented *And Then There Was One* at the Yorkton Regional Drama Festival while Porcupine Plain presented *Amber Waves* at the Prince Albert Drama Festival. While neither won best overall production, individuals from each production were recognized for their own personal skills.

From Wadena, Baron Zarowny won top acting award, Kevin Nakrieko received honourable mention and certificate of merit for acting, and technical certificates of merit went to Jessica Harding for costumes, Jason Kuras for sound, Jena Tweidt and Jessie Hultin for props.

Porcupine Plain won the runner-up for best technical production, Blane Langdon won certificate of merit for acting, Stacey Lutz won certificate of merit for stage management, and Anton Farber won certificate of merit for technical management.

Mr. Speaker, these may very well be our next generation of actors and actresses and technical producers. I would ask the legislature to join with me in congratulating these students and wish them well in future competitions.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speech by the Member for Rosthern

Mr. Van Mulligen: — Mr. Speaker, former Ontario Premier Bob Rae once said of the once relevant Joe Clark that:

Being attacked by Joe Clark is like being savaged by a dead sheep.

I was reminded of the quote last night during the fourth — or was it the fifth — hour of the member from Rosthern's shall we say slightly repetitious tirade against everything that lives, breathes, walks, talks, waves, flies, buys, sings, and regenerates in Saskatchewan. What a performance, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Van Mulligen: — In honour of yesterday's Canada Book Day here is a dyspeptic part of a sour poem for the member to make into a sampler for his wall:

The old cow, the old cow she is dead;
It sleeps well, the horned head.
We poor lads, 'tis our turn now
To hear such tunes as killed the cow.

So, Mr. Speaker, one gets the impression that the member isn't happy.

So my question is: if he's so miserable and if he thinks his personal misery should lead to a non-confidence vote in the government, why did not he and his colleagues allow last night's motion to come to a vote?

Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, if things are so bad, why don't the public opinion polls reflect it? Could it be, Mr. Speaker, I wonder, that member . . . members opposite are peddling snake oil, completely rejected by the people who do live here and like it; who do work here and are proud of it . . .

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

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Jolene McIvor's Curling Accomplishments

Mr. Brkich: — I'd like to take this opportunity to talk about a remarkable constituent of mine from Davidson, Jolene McIvor and her curling teammates, Teejay Surik, Janelle Lemon, and Maegan Strueby. Jolene's remarkable junior women's curling team excelled in their sport this past winter, winning the Saskatchewan Junior Women's Championship in Nipawin on December 31. This was McIvor's last shot at the junior championship, having turned 20 last year.

Previous attempts at the championship came close, but this year they curled very well together as a team and success was finally achieved. The McIvor team travelled to the Canadian junior women's curling finals in Summerside, PEI (Prince Edward Island) held during the week of January 19 to 27, 2002.

All through the week, the team curled very well together with McIvor providing calm leadership and steady shots, making it through to the semi-final round against the home team from Prince Edward Island.

They had a hard fought game against this team and ended up losing in the final moments. However, they emerged with the bronze medal for the province of Saskatchewan, an accomplishment very worthy of note in this House.

Jolene is the daughter of Perry and Ronna McIvor of Davidson. Curling has always been the family sport with Jolene often curling with the three sisters under the expert instruction of their experienced curling parents.

The McIvor family has over the years been strong supporters of the Davidson Curling Club . . . (inaudible) . . . medal and bring

the Saskatchewan junior women playdowns to Davidson a couple of years ago.

Jolene is a second-year University of Saskatchewan student who presently curls out of the Nutana Curling Club in Saskatoon. I am very confident that Jolene will succeed at the adult level of the women's curling.

With that, I would ask that all the members join me in congratulating Jolene McIvor and her teammates on the remarkable accomplishment this past winter.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ORAL QUESTIONS

Increase in Long-Term Care Fees

Mr. Gantefoer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Health. People across Saskatchewan are talking about the NDP's attack on long-term care residents through exorbitant fee increases.

The letters, petitions, phone calls, and e-mails to our offices are increasing daily as people begin to realize that the NDP plan to go after 90 per cent of a long-term care resident's income.

The NDP have tried to present this fee increase as only affecting the wealthy or seniors with an annual income of over \$50,000. But according to the NDP, even a senior living at the poverty line is considered wealthy because they too will see their long-term care fees increase rather dramatically.

Mr. Speaker, what steps is the minister and the Department of Health taking to notify existing long-term care residents and the Saskatchewan public in general exactly how the fee increases are going to affect them?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The first thing I would like to say is that the member opposite and all of his colleagues refer to letters on a daily basis. I have not received those letters that they have mentioned in the House and I would ask them to send those forward to us. So I would ask them to do that.

The other point, Mr. Speaker, is that the health districts across the province have in various ways informed their members. In Regina Health District for example, letters went out a couple of weeks ago, at least now, to all of the people who are long-term care residents to explain what the changes would mean. It went to their families so they could look at it and discuss the various questions.

This is the plan for the whole province, that this kind of information would be provided because that's what needs to be done. And it's gone out in most places already.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Gantefoer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I participated in a radio open-line show this morning. And a man

called in who had an elderly relative in long-term care. He said he had seen the minister on television saying the only people who were going to see their long-term fees go up would be seniors whose annual income was greater than \$50,000 a year. He was unaware that the fee increase actually starts at an annual income of less than \$12,000.

There was also a call from a family member of another long-term care resident who said they were already subsidizing their loved one's care by paying for their drug and incidental costs and they were wondering how on earth they were going to be able to afford any more.

Mr. Speaker, it's just not long-term care residents who are looking for information about the fee increases. Mr. Speaker, I understand that the minister will be circulating information to long-term care residents, but how are the rest of the public of Saskatchewan going to be informed about the specific rate increases for long-term care?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, I think I've mentioned last week about where people can contact if they have very specific questions. And they can contact people in the department; they can contact people in the health districts. There is general information that's gone out and there will continue to be more information.

The other thing is to remind everybody is these fee increases take place October 1 of this year. That's a number of months away and the information will go out to people so that they can look at that.

I want to remind everybody that the taxpayers of Saskatchewan are contributing \$337 million — this is taxes we collect — \$10 million more than last year. And what we are doing is we're covering about 74 per cent of all of the costs of long-term care.

I ask the members opposite, where are they going to find that money that's there, and what are they going to do . . . what's their proposal?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Gantefoer: — Mr. Speaker, seniors and retirees who are planning to finance for their later years, family members who are looking after loved ones who may need some long-term care in the immediate future, and all Saskatchewan people are looking for information as to how this fee increase may affect them or affect their family members and their futures.

They want to know exactly how the NDP (New Democratic Party) is going to raid the bank accounts so they can figure out if there's any possible way to plan their future so they can avoid it.

Mr. Speaker, I find it ironic that the NDP will advertise and pay for huge billboards making sure people don't stick knives in toasters, and yet they can't properly inform the people of this province about what this exorbitant fee increase is going to be.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Gantefoer: — Mr. Speaker, the minister would like to think that this is a great informed decision that this government is making. What they're doing is raiding seniors' bank accounts, and they should be held accountable for it and explain it to the people of this province.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, one of the obstacles that we have to overcome is the kind of misinformation that comes from those people. And what the difficulty is that they pick little pieces and don't provide the total picture.

I encourage people to contact their health districts or the Department of Health to get the accurate information, and the kind of information that will allow them to make the plans that they need to make.

What we plan to do is provide this province with a good health care system as it relates to all the different aspects. What we have is a challenge around the budgets that we have for this particular year, and the years to come. And we need to make sure that we look carefully at the effective use of all of the dollars that we have.

That is part of our long-term plan, and we're going to continue to do that, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(14:00)

Gaming Agreement with First Nations

Ms. Bakken: — Mr. Speaker, my question is for the minister of Gaming.

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

Ms. Bakken: — My question is for the minister of Gaming. The newspaper headlines this morning suggest that a new 25-year gaming agreement between the NDP government and the FSIN (Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations) is ready to be announced, maybe within days.

Mr. Speaker, the whole issue of gaming in Saskatchewan received intense scrutiny after the financial scandal at SIGA (Saskatchewan Indian Gaming Authority) and there are still questions surrounding how gaming was conducted by SIGA and the SLGA (Saskatchewan Liquor and Gaming Authority).

The RCMP (Royal Canadian Mounted Police) have concluded their investigation into SIGA and turned the results over to the Justice department.

Mr. Speaker, why would the NDP agree to sign a new gaming agreement before the Justice department announces whether or not charges will be laid as a result of the RCMP investigation?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to respond to that member's question. It allows me to reiterate

again what happened and what the government and FSIN and SIGA did in a partnership to make sure that any wrongdoings that had been discovered were overcome.

When those problems are overcome . . . And I don't think, Mr. Speaker, that the members opposite should be raising police investigations and anything to do with that. I'd prefer that not necessarily be part of negotiations that are going on in good faith with SIGA, who has met some very high benchmarks set by the Provincial Auditor, commended by the Provincial Auditor and, Mr. Speaker, we are negotiating in good faith with our friends and our partners, First Nations people. And when the deal is completed and agreed to, it will be announced.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Bakken: — Mr. Speaker, there are still so many unanswered questions about what was going on at SIGA during the tenure of Dutch Lerat and about how much the NDP government knew about it. Yet the NDP intend to sign a new 25-year agreement to allow SIGA to expand gambling. Is a 25-year agreement in the best interests of people of this province?

Mr. Speaker, this will be by far the longest agreement of its kind in Canada. Can any of us say that the conditions for gaming in the province today will be the same in 25 years? Certainly not.

Mr. Speaker, why is the NDP locking the people of this province into a 25-year gaming agreement?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Osika: — Mr. Speaker, because of the turnaround at SIGA we agreed to go back to the table and continue our negotiations. We knew there was an investigation ongoing, Mr. Speaker, but after SIGA had met the benchmarks that were set, we felt, in all good faith, that we had some competent people replace the CEO (chief executive officer), members of the board.

And as a matter of fact, Mr. Speaker, members opposite were present when Ed Bellegarde, the CEO of SIGA — and I believe the member from Humboldt was there as well — was recently presented with a Display of Excellence award, Mr. Speaker, from the Canadian gaming industry for demonstrating extraordinary contributions within the casino industry. Mr. Speaker, these are the kind of people now that serve on the board that we are negotiating with in good faith.

I recognize that the members opposite perhaps are not interested in assisting First Nations in economic development and economic employment opportunities, Mr. Speaker. But we, on this side, are. It's important to this whole province.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Bakken: — Mr. Speaker, just a few years ago — and members from the government side of the House who represent Saskatoon will know this — the people of Saskatoon rejected the idea of a casino in a city-wide plebiscite. And it is reported that this new 25-year agreement would give SIGA the

permission to build a casino on the east side of Saskatoon.

Mr. Speaker, why is the government signing a new gaming agreement that will include a Saskatoon casino when they know full well that the people of Saskatoon do not want one?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm not sure where the member gets her information. We continue to negotiate in good faith with First Nations people, with SIGA, on these very issues.

Now let me just remind the members here and the people, I'm very proud of the fact that Mr. Bellegarde, that I just spoke about, since he was appointed CEO in July, 2000 and . . . or 2001, pardon me, since that time he has realigned priorities, cut operating costs, and doubled the net profits. This national recognition that he received is proof of the progress that has been made by SIGA.

And, Mr. Speaker, if people are reading the media comments from ministers from Alberta and Manitoba, they are saying Saskatchewan is the leader in assisting First Nations in creating economic activity and development and employment for First Nations. We have the template. They are going to follow our lead, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Bakken: — Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Premier. The Premier's NDP government is about to sign a new 25-year gaming agreement with the FSIN in spite of the fact that the Justice department is considering laying charges in the SIGA scandal; in spite of the fact that this would tie the province down for 25 years; in spite of the fact that the people of Saskatoon, a city he now represents as the MLA (Member of the Legislative Assembly) for Riversdale, have officially rejected a new casino development; and in spite of the fact that as an opposition member of the legislature, the Premier protested loudly against the introduction and expansion of gambling in Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, in spite of all this, how can the Premier now sign and support a new 25-year gaming agreement?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member from Rosthern scowls and points at our Premier. He should be scowling and pointing at his leader, the Leader of the Opposition, Mr. Speaker, who, I will quote, in a speech he gave to First Nations Assembly . . .

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

Hon. Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again, I think the pointing a finger should be at the Leader of the Opposition, from members in his own caucus, because what he said was he believes:

. . . the financial success of the Saskatchewan Indian

Gaming Authority is one of the great and largely untold business success stories in Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, I'd also remind the member that the casino, if there's a casino in Saskatoon, it will be at the will of the people in that community. I would also have another quote from the Leader of the Opposition, Mr. Speaker:

... I am impressed with the direct and business-like approach both SIGA and the FSIN have taken in addressing the governance challenges that arose in 2001.

I recognize the importance of getting a new agreement signed as soon as possible . . .

We are co-operating and bargaining in good faith with our partners, the First Nations people.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Sale of Assets from Saskatchewan Valley Potato Corporation

Mr. Brkich: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know only the NDP could lose money growing potatoes and they lost a lot of it. Now we learn . . .

The Speaker: — Order, please. Order, order. Order. The member start over, please.

Mr. Brkich: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Only the NDP could lose money growing potatoes and they lost a lot of it. Now we learn they're losing \$5 million on the sale of the potato sheds. That makes a loss of \$28 million that we know of so far. And the minister in charge has called it a success.

Mr. Speaker, my question is the Minister of CIC (Crown Investments Corporation of Saskatchewan). Has the minister learned his lesson? When is the NDP going to stop gambling taxpayers' dollars on money-losing business ventures?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. And to the member, he will know that we have been very clear about getting out of the potato industry. In fact, Mr. Speaker, we've sold quite a number of the buildings already and what he will see in the financial statements for the coming year, this year 2002, in fact, is a profit above and beyond what we had projected earlier on.

So in fact there will be revenue that will flow back in to the CIC dividends as a result of the sale of these buildings, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Brkich: — Well, Mr. Speaker, that's all right, but not only did the NDP lose \$20 million in this venture, they almost single-handedly destroyed the potato industry in my area. It's only now starting to recover and some of the businesses will never recover from the millions of dollars they lost when the NDP potato corporation went bankrupt. Yet the minister in charge is still calling it a success.

Mr. Speaker, they lost millions of taxpayers' dollars, they wrecked the potato industry, and they left millions of dollars in unpaid bills. At the very least, will the minister admit this is a terrible mistake and will he apologize to the people who are hurt by this NDP disaster?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well the member says that we killed the potato industry, Mr. Speaker. Are there things we could of done better? Absolutely there are, and we learn from every investment, Mr. Speaker. We learn from every investment.

All I know, Mr. Speaker, is that when we started there were 200 acres of potatoes grown out there — 200 acres. Now there's 10,000, Mr. Speaker. And there's a good industry out there, Mr. Speaker.

And I remind the people of Saskatchewan, who was it that invested the hundreds of millions of dollars in the infrastructure in the first place, Mr. Speaker? Who was it? Some of those folks over there should know the answer to that question.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Brkich: — You know, Mr. Speaker, he wants to talk about priorities. You know this year the NDP is attacking Saskatchewan seniors by taking 90 per cent of their income. And how much money will the NDP get from the attack on seniors? About \$7 million — \$7 million, Mr. Speaker. That's one-quarter of the amount the NDP lost on its potato disaster.

And now, who's end up paying for it? Saskatchewan seniors. The NDP is now taking their life savings to pay for its stupid decisions like this one. Where is the NDP priorities? Why do they have millions of dollars to blow on potatoes but no money for Saskatchewan seniors?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Well, Mr. Speaker, as one of the members said on this side, there they go sprouting misinformation again, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I said in my last answer, Mr. Speaker, that there are things that we learn from every investment. But, Mr. Speaker, having said that, is that member now saying that nothing should . . . we should do nothing in respect to assisting producers in trying to diversify our economy, particularly in agriculture, Mr. Speaker, an area where they themselves invested, along with the federal government, tens and hundreds of millions of dollars in infrastructure, Mr. Speaker. Nearly \$200 million by way of irrigation infrastructure.

I think that we have a stronger industry, an industry that will succeed over the years to come, and it's now in the hands of the private sector that I'm sure will do a good job of growing that industry, Mr. Speaker.

Saskatchewan Indian Gaming Authority

Mr. Hillson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of

Justice: as the chief law enforcement officer in our province I would like to ask him if a final decision has been made as to whether there will be charges, if any, in the SIGA matter. And if no final decision has yet been made, does he consider it advisable to enter into an agreement which cannot be reviewed for a full generation, prior to that process being completed?

Hon. Mr. Osika: — Thank you. Mr. Speaker, I thought the member was paying attention a little earlier when I indicated we were aware that the investigation was under way. Justice is still looking at the results of some of the police investigations. That's another matter.

We are negotiating in good faith with SIGA, who has met very high standards that were met and applauded by the Provincial Auditor, Mr. Speaker. They have made every effort to ensure good accountability in every respect in those areas where there were some problems. Those have been overcome.

Mr. Speaker, if we were going to ongoing never do any negotiations because of certain police investigations, we could be not accomplishing any business in this province for a long time.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hillson: — The community casinos have been establishing community development corporations in order that First Nations leaders can sit down with other community groups and other community leaders in the host communities in order to decide the best use of casino profits for community development and community undertakings and social projects in those communities.

My question to the gaming minister is whether those community development corporations will be protected in the new 25-year-long agreement, or will the use of casino profits be strictly and solely the purview of SIGA?

Hon. Mr. Osika: — Mr. Speaker, as I indicated, we've been negotiating in good faith. I have a great deal of respect and commend the members on both negotiating teams for their efforts. And when they have agreed, come to an agreement we will let the public, the member opposite, and everybody know what that agreement will be, Mr. Speaker. And it will be a good one.

I'm not prepared to discuss the contents of any agreements in this House or in public until it's done.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(14:15)

Crown Investment Corporation's Investment Strategy

Mr. Hillson: — Mr. Speaker, my question is to the Minister of Crown Investments. He has many times told us that this province is pursuing an investment strategy which is different than any other jurisdiction in North America.

He has told us that this investment strategy of investing around the world is in order that wealth and investment can pour into

Saskatchewan, creating wealth, investment, and employment in this province.

My question for the Minister of Crown Investments: if we are doing something different than everybody else, and we are right and everybody else is wrong, why is the economy of the other provinces and states in North America growing and ours is contracting?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, I'd be pleased to answer on behalf of the government.

I think members on the opposition side will be, at some point in time, forced to agree with the reality of the circumstances of 2001, the drought and the impact on the productivity and the value of the produce that came as a result of what we do in agriculture.

One day they will have to agree with the economists, the people in StatsCanada, *Saskatchewan Trends Monitor*, and other economists who have looked at the circumstance and who clearly understand the retraction of our economy in 2001 was based on agriculture.

Now if members opposite care to ignore the fact that 2001 was a difficult year, I want to say, Mr. Speaker, if they can recognize the fact that our GDP (gross domestic product) contracted in 2001, will they, all of them, stand up in this House and at least recognize eight previous years of successive GDP growth leading this province as being . . . this country as being . . .

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Investment Services Corporation

Mr. Hillson: — Mr. Speaker, we have been told that the LAND (Land Titles Automated Network Development) project, which we still haven't got up and running in this province, we are flogging around the globe at total travel costs of \$187,000, I believe.

Now this is such a good system that we believe we can market around the world. And of course if we haven't, it's certainly not through lack of effort on the part of our officials and government.

Now my question for the government is simply this. The fact that we have some system superior to everybody else in the world — even though we can't get it operating — the fact we have something superior to everybody else in the world, the rest of the world has failed to understand that, in spite of the money we have invested in flying all over the globe meeting them.

Now what is the problem with the rest of the world? How is it that we are so much smarter than everybody else? Does the government think that everybody else in the world is suffering from a lower IQ (intelligence quotient)?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Axworthy: — Let me remind the member that the LAND (Land Titles Automated Network Development) system is working, that it has cut the cost for house transactions for the vast majority of citizens of the province about a half, Mr. Speaker.

Let me just read a little ad, Mr. Speaker, from *The Globe and Mail*, indeed from all the newspapers across Canada, an ad from Microsoft, which describes the LAND Information Services Corporation of Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, in this way. Mr. Speaker, it says, ISC (Information Services Corporation of Saskatchewan) are now industry leaders in LAND information systems.

Mr. Speaker, if I was given the choice between, if I was given the choice between listening to the member opposite or Bill Gates, I'd pick Bill Gates every time.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Excuse me, why is the member on his feet?

Hon. Mr. Osika: — With leave to introduce guests, Mr. Speaker.

Leave granted.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Hon. Mr. Osika: — Well thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank my colleagues for giving me leave to introduce and welcome the president of the Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association, Mr. Mike Badham, and a number of city mayors that have joined us this afternoon with whom I'll be meeting shortly after question period.

So I would ask all members to kindly welcome some of our leaders of our communities throughout this great province of ours. Welcome.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too would like to welcome the mayors of some of Saskatchewan's finest cities to the Assembly. I see Mayor Perry from Estevan, Mayor DeVos from Yorkton, Mayor Madden from Saskatoon, Mayor Schlosser from Weyburn, Mayor Korte from Humboldt, and also Mike Badham from SUMA (Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association) is with them.

We welcome you to the Assembly. We have met many times with the mayors. We look forward to meeting and working with them, as they represent their citizens in an expert fashion here in Saskatchewan. Welcome to the Assembly.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Why is the member from Regina Coronation Park on his feet?

Mr. Trew: — Mr. Speaker, I'm asking for leave to introduce a guest.

Leave granted.

Mr. Trew: — I thank colleagues in the legislature. Mr. Speaker, to you and through you to the members of the legislature, it's my pleasure to introduce a acquaintance of mine whom I've known for a long time. He's an honorary north-ender in that he taught school, actually taught social studies at Robert Usher for quite a number of years up until he retired. Mr. Speaker, I ask all hon. members to help me in welcoming Fred Steininger to the Assembly.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. D'Autremont: — Mr. Speaker, on a point of order.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Cannington on a point of order.

POINTS OF ORDER

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my point of order is that the member for Regina Victoria during members' statements used terms derogatory to the members of the opposition in referring to them as snake oil salesmen. Mr. Speaker, I would ask that the member apologize and withdraw his remarks.

The Speaker: — The member for Moose Jaw North on the point of order only.

Hon. Mr. Hagel: — Mr. Speaker, as is always the case in ruling on the use of language in the House, it's context that determines whether it's in or out of order. I suspect, Mr. Speaker . . . or I suggest, I should say, that you will want to refer the *Hansard* to recognize the context and I think that, Mr. Speaker, you will find that the use of the phrase that the hon. member for Victoria used was entirely in order.

If the hon. members are feeling a little bit guilty about tags that they may have to wear, that's their problem, Mr. Speaker, not the problem of the House.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

First of all, I thank members for raising this to my . . . bringing this to my attention at this time. And I would like — both members — and I would like to make a comment on it.

I had the opportunity to double-check the precedents once again, and in the case of the wording mentioned by the member for Regina Victoria, I see no precedent.

However when I look at the context of the statement made by the member for Regina Victoria — the statement, peddling snake oil salesman — and I compare it to a statement made later, from the member from Melfort-Tisdale raiding bank accounts, I find that both — although they were quite colourful figures of speech, probably could be categorized as colloquialism — that the more important thing here is perhaps the effect it has on the House as a whole. And there probably are statements like this and other statements that members could

bring up repeatedly on points of order.

I'm very hesitant to rule on statements of this nature because they're very borderline. Under one condition they may be out of order and another condition they may not be out of order. So instead of ruling, I would just ask members to consider the effects of their words and their phrases, and particularly the tone that they use when they make these statements.

Now if, on the other hand, a member at this time wishes to withdraw their remark or any one of the remarks that were made, I would give him the opportunity or her the opportunity to do so.

Mr. Gantfoer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would wish to withdraw the comments I made about raiding bank accounts. I think that it certainly underscores the deep concern we have for the level of money that's being taken and certainly I would withdraw that.

The Speaker: — Order. Order, please.

Hon. Mr. Hagel: — Mr. Speaker, on the point of order, I think you've just provided opportunity for members to withdraw remarks and it's out of order for members to then proceed to debate. And I would encourage that members of the House follow the direction you've given, Mr. Chair.

The Speaker: — I appreciate the member's gesture and I accept it as a withdrawal.

Why is the member on his feet?

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker, on a point of order.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Cannington on a point of order.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On another point of order, during question period the member for Meadow Lake, the Minister of CIC, referred to the member from Arm River's comments as, sprouting misinformation, Mr. Speaker — one of those words that is in the book as not being permitted, Mr. Speaker.

And while sprouting is welcome in Saskatchewan, the reference to a member's statements as misinformation is unparliamentary, Mr. Speaker. I ask that he apologize and withdraw the remarks.

The Speaker: — Order. Order. Order. Members of the Assembly, members of the Assembly, members of the Assembly . . . Order.

I just ask members not to get carried away. Not to get carried away with these things. I would categorize the remarks just quoted about spouting misinformation about equal to the comment, stupid decision. And if one person brings the remark, another person tends to counter it.

I ask members just to kind of settle down on this and accept each other's flaws once in a while.

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Before orders of the day.

The Speaker: — Before orders of the day? Why is the member on his feet?

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Speaker, I'd ask leave of the Assembly to move two motions regarding membership to the standing committees.

Leave granted.

MOTIONS

Substitution of Members on Standing Committee on Private Members' Bills

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Speaker, by leave, I move, seconded by the member from Moose Jaw North:

That the names of Ms. Doreen Hamilton, Ms. Colleen Jones be substituted for those of . . .

An Hon. Member: — Carolyn.

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Or Carolyn Jones. Carolyn Jones. Do you want to trade it?

. . . be substituted for those of Mr. Mark Wartman and Ms. Deb Higgins on a list of members comprising the Standing Committee on Private Members' Bills.

And if I could read the second motion in? That the names . . . One at a time, do you want?

An Hon. Member: — Yes.

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — I'll do the first one as moved.

Motion agreed to.

Substitution of Members on Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Speaker, I also move, seconded by the member from Moose Jaw North:

That the names (I'm going to be careful with the names on this one) the names of Mr. Warren McCall, Ms. Pat Atkinson, and Mr. Keith Goulet be substituted for those of Ms. Deb Higgins, Ms. Carolyn Jones, and Mr. Mark Wartman on a list of members comprising the Standing Committee on Public Accounts.

Motion agreed to.

(14:30)

TABLING OF DOCUMENTS

The Speaker: — Members, before orders of the day, I would like to table two documents from the office of the Provincial Auditor. One is the report to the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan and the 2001 financial statements of CIC Crown

Corporations and related entities dated April 2002.

And the second is a report to the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan on the financial statements of Crown agencies for years ending in the 2001 calendar year, dated April 2002 as well.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

WRITTEN QUESTIONS

Mr. Yates: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker, I am extremely pleased this afternoon to stand and table a written response to question no. 136.

The Speaker: — The response to 136 has been tabled.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

SECOND READINGS

Bill No. 28 — The Inter-jurisdictional Support Orders Act Loi sur les ordonnances alimentaires interterritoriales

Hon. Mr. Axworthy: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to rise to move second reading of The Inter-jurisdictional Support Orders Act.

The proposed Act streamlines the process by which support orders are obtained, varied, and enforced in cases where the parties live in different jurisdictions.

It does this firstly by replacing the current two-stage hearing process for obtaining a maintenance order with a single hearing process. Saskatchewan residents seeking to establish or vary support obligations will no longer have to have their evidence reviewed by a court here before it's sent to the respondent's jurisdiction.

Instead the claimant will prepare a support application package that will be sent directly to the reciprocating jurisdiction, where a court hearing will be held based on the evidence supplied by the claimant and the respondent.

In cases where the court is faced with conflicting evidence from the two parties, or needs further information from the party in the other province, the Act will allow the court to obtain the further evidence it requires by telephone.

The second major change will eliminate the ability of respondents to oppose registration of Canadian support orders. This means that if a support order made in Canada is sent here for enforcement, or sent from here to another province or territory, enforcement of the order can commence immediately.

The old Act required that maintenance enforcement personally serve the payor with 30-days notice before enforcement could begin.

Respondents will continue to be able to apply to set aside registration of foreign maintenance orders. And this change does not affect the ability of respondents to apply to the court to change the amount of maintenance payable if their

circumstances change.

Mr. Speaker, this updated legislation for inter-jurisdictional enforcement of maintenance orders is compatible with the new system recently adopted in the United States, and it will reduce delays and costs for parties in obtaining and enforcing maintenance orders. This new model will work most efficiently when all of the provinces and territories have implemented it.

Mr. Speaker, at the Premiers' Conference in August 2001, the leaders of all of the provinces and territories agreed to pass this legislation before their next conference in August 2002. Saskatchewan will be the fifth jurisdiction to introduce this legislation.

Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to move second reading of An Act respecting Inter-jurisdictional Support Orders and making consequential amendments to certain Acts.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it's a pleasure to rise on this Bill today.

Inter-jurisdictional maintenance orders have been a problem over the years where someone who has a maintenance order applied against them simply moves to another province to try and either avoid or defer the payments of their maintenance.

This is not appropriate, Mr. Speaker. It's wrong. It harms the children involved and punishes the children rather than providing them with any assistance.

It has always been a problem when that parent has moved out that is paying the maintenance orders. Or when the spouse that has the children has moved and tries to maintain the reception of those maintenance orders, it causes a great deal of difficulty.

I would hope that this piece of legislation, Mr. Speaker, provides for a two-way street on this issue; that maintenance orders in Saskatchewan would be enforced in other jurisdictions just as maintenance orders in other jurisdictions would be enforced in Saskatchewan.

It always seems to run into a great deal of difficulty, and hopefully, this piece of legislation will go a long ways to alleviate that, Mr. Speaker.

In that sense, I believe that we think that this is a good piece of legislation, but it is a fairly comprehensive piece of legislation, Mr. Speaker, and needs time to be gone over to ensure that it is in fact providing the support to children that it seems to indicate that it does to ensure that this is a two-way street, Mr. Speaker; that enforcement orders from Saskatchewan will be valid in other jurisdictions, just as those maintenance orders from other jurisdictions will be valid in Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker.

So to give time to review this Bill, to give the stakeholders in this area an opportunity to review it and ensure that it meets the necessary requirements, Mr. Speaker, I would move that we adjourn debate.

Debate adjourned.

ADJOURNED DEBATES

SECOND READINGS

Bill No. 15

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Axworthy that **Bill No. 15 — The Queen's Bench Amendment Act, 2002/Loi de 2002 modifiant la Loi de 1988 sur la Cour du Banc de la Reine** be now read a second time.

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Bill No. 15 is one of those Bills where instead of providing leadership, government is just following what's exactly been happening in the judicial system.

It's a situation that has been there for a long time and I guess in order to clear it up and so there's no misconception that what is actually happening in the judicial system and what the law happens to be about that are on the same page. Unfortunately this seems to be somewhat indicative of this particular government that it very often follows rather than leads.

What Bill No. 15 is about specifically, Mr. Speaker, is that under the present situation in a mediation process that takes place that are conducted by a judge, any of the information that's there, there's protection on that.

Also what has happened in the past, statements made during that mediation, as I said, are protected. Also this amendment will extend that same protection to pretrial hearings. Now that in a fact . . . in fact has been the case in Saskatchewan for quite a number of years. But it has in fact been the case, but it hasn't been that fact in law. And so what Bill No. 15 does, The Queen's Bench Amendment Act, is to put those two things in line so they dovetail with one another.

And we have contacted some of the legal societies about this particular Bill, how they feel about it. There's no concern on any level about Bill No. 15. We have no concern about it. No concerns have been raised to us. And therefore, Mr. Speaker, we're prepared to move Bill No. 15 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. 16

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Axworthy that **Bill No. 16 — The Independent Officers' Remuneration (Amendment) Act, 2002** be now read a second time.

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Bill No. 16 deals with an issue that's moderately new to the province — and I mean moderately in the span of time that we very often deal with — and it deals with a number of independent officers of the legislature, the Children's Advocate, the Provincial Ombudsman, and the Chief Electoral Officer.

These people, their remuneration in the past numbers of years, has had a rather circuitous route that it's gone through. And

recommendations have been made; those have gone to the Board of Internal Economy. And most of us from one time or another have sat on the particular board when we've dealt with these particular issues, particularly what should the salaries be.

And it's always a contentious issue because some of these particular officers are almost in a growth industry. Some of those jobs can grow, and if they want to they can enlarge their own sphere of influence and the job gets bigger, and then they can come back and say, well we need more pay. And it becomes then the job of the Board of Internal Economy to assess that.

And it's somewhat awkward, when we've had these three individual positions, these three independent officers, and we look at what each one's doing, and we juggle with the numbers. Different boards will have different opinions on different times and dates as to what should happen with that particular pay.

So in accordance with that, Bill No. 16, Mr. Speaker, proposes that the Children's Advocate, the Provincial Ombudsman, have their salaries linked to the average of all deputy ministers' salaries as at April 1 every year; while the Chief Electoral Officer's salary is at the maximum of the senior executive range 2.

What this does, Mr. Speaker, is set that up in a solid sort of way so these individuals know where their salary's going to be; it's not going to be at the whim of that particular committee. And also, there's no opportunity for them particularly to say, well I've done a better job than any of the other two, therefore my salary should rise above theirs. It's a fixed sort of thing that relates to, as I said, Mr. Speaker, the average of all deputy ministers' salaries as of April 1 every year.

And I think that removes some of the difficulties that have been there in the past, some of the discussions that have taken place at the Board of Internal Economy, and as I said also at the start, it removes the opportunity for some of these individuals to decide that this is a growth industry and they can you know create some positive salaries for themselves.

Having said that, Mr. Speaker, we had recommendation on the committee that made a recommendation for Bill No. 16. We were in agreement with those recommendations. We have no reason to oppose this Bill and therefore we recommend that it go to Committee of the Whole. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Bill No. 5

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Melenchuk that **Bill No. 5 — The Apprenticeship and Trade Certification Amendment Act, 2002** be now read a second time.

Mr. Hart: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me pleasure to enter into the debate on this Bill. Mr. Speaker, this Bill deals with changes to the Saskatchewan Apprenticeship and Trade Certification Commission. It makes some amendments to the existing Act that deals with the apprenticeship program and training of skilled workers in this province, Mr. Speaker.

And I think we have looked at the Bill, we agree with most of the changes; we certainly have some questions, Mr. Speaker, that we can deal with at a later time. I just might outline a couple of points that we have some questions with, Mr. Speaker, with regards to this amendment.

This amendment allows for representatives of employers and employees to be appointed to the commission as part of the process rather than the actual employer and employee, and we certainly think that there is merit in that provision, Mr. Speaker, provided that it's an unbiased process; that both the employer and employee are governed by the same set of rules and regulations as far as the selection of their representatives and so on. We certainly don't have a problem with that.

However if the regulations are set up in such a fashion that it influences the employer over the employer's rights, or vice versa, Mr. Speaker, well we certainly would have a problem with that. So that's a concern that we need to . . . needs to be addressed, Mr. Speaker.

There's an area of compulsory trades and talks, and the amendments talk about only qualified people are eligible for apprenticeship and those sorts of things. There may be a hint of forced unionization. We feel that it's only a slight possibility that that may be there and what we want to be assured of, Mr. Speaker, that that, in fact, is not one of the underlying purposes of this amendment, Mr. Speaker.

The amendment also talks about ensuring that there is an appropriate ratio of apprentices to journeymen in the various trades and that certainly is a worthy goal, Mr. Speaker. However simply to make this amendment and state that objective is one thing.

On the other hand, the training institutions — whether it be SIAST (Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology) or private colleges or regional colleges and all those people in skills training, in the skills training area, Mr. Speaker — they need the tools to be able to in fact provide the training spaces for the apprentice. And at this time, Mr. Speaker, I'm told that there are a number of trades where spaces for apprentices to gain the formal education part of their apprenticeship at SIAST or . . . that there is a shortage of spaces and that there is in fact a very long waiting list.

And this certainly is not satisfactory, Mr. Speaker. And we certainly don't see that with the small increase to post-secondary education training institutions that that situation will be rectified in the near future, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, having said that though, there are . . . as I said, I think most of these committees can be addressed . . . questions can be addressed in Committee of the Whole, Mr. Speaker.

And, Mr. Speaker, however, I think before we get there, it would be incumbent upon me to outline some of our concerns, further concerns, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, some of the problems that, with the apprenticeship program, that exist that this Bill tries to address, perhaps could be addressed in another fashion.

The amendment says that there is a provision made in the Act to allow a probationary period in the apprenticeship process, which then gives young people and also those people who are seeking retraining and entering a new trade, it gives them an opportunity to try this new occupation, I suppose, become part of the process without having to go through the whole process and then find out at the end of the day that they no longer . . . really don't like the occupation they've chosen.

And, Mr. Speaker, there's perhaps another tool that this government could use to help with that problem, with that situation and that is expanding the work experience program in our schools. We've met on a number of occasions with the Saskatchewan Labour Force Development Board who has suggested that there's a real need for this type of a program in our high schools, to give the high school students some work experience and exposure to various operations and those sorts of things, Mr. Speaker.

So, Mr. Speaker, when we look at the estimates and we hear what the Minister of Learning has to say, to this point in time, we certainly haven't heard any new emphasis on the work experience program in our high schools, Mr. Speaker. And we certainly would promote or would suggest that the Minister of Learning and his department look at that whole area.

And the way the program works now, Mr. Speaker, is that the work experience program is pretty well left up to the initiative of teachers and principals in our high schools. And most of the time, from at least the bit of experience that I have had . . . And I should mention, Mr. Speaker, that I have had a couple of high school students do work experience in my constituency office. And I certainly found that to be a very rewarding experience and I . . . from the feedback that I had from the young students that spent time with myself and my constituency assistant, they seem to feel that it certainly was a rewarding experience.

And in fact, we may have some future politicians come out of that experience, Mr. Speaker. It wouldn't surprise me. There was one or two of the students who were keenly interested in what we do as MLAs and expressed a real interest.

They weren't . . . They really didn't take a whole lot of interest in the mundane work that our constituency assistants do as far as the filing and just managing the paper flow in our offices, but when it came to the political side of things and the whole area of governance and so on . . . One student in particular was keenly interested and I believe this student has gone on and has enrolled in one of our universities and is looking at studying political science and that sort of thing.

But coming back to that whole area of skills training and work experience, Mr. Speaker, as I said, it's been my experience that most of the time it's left to the initiative of one of the teachers in the schools, particularly in the small schools in rural Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker.

If you have a teacher who has the time and has some of the background information and has the co-operation of the community to set up a program, it seems to be very successful.

But on the other hand, if you have a teacher who doesn't have a lot of support and doesn't have . . . as I said most of the teachers

don't have time to really do all the background work that's necessary, Mr. Speaker, then the program is not very effective.

Quite often what will happen is this young person, high school student, may get a placement at a local business. The local business person doesn't have the background information to really know what's expected of them so they just use them as some unpaid labour to sweep the floors, and cart out the boxes, and perhaps clean out a cooler, and that sort of thing.

And really the students are . . . it really leaves a bitter taste in the students' mouths and they really . . . the next time work experience comes along they don't participate in the program.

But on the other hand, if it's a well-run program — as I indicated in our own situation, we did have the one student who was keenly interested, and I've heard from some of his classmates and from students in other communities in my constituency — they find it very valuable.

And this all ties in, Mr. Speaker, to this whole area of giving future workers in our labour force some prior experience as to what their occupation may be like. And there is a real need, Mr. Speaker, in this province to grow the capacity, the training capacity, and increase the number of skilled workers that we have in our province, Mr. Speaker.

We take industries like Doepker, who are looking frantically for skilled welders and other trades people and they just can't find them. They have a market out there, they have the wherewith . . . the raw resources but they lack one thing, and that's a skilled workforce — people who can do the intricate type of welding and fabrication, Mr. Speaker, that they require, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, there's also some . . . a need for this additional training, Mr. Speaker, and this . . . these amendments pay some lip service to that, but we really need to increase the training capacity.

So, Mr. Speaker, at this time I'd like to move a superseding motion that we adjourn debate . . . I'd like to move a superseding motion that we go to adjourned debates.

That this Assembly and the people of . . .

. . . item no. 6:

That this Assembly and the people of Saskatchewan have lost confidence in the current Premier and cabinet.

And that'll be moved . . . seconded by the member from Swift Current, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The division bells rang from 14:58 until 15:06.

Motion negatived on the following recorded division.

Yeas — 23

Hermanson Kwiatkowski Heppner

Julé	Krawetz	Draude
Gantfoer	Toth	Wakefield
Stewart	Elhard	Eagles
McMorris	D'Autremont	Bakken
Wall	Brkich	Weekes
Harpauer	Hart	Allchurch
Peters	Hillson	

Nays — 28

Calvert	Addley	Atkinson
Hagel	Lautermilch	Melenchuk
Sonntag	Osika	Lorjé
Kasperski	Goulet	Van Mulligen
Prebble	Belanger	Crofford
Axworthy	Nilson	Junor
Hamilton	Harper	Forbes
Jones	Higgins	Trew
Wartman	Thomson	Yates
McCall		

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to speak on Bill No. 5, An Act to amend The Apprenticeship and Trade Certification Act.

As we know, in today's economy apprenticeship is very important in all trades and we need to encourage and set in regulation the conditions to allow people to become journeymen in their trades and in their areas of expertise and allow the people that are trained in those areas to bring young people and other people along into that industry and into that trade so that they work into our labour force.

It's imperative that we pursue this goal and with all people of Saskatchewan but particularly the young Native people that need to be trained into jobs that we hope that will be there in the future. And, Mr. Speaker, as I pointed out, it's imperative that young people and people that are coming out of other industries that do not necessarily have the skills and training to date, be allowed to get into the industries and the jobs that may come up into . . .

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

Hon. Mr. Osika: — Mr. Speaker, with all due respect to the member from the opposition speaking, with leave to introduce guests.

Leave granted.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Hon. Mr. Osika: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I thank you, colleague. I would like to introduce a friend of mine, Mr. Wally Oucharek, who is here and brought a number of art students, grade 12 art students from Melville to the Assembly here this afternoon. And I'm told that they wanted to see a little bit of action of government and this legislature. Please help me welcome them, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ADJOURNED DEBATES

SECOND READINGS

**Bill No. 5 — The Apprenticeship and Trade
Certification Amendment Act, 2002
(continued)**

Mr. Weekes: — Well thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Apprenticeship and Trade Certification Act brings up a number of questions.

In the Bill it talks about who is to sit on the various boards from the employer point of view and the employees' side of the equation. And I believe it's important that there's fair representation is placed on boards at all times and so that everyone's views are taken to account when decisions are made. And in particularly where we designate people to go into training into apprenticeship courses and to make sure that the employee or potential future employees of a particular trade is trained in the right job category for the jobs.

And as we know in today's economy, the jobs change many times. There's new technologies coming along at all times and so people need to be upgraded and trained throughout their career. It's becoming a more and more important aspect of this economy . . . modern economy that we live in, that the employees and the employers work together to have training in place so that the jobs are filled and we have an efficient industry. And be very competitive not only in Canada but in a global view around the world, so that we are productive and able to increase jobs and bring profits into this province to broaden the tax base and to grow Saskatchewan so that there is more opportunity for the future children of this province.

This commission that is going to be set up talks about, administer the skills training benefit to apprentices and tradespersons. There is a need for rules and regulations so that all the stakeholders in particular trades and industries know what the rules and regulations are and that there's no surprises when someone goes into a course or a plan so that they do come through the training period and are fully trained in that profession.

Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, the problem Saskatchewan has today is that we don't have enough job opportunities. And even though we train people for all sorts of jobs and industries, we have to make sure that in our society that there is jobs for these people when they come out of their training and out of their apprenticeship programs.

(15:15)

We don't want to . . . Number one, we don't want people to be trained and leave to other provinces. We want to keep our young people here in this province and develop and grow industries and businesses in this province so that it's for the benefit of the whole province by broadening our tax base and having more higher-paid employees in this province which broadens our tax base and ultimately brings more revenue into the government's coffers so we can afford very important parts of government services as health care and education and so on.

And it's also very important that we set up programs and courses that people will stay in. We don't want to have people going into apprenticeship courses only to find out that they drop out later and really a waste of their time and the time of the training facilities and costly to everyone concerned. And as I mentioned, that it's very important that we work on those many details.

We don't have any particular problem with Bill No. 5, but we will be asking a number of questions in the committee once it goes to committee. And we would like to speak to the stakeholders involved and just clarify a number of the items in the Bill to make sure that the rules and regulations in place . . . that this Bill brings into place does produce the desired results of benefiting the young people of this province and also the business sector of this province so that we have highly trained individuals going into the new businesses and industries that are growing and changing in development.

So at this time, I'd just like to say again that we will let this Bill pass into committee.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

COMMITTEE OF FINANCE

**General Revenue Fund
Saskatchewan Water Corporation
Vote 50**

Subvote (SW01)

The Chair: — I would invite the minister responsible for Sask Water to introduce his officials and, if he wishes, make a brief statement.

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I just wanted to introduce, to my immediate right Stuart Kramer who is the president of Sask Water Corporation. And to my back right is Greg Argue who's the director of the corporate communication, policy, and planning. Directly behind me is Terry Hymers who is a corporate controller. And to the extreme right of course we have Wayne Dybvig who is the vice-president of water resource and infrastructure management.

And, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Chair, I'd like to point out to some folks that may be watching back home, the purpose of the Committee of Finance is to allow the opposition to go through the budgets of each of the different departments line by line and to question the minister on a wide variety of activities within his portfolio. And that's what the exercises of the Committee of Finance and the estimates.

So that's a part of my opening comments and to certainly point out that there's much work ahead of us and I look forward to the questions of the opposition. Thank you.

Mr. Brkich: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to welcome the minister here and thank him for his opening remarks.

I want to welcome the officials here as the stewards and the masters of our vast waterways here in Saskatchewan. I know it's not an easy job; it's a big task you have to look after them considering the many issues that are before Sask Water — drought conditions that are facing our producers, and in the villages and town and cities this year, safe water issues, recreation. Many things you have to look after, and I'm glad the minister is . . . the statements he had made that he is willing to . . . like he'd said . . . the statements he'd made on going through the estimates which, I believe, is a good process.

This is the third time I've did this, and each and every time I seem to have a different minister, so sometimes I wonder if this portfolio is a hot potato.

With that remark I have to ask . . . I understand going through the estimates, that most of your assets were turned over to CIC in 2000. But I was wondering about . . . I know there were some issues on renting land yet with Sask Valley Potato Corporation that were still on the books in 2001.

Could you give me any background information on your involvement — if you have any left — with Sask Valley Potato Corporation — anything that pertains to Sask Valley Potato Corp. and Sask Water and CIC.

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Just to point out that any and all of the assets of the potato corporation was transferred to CIC in June 2000. And the answer is no, that Sask Water has no more involvement with the potato corporation.

Mr. Brkich: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Mr. Minister. I'm glad that the taxpayers of Saskatchewan will be happy, and my constituents will be happy to see that Sask Water and, hopefully, the government is out of the potato growing industry and that it will thrive in the future.

Now one of the many things I want to ask you questions in is I want to deal a little bit to start with, with Justice Laing's report on North Battleford. In his report on the North Battleford drinking water issue, of which the NDP government was found mostly to blame, Justice Laing stated Sask Water to be converted into sort of a money-making water utility that will charge for whatever advice it gives in the area of delivering water and waste water treatment operations and consultation services.

Can the minister please give the Assembly an update as to where this stands currently?

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Just to point out that the legislation will be presented, of course, in the next several weeks, in the spring of 2002. And there we'll begin to really define very clearly what Sask Water's role in the future, in terms of us trying to put together a comprehensive water strategy for the province as a whole.

Much of that work has been done, and as you're probably are aware, there's a transition process in place now. Legislation has

to be drafted up and drawn up; it's got to be passed. And what we hope happens is that at the conclusion of this session, that we're able to pass the Act and then to proclaim the Act by the early fall so a lot of these things are able to be put in place.

Sask Water will be certainly working with a number of communities. They will be sitting down with the communities and giving them some consulting services, some engineering services, and standing with the communities to also look at ways to source water; but more importantly, to make sure that some of the water services that we are going to help the communities look at, some of the solutions, is they want to make sure that these solutions are affordable.

So Sask Water itself has a very well-defined role. And I think that's the value of this total exercise is to make sure the roles and the responsibilities and the authority and certainly the support structure is in place, is very sound, is very comprehensive and it does deal with some of the specific challenges of the many sizes of communities that, you know, that we have, plus the many different type of challenges that some of these water systems may have.

Mr. Brkich: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. This afternoon I met with some of the mayors from around Saskatchewan and also I'd met with SUMA on different occasions and they expressed basically the same thing you were saying there.

They would like Sask Water's role to be defined because right now it seems like it, when it comes under Water, nobody's really sure on their safe water drinking whether it falls strictly under the Environment or is it dealing with Sask Water. And I take it this legislation is going to deal a little more with it.

Can you give me any idea yet on the legislation, of how it's progressing or what intends to be in this legislation? Can you give me anything at this particular time?

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Just to point out that we've had a meeting with SUMA. We've also had a meeting with SARM (Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities). And at these meetings we've discussed with both SUMA and SARM some of the potential solutions and some of the strategies and some of the schedules that we hope to implement as a result of our water strategy.

And I would point out that I mentioned several weeks, but sometimes in May we hope to have all the Acts drawn up. Legislatively there is some work that we have to do. But we anticipate that in May that we'll be able to present this to the Assembly and hopefully have it passed by the end of June and of course proclaimed in the fall.

I would point out that much of the three areas we're focussing on certainly is to talk about the watershed stewardship concept. That's going to be housed in the Environment portfolio as well as the rules and regulations. And the new minister of SERM (Saskatchewan Environment and Resource Management) will be explaining those rules and regulations once she's up in her estimates.

(15:30)

I would point out as well that through the Canada-Saskatchewan Infrastructure Program that the minister that is responsible for government affairs will certainly present all those details during his estimates as well.

But clearly, Sask Water's new role is to be a solutions provider in which we will work with the communities, and the towns, and the villages, and many other interest groups out there, to try and find some affordable solutions.

And certainly as you know, Sask Water has a number of technicians, they have engineers, they've got consultants, they have a number of people that are available on staff. We could also outsource some of this work. But the most important thing is that the communities stay in constant contact with Sask Water because there's a lot of information, a lot of valuable expertise, and certainly a genuine effort to support and work with the communities, that Sask Water is willing to offer to the people of Saskatchewan.

And again that has been made public on many occasions. So every bit of information we can get out to people is certainly very helpful.

Mr. Brkich: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Chairman, you've mentioned quite a few things there which is good. I know we talked to the towns and the villages and the cities there. I think you have been consulting with them, and they would like you to keep consulting with them with this new Act. We talked a little bit about that today with the mayors and that.

One of the things that was brought up when I met with SUMA was the issue of small towns or villages. You talked about having numerous engineers, consultants, expertise in this area, which is good. A lot of the towns need somebody to come out there and basically to look at their water system and tell them what they need to be fixed.

But what our concern was, and SUMA's concern is, is a charge. A lot of these towns are operating on a very small budget. The only money they have budgeted maybe is just going to be able to fix that particular water problem. But if they have to turn around and pay Sask Water \$5,000 in consultation fees, and they were planning to spend \$10,000 on the water system, and you've taken half of it just to tell them what was wrong with it . . .

I would urge you . . . And I'll ask you right now, are you going to provide that service — since you have all the engineers and expertise there, numerous ones you've mentioned — will you provide that service to the towns and villages to go to their water systems, their sewage systems, or their water facilities and to look at there and tell them what they need, that has to be done, that you can do that to them for free of charge.

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you very much for the question. And I think the question certainly will lead to more and more answers as to some of the solutions that many of these communities are asking for.

And I would thank that member because the more information we're able to present out there in the public about some of these challenges, the more we're able to respond to them. And I think

public awareness is a key, key factor in us determining how best to serve some of Saskatchewan's needs and how best to address some of the water challenges that we all face.

Communities, whether they're smaller or larger communities, have traditionally always been the owners and operators and the providers of water to their citizens. So I think that role is clearly understood and accepted by all the parties.

Now what we do in Sask Water to try and help the smaller communities, in reference to your question, I would characterize the answer in this fashion: that we've always maintained that about 65 to 70 per cent, give or take a few points, of the population in Saskatchewan is adequately served with fresh water . . . or with safe water. And certainly we got certified operators, and the list kind of goes on as to what a good support system that this 65 to 70 per cent of the population have.

The last 15 per cent . . . or the 15 per cent are mostly farmers and farm families that have their own source of water — whether it's a well system or some sort. They of course also have a support system in place.

It's the last 15 to 20 per cent of the people of Saskatchewan where we have to concentrate some of our work towards, and that last 15 to 20 per cent that we speak about are the smaller villages and the smaller hamlets. So when we get calls from them, we certainly correspond and we communicate with them. And the initial assessment of some of their systems, that of course Sask Water does at no cost.

But what we want to be very, very careful of here is that while the support system is very important towards the smaller communities, what we want to do is to make sure that they know that the service is available from the private sector or from Sask Water. And regardless of who provides that service, when it starts being heavy technical advice, it starts being engineering drawings and so on and so forth, that these services are going to cost money.

And what we're trying to sit down with them is to find the least affordable . . . I meant, the best affordable option for their citizens. And it's the numerous communities that range from 45 people to 100 people, and often we will find that many of these smaller communities, once you go in there and do the initial assessment that there is quite a bit of work that has to be done.

So I would say that the first point is that as soon as you call Sask Water, the meter doesn't start to, you know, start to build up. The costs don't start to be billed. The initial assessment is free, in the sense that we go out there and see what the challenges are, and then we begin to establish a relationship with that community. And then we can sit down and determine the best potable solution with fair water prices for the citizens of that particular community to be able to put that in place as quickly as we can. And there are a variety of options.

Mr. Brkich: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Chairman, yes, that's kind of the answer I was looking for. And that's . . . the point I was trying to get across is, yes, the towns or villages would like, like you say, the initial consultation to be free of charge. You know, once the work actually starts on the project,

they know that, yes, they're going to have to buy the pumps and maybe do the . . . and once you get down to the drafting of the engineering drafts, the plans, yes, they will have to pay for them.

What they were looking for was for you to come out and tell them, you know, free of charge, because that can also take some time. What are your different options, what would a pipeline roughly cost, the proximity of your closest pipeline, or how deep a well you might need, how much water would you need to supply 100 residents — things like that, what they're looking for.

So I hope that you keep that free of charge because the towns out there — and villages and bigger towns, bigger centres; it just isn't small ones that when we're talking towns, you know, anywhere from 2,000 to 10,000. I mean they're all . . . their budgets are very tight and . . . but yet water with all of them is a big priority. So I thank you for that comment and I hope that you keep it that way.

Talking about splitting up when you talk about charging a fee then . . . and also in the report here out of Moose Jaw saying that . . . Will you be doing . . . setting up a lot of the work yourselves, like being able to charge the work itself to put in a system in a town if they want one?

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you very much for that question. What I want to point out as well, Mr. Chair, is that we are currently working with a lot of small communities and I think that number's at 50.

We are in partnership and constant consultation and communication and collaboration with the consulting engineers. And of course the options that many of these small communities have are clearly anybody's options — whether they go to Sask Water, whether they go to the private sector.

What Sask Water does not do, it does not compete with the private sector. On many occasions we'll engage the private sector. And as I mentioned before, we have a very close relationship with them. We've often maintained that there's a whole bunch of work that needs to be done. So there's much work that could certainly be shared.

And like anything else, what we want to do is to establish a relationship with these small communities. Because traditionally they have been responsible for the delivery of safe water to their citizens, we want to sit with them and see what options are available with them. And they have a choice — they can certainly go to Sask Water or the private sector.

I think the most important thing is that, you also point out, is that some of these water systems need to be sustainable systems; that as much as we want to support the smaller communities, we also want to encourage them to have sustainable, self-sufficient water plants that meet all the guidelines and have the standard operators. And I can tell you that that's the objective of many communities, is to operate their systems safely and independent of the government, and so on and so forth.

So we're down the same path in terms of our thinking. And we

just want to encourage people to take a very active role when it comes to assessment and to improving on their water system but to also make sure that these systems are self-sufficient and they serve the people of their community for many years to come.

Mr. Brkich: — With the new utility being split off, you're also going to give irrigation to Sask Ag and Food. How is that progressing? What exactly, I guess, falls under your jurisdiction when it comes to irrigation? And what is going to be their new role with the irrigation end of it? And what are the changes going to be?

Basically with the way I understand — just out of this report here — I can read you the news report that was done in Outlook here. Basically:

These changes will involve: the current water irrigation department falling under Sask. Agriculture & Food; SaskWater's utility operations department becoming a separate corporation; and the new treasury board being named the Sask. Watershed Authority, said a communications spokesperson for SaskWater.

Can you give me some information on the irrigation, how that's going to be turned over to Sask Ag and Food, and is that going to affect irrigators in my constituency and the irrigators, I guess, throughout the province, is my concern?

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Just to point out that we don't anticipate any challenges for those folks that are currently involved with the irrigating aspects of Sask Water.

I would point out that there is . . . the operation of the actual works itself, the delivery and the pumping, will certainly be operated by Sask Water. The irrigation services, the agronomics and the marketing and so on and so forth, that will come under the Sask Ag and Food. And Sask Ag and Food certainly can answer those questions if you have any specifics.

But clearly in the operation of the works, the delivery and the pumping, that will still be retained under Sask Water. And again we don't anticipate that there'd be any disruption in the current system that's in place now, just a better system to serve Saskatchewan people.

(15:45)

Mr. Brkich: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Chairman, I understand that basically you still will meter the water out, or Sask Ag and Food will have to apply to you for a number of feet of water that is to be irrigated on a certain area. You can correct me if I'm wrong on that.

With the Lake Diefenbaker area . . . I've been there just about a week ago and the lake levels are probably the lowest since it was built. What's happening there with irrigation? Is there going to be any change in the irrigators? Will they be cut back? Do you have any information on that right now that you can share with me and the irrigators in the area?

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Okay what's going to happen — and again the details are certainly being worked on — is the general

direction we're heading on this is that the approvals for water use will be sent to the Watershed Authority. And of course, Sask Water will actually be the delivery of that once the approval is gained.

In reference to your question about Diefenbaker, I would point out that the effect on the irrigators should not be significant in the sense that the levels of Lake Diefenbaker are higher this year than they are in 2001. And Sask Water is fairly confident that they have enough water to meet their needs.

There may be some slight increase in cost because you have to increase the lift from, you know, from the water source, so there may be some cost increase there. So what we're trying to do again is to try and maintain those costs and keep them as low as possible.

But clearly the rules and the regulations and the responsibility and the processes will all be well defined to as many people as possible to make sure they understand them.

Mr. Brkich: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Chairman, yes, I'm sure the irrigators will be happy to hear that. I know the only concern with some of them was basically some of them can't get their pumps down into the lake when it's at that lower level — just differently the way they had it set up.

I know we'd worked on a case I think last year where a guy wanted to dig a little trench to his pump because his rails basically didn't go out far enough any more. And I hope that you will accommodate any way you can the local irrigators in the area with being able to do that.

One other question just dealing on Lake Diefenbaker: how is the snowpack doing and estimated water that's going to be coming in later in June? Can you give me an update on that.

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I would point out that in this year we anticipate that the water levels will be better than last year. Last year, as you may know, the water levels in Lake Diefenbaker were 4 metres below normal and this year they'll be about two and a half metres below normal. So there is . . . we anticipate an increase in the lake level.

And I'd also point out that the Alberta government does monitor the snowfall and the snowpack, and we have been getting information that there's been an increase in the snowpack so that's always good, positive news. It's never a sound science, of course, but we anticipate that the water levels will be better this year than last year.

Mr. Brkich: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. I know my irrigators, if they believe to be true . . . I know that I've talked to a couple of them there and they swear that this is the lowest that lake has ever been and those are the people that have lived longest. So I've had a few phone calls and they're worried about it. So I will pass *Hansard* onto them and we'll see, I guess, when it comes times to irrigate if there's any problems.

With that I'd like to get back to Justice Laing's report. I picked out a few items in there; it's quite a book to read through. So I'm hoping you can give me some more information on it.

In one paragraph there, in Justice Laing, he mentions a cabinet decision item, in which Sask Water is mentioned numerous times. He says in his findings, and I think it's no. 48 and 49:

That the responsibility for implementing the . . . (cabinet decision item) rests with three or more entities, with separate budgets, and separate priorities, is considered . . . (and it) is considered a serious weakness in the implementation strategy.

Before I get to the second half of the findings, I would like to ask the minister for his thoughts on that finding. Does he agree with that?

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. I think that the important progress that has been made to date, to talk about our direction we're going as a government, is to certainly look at the three-pronged approach that we often speak about.

And in terms of the increased rules and the regulations and the enforcement and all those particular aspects that we need to put a lot of emphasis on, the Minister of the Environment would certainly be in a position to respond more clearly and more eloquently on what is being done in that regard.

And secondly, as well, with the Watershed Authority, when we talk about the protection of water at source, these are things that of course the Minister of the Environment will also speak about in terms of what their role is. And he'll get into greater detail. And I think the people of Saskatchewan will be really impressed with the progress on not only the rules and regulations, but also the fact of the matter is the protection of the water at source.

So this is from source to tap. It is a comprehensive strategy. And of course the final step of this whole effort is to look at the assistance to the community for delivering safe water to the many residents of Saskatchewan.

And I go back to my earlier comment about the breakdown of the provincial population as a whole where, again, we say 70 to 75 per cent of the population in our opinion is adequately served with a certified operator and generally safe water. And 15 per cent, of course, have their own source of, you know, of well water, and so on and so forth. These are the families in the farm and farmers in general. It's the last 15 to 20 per cent that we want to concentrate our efforts on.

And again, the minister of Government Services will certainly speak about that during his estimates of some of the great progress being made to the CSIP (Canada-Saskatchewan Infrastructure Program) program. The infrastructure program is, of course, a five-year program and he'll give you all the details of some of the communities that have applied and some of the great work that has been done.

And there's a lot of success to be told in some of the stories. And we've always maintained that there's been good progress made and greater progress is going to be made. And we always have to maintain diligence on this particular file because diligence is our greatest asset when it comes to the provision of safe water.

So I think the progress made to date is certainly going to prove to the Saskatchewan people that it is a good plan. There is a source to tap processes in place. There's some good rules and regulations. There's some good support. Responsibility is certainly there on the towns and villages as well, certification of operators. It is a very comprehensive strategy.

So I think clearly that there are many lessons learned and many more to learn. But we would ask the people to be diligent and to be patient and to certainly do their part because absolutely everybody has a role, a responsibility. And we want to engage as many partners as we can on this and to be upfront and honest as well, to tell people if there is a challenge, they will hear about it.

And certainly that strategy has worked well. And many people and many leaders at SUMA and SARM agree that communication, progress, and certainly understanding what . . . who does what is so very important for us to build on to ensure safe quality water for the people of Saskatchewan on a long-term basis.

Mr. Brkich: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Chairman, also just want to make one more comment on Justice Laing's report here. In finding no. 49, he states that:

CDI does not identify what its monitoring and compliance program will consist of to conduct inspections on (the) municipal/public water facilities. To the extent (of) the monitoring and compliance program is intended to "ensure a comprehensive water quality program at all facilities," the financial resources committed to the program to date will not accomplish this.

My question I guess to the minister is: do you concur with the finding by Justice Laing?

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you very much for the question, Mr. Chairman. What I would point out, that there are going to be regulations that are going to be enhanced. The Minister of the Environment, as I mentioned before, has all the details, the specifics, and I can tell you that there is a fairly comprehensive package there.

Without question the rules and regulations are a very important tool. And as I mentioned before, the Minister of the Environment during her estimates will explain in great detail and with great eloquence some of the questions that you may have around some of the rules and regulations that need to be tightened up. Thank you.

Mr. Hart: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Minister, I'm looking at the Estimates book and it indicates under subvote (SW02), that description there, part of Sask Water Corporation's responsibilities are to provide technical assistance to rural residents to improve water supply and treatment methods and support erosion controls and so on.

Now I guess my question is . . . To you, Mr. Minister, the first question is: what role and what responsibilities does Sask Water have to small rural communities? There's a number of rural communities who are experiencing some real serious challenges with water; some of them have . . . just don't have any water.

And I have such a community in my constituency.

But I wonder if you could just very briefly outline what role Sask Water plays in these situations and what type of services, and if there is any financial assistance that Sask Water has for these communities.

(16:00)

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I think the most important thing is to tell the small communities in your constituencies to contact Sask Water. What we do is we constantly want to be in contact and in constant communication with many of the 15 to 20 per cent that I often make reference to.

And what Sask Water will do is that the moment you call Sask Water, you know, the meter doesn't start ticking away. We have a lot of consultation processes. In fact, we mentioned earlier, we've met with and are working with 50 communities now. And we do an initial assessment of some of their plants — kind of a walk-through evaluation if you will, of some of their operations, no matter what size that these communities are.

And following that, once the work becomes more comprehensive — and I'm talking about the drawings and engineering and so on and so forth — then obviously that goes to the next level where we're establishing a relationship, a business relationship, and of course, those tend to cost money.

So I would point out that not only would we do a walk-through, but analysis of options. We will determine some of the best and lowest cost solutions.

And that is the crux of some of the challenges that we'll face in Sask Water, and as a province as a whole, is that when you mention many communities and villages, some of them have very small systems, some of them have outdated systems, some of them don't even have any water. The drought system certainly has had an adverse effect on some of our progress that we have been making in the province. I spoke about it earlier.

So there's no question that there are a wide range of issues. And what we don't want to do, is we don't want to stick our head in the sand and pretend this problem doesn't exist. We want to take this problem head on; we want to work with the small communities.

And what the small communities have to know as well, is that we'll certainly be there for the initial assessment, but at the end of the day if there's a relationship, a business relationship established, then we are in essence acting as a service provider. And of course that's when, you know, when fees are certainly talked about.

As I mentioned earlier to your associate, that the option that some of the communities have to go . . . or could go through is the private sector or through Sask Water.

But if I had a message to the small communities, I would say get your water tested often. I would ask the people to make sure their water is tested. I'd ask the small communities to look at advice, whether it's from the private sector or from Sask Water.

I would ask them to be diligent in some of the things you do with the testing and with certification of their operators. I would ask them to be prepared to look at financing through the municipal services board. I'd look at . . . I'd ask them to be patient to the infrastructure program.

I'd ask them to play a very large role because at the end of the day, these systems are owned and operated by these communities. And what we want to do is to make sure they're operated legally and they operate with as much support as possible, not to the point that they're dependent on government grants on a constant basis, but to a point where they are able to continue to afford their system and to upgrade it to make sure that safe water is being delivered at a fair price to the residents of, you know, their community.

And this would be the specific challenge and certainly Sask Water could look at some of these options and explain some of these options to them.

Mr. Hart: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Minister, I have a small community in my constituency; it's the village of Elfros. You may have heard of this. I've talked to you briefly about it.

This is a community of approximately 160 residents. They have some real serious water challenges in their community. And I'll briefly outline the experience that they have had in the last, oh, eight, nine months.

Prior to August of last year they depended on surface water for their supply of water to their village. They had a pipeline from a dam into their water treatment centre in their village and it served the community fairly well over quite a number of years. But due to last year's drought the residents of the village could see that that water supply wasn't going to last — in fact it was going dry.

So they took some action. They hired a well driller, put a new well in, in the area not too far from the dam, and they were assured that this well would have ample supply of water for a long time. And in fact it turned out to be pretty good quality water.

I can remember seeing the headlines in the local paper, Elfros has all kinds of water or something to that effect.

Well unfortunately, Mr. Minister, in late February or early March that well went dry. Obviously it probably was just a pocket of water; it wasn't a dependable aquifer or whatever. I don't know if they really know why it went dry, but it went dry and there was no water, so they were faced with the problem of supplying water to their residents.

And so they hired a local contractor to haul water and that was costing them about \$1,000 a day to haul water. And this wasn't potable water. They issued . . . the town council issued a boil-water advisory to all their citizens immediately.

Then they were in a desperate situation. I believe they did talk to Sask Water and they said that they did get some advice. I don't know the extent of it. It sounded as if it was some very preliminary advice and so on. But they decided they'd search for water in that area because the pipeline was there.

They drilled a well but there was . . . or drilled a test hole but there was no water. They went down 400 feet, hit bedrock. So they moved the drilling rig into their . . . into, near to town. And they drilled a number of test holes — some had some water, they did a bit of a pump test, but not dependable. And I believe they drilled approximately in total about five or six test holes until they finally found what they thought was a good supply of water. They pump tested it for a period of time. It seemed to produce about 50 gallons per minute, I'm told.

So what they did is to . . . And in the meantime they're hauling this water at \$1,000 a day, which for a community of 160 people, you can imagine if you're hauling for a few weeks that's going to, you know, could very quickly break that community. So they were quite happy that they'd hit this supply of water.

So what they did is they . . . when they did the test hole, they cased it, they pump tested it, and then they ran an overground line to their water treatment plant and continued to advise their residents that they had to boil their water because they hadn't had the tests back.

Well I got a phone call from the mayor yesterday, Mr. Minister, and that well has gone dry. So they're back, I believe today, hauling water again. And in the meantime, the village has sent your colleagues, the Minister of Government Relations, a letter outlining their expenditures. And I'll just briefly summarize them for you, Mr. Minister:

The expenditures — and this letter was dated April 12 and I am certain that they have since then have spent more money on securing a supply of water for their community — but the expenditures to April 12 that they incurred in this latest go-round of well drilling and water hauling total about almost \$60,000, just . . . 59,800-and-some dollars.

The expenditures or the amount of money that this small village spent on drilling the well and all the associated costs last summer, they spent a little over \$30,000. They received a \$1,400 grant from PFRA (Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Administration). I believe the RM (rural municipality) came on board and somehow they were able to work it so that they received a small grant. So they had a net cost of over 29,000.

So to sum it all up, this community of 163 people — I believe, is the official population of this community — they spent, in the last eight or nine months \$80,000 and they're not done and they don't have a supply of water. And what they are asking, Mr. Minister, is: what more can they do? Has Sask Water got some capabilities first of all, I guess, to find a reliable supply and help them with that, and is there any assistance available through Sask Water to these people? What can you do for the people of Elfros, Mr. Minister?

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you very much for the question. And exactly what I would say is that, you know to the community, that we certainly understand their frustration. As you mention time and time again, there's a number of communities that have trouble with safe water and some communities that don't have any water. And that certainly, you know, is a good analysis of some of the challenges that we face.

I would point out that Sask Water will contact them again. And we'll re-establish a working relationship in the sense that the meter doesn't start to tick from day one and we'll start looking at options for the community. And certainly the provincial government is very concerned with their challenges and that we will stand beside them and look at various options.

I will point out that in some of the other sectors — and we're not suggesting this in any way — some areas have looked at regional pipelines, waterlines, and other people have looked at various other kinds of potential sources of water. And these options, Sask Water has much information as to what other communities are doing.

So if I had a message to Elfros, I would say we would make contact with Elfros. We would share with them some of the examples. For example, Hague, as you may or may not know, is currently looking and working with Sask Water to look at tapping into the Saskatoon water system. So these are options. It may not be an option for Elfros. But the first thing to do is to reconnect and to assure the people of Elfros that their concerns are certainly understood by the province and we'll work with them very closely.

And the Municipal Affairs minister, Government Services minister will certainly talk in greater detail about some of the funding that you talked about when you talk about infrastructure. I don't have those details but he will.

The Deputy Chair: — Why is the member on her feet?

Ms. Junor: — With leave to introduce guests.

Leave granted.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Ms. Junor: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair. I'd like to recognize in the west gallery 35 students from Hugh Cairns grade 4 class. And with them is teachers Mr. Arthurs, Mrs. Miller Racicot, Mr. Slater, Mr. Walters, Mr. Yaworski, Ms. Miller, Ms. Berquist, Mr. Johnson, Mr. Young, and Mr. Udchic are also along as chaperones.

I'd like to welcome them to the Assembly today and I look forward to meeting with them later for a picture and a chat.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

COMMITTEE OF FINANCE

General Revenue Fund Saskatchewan Water Corporation Vote 50

Subvote (SW01)

Mr. Hart: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Minister, I guess what I would ask on behalf of the residents of Elfros is, does Sask Water have technical expertise within the corporation that could assist this community in suggesting sites that may have a supply of water for them as far as drilling of future wells and that sort of thing? What technical expertise does the corporation have in

that whole area, Mr. Minister?

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — The answer would be yes, we do have engineers that are very adept at finding different water sources. And as well, we can also draw on the private sector that may be of valuable assistance in this regard.

So I would point out that absolutely Sask Water does have some staff members and resources to assist in this effort. And all I would ask is that they contact us or we'll contact them and we'll establish this communication effort. And to also point out that we would work with them to find the most affordable and reliable source of water. So we'll go down that path together.

Mr. Hart: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. You indicated in some of your answers to my questions that initially when you do the assessment and initially talk to a community that there's no charge for that.

I suppose what the people of Elfros and I would like to know is, when does the meter start? When do you turn the meter on? When do you start charging for these services, and what type of services are, I guess, chargeable services and what type of information is provided to a community without . . . at no charge?

Because as you can realize, Mr. Minister, this small community has spent a tremendous amount of money on water and they're going to have to spend a whole lot more. And I suppose they . . . and what they are asking is, they're asking for any help that they possibly can get from whatever department of government or from where . . . from whoever. Because they are really up against it, Mr. Minister.

(16:15)

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you very much for the question. And I will point out to the village of Elfros that Sask Water will be very clear as to when the billing will begin. And as I mentioned, whatever we're able to offer in assistance without billing, we certainly will. But the relationship will be established between Sask Water and Elfros and they will have a clear understanding as to when the billing procedures begin.

And I would point out — I'm not sure this is my last question — but I will thank the opposition members for their questions and also thank the officials for their information and their presence here and again encourage you all to continue forward in the public awareness that is necessary on this file. Thank you.

Mr. Brkich: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Yes, you are right; that is the last question for today. I want to thank you and the officials. You've been very open and I look forward to having some more debate about some more budget items here I have. So till next time, see you then and thank you.

Ms. Atkinson: — I move that the committee rise and report progress and ask for leave to sit again.

An Hon. Member: — Just report progress.

Ms. Atkinson: — Report progress.

**General Revenue Fund
Government Relations and Aboriginal Affairs
Vote 30**

Subvote (GR01)

The Chair: — I recognize the Minister of Government Relations and ask him to introduce his officials.

Hon. Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and to you, and to my colleagues here in the legislature, I'm pleased to introduce Mr. Brent Cotter, deputy minister of Government Relations and Aboriginal Affairs; Larry Steeves, on my immediate left, who is the associate deputy minister of municipal relations; John Edwards, who is the executive director of policy development; Russ Krywulak, at my far left, who is at grants administration and provincial municipal relations; Doug Morcom, behind me, who is grants administration; and Marj Abel, who is the director of finance and administration.

Mr. Hart: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. I imagine that the minister can anticipate some of the questions I may have for him this afternoon. He was here earlier when we were doing estimates with the Sask Water Corporation, and I think, Mr. Minister, I will continue on that line of questioning with the village of Elfros.

Mr. Minister, I have a number of other questions dealing with other areas, but seeing that this is current, we may as well deal with this area first.

But first of all, Mr. Minister, I would like to welcome your officials here, and I'm sure they will be able to provide you with the assistance you require to answer some of these questions.

Mr. Minister, the . . . you are, I'm sure, familiar with the situation in Elfros. I explained it earlier, but I could just briefly summarize it for your officials. This is a community who could see that they were running out . . . going to run out of water. They depended for quite a number of years on surface water to supply their village of 160-some people.

So last summer they felt it was necessary, and in fact was very necessary, because the dam was running, quickly running out of water due to last year's drought.

So they hired a well driller and drilled a new well in the general area of the where the dam was located and they thought that they had an excellent supply of water. It was good quality water, and the pump testing and so on that the well driller did indicated that it was a good producing well. And so they did the necessary hookups and those sorts of things to a cost of approximately \$30,000 to drill the well, make the necessary . . . do the necessary work to hook this new well into the water supply.

And the residents were very, very happy. It was a fairly costly venture for the small community but they felt that they had a good, secure supply of water.

Unfortunately, that proved not to be correct. In either late

February or early March, I believe it was early March, the well went dry. And so they were . . . the town council, village council was faced with this huge problem of supplying water to the residents so they contracted . . . contacted a local contractor and that contractor started hauling water, I'm told, 18 to 24 hours a day. They were making a 40-mile round trip to haul this water. The water was . . . they didn't have time to test it; they were getting it from a well. But they didn't know whether it was safe for drinking so they immediately issued a boil-water advisory to the residents.

And this was costing them approximately \$1,000 a day is what it averaged out to. And they . . . then they had no other choice; they got another driller in and started drilling holes in the ground to find a supply of water. And they drilled about six or seven test holes, and some they cased and pump tested them because there was an indication, the E-lock showed there was water there, but not a satisfactory supply.

So finally by, I believe it was the sixth hole, they hit what they thought was a reliable supply of water. The well was developed, pump tested. I believe it pumped out at least 50 gallons a minute — and the village requirements are about 30 gallons a minute — so it was certainly ample, more than an ample for their village.

And they proceeded to hook this into their water treatment plant by an above-ground pipeline and their costs for all of this . . . these expenditures in the month of March and April came to about \$60,000. Well they've incurred more costs since.

And, Mr. Minister, yesterday I received a call from the mayor of Elfros saying that their new well is dry. And they are really up against it. They've spent at least \$80,000. It'll be more because they . . . I believe they are starting to haul water again today. They don't know where to look for water.

The minister responsible for Sask Water said that the . . . that his Sask Water could supply him with some technical advice as far as locating a possible supply of . . . a future supply of water. But in the meantime they're going to have to incur this cost of \$1,000 a day to supply water to their residents.

And, Mr. Minister, they're really up against it. They don't know where to turn. The mayor said, is there someone out there that can help us because this is going to break this community. And they have a little bit of a reserve, money in reserve, but I don't know if it's enough to cover the existing bills.

They did send you a letter, Mr. Minister, dated April 12 in which they outlined their expenditures and asked for some help. And I might just read the closing paragraph of that letter. It comes from their administrator:

The main concern of the Village is the health and safety of the residents with the wish to promote a continued good life style for some of the people in this wonderful country.

And that's, and that's their concern. Mr. Minister, what answers have you got for the people of Elfros?

Hon. Mr. Osika: — Mr. Chairman, I sincerely thank the member for that question. And he echoes a concern that . . . a

genuine concern that he shares on behalf of his constituents, as do many members on both sides of the House that . . . whose communities, small communities, face similar situations unfortunately for a variety of reasons.

And, Mr. Chairman, I would . . . I want to genuinely respond to those concerns on behalf of Elfros and Arran and a number of communities who find themselves in a situation where they require financial assistance; they require some type of support.

Before I do that, I hope the hon. member will oblige me by just giving a brief overview as a result of some of our . . . the changes within government. I just want to make a statement in advance of responding to some of the specific concerns just to tell you that, as the province has embarked on a new direction, there have been numerous changes. And while the department structures have changed I just want to . . . want it on record here today, Mr. Chairman, that the commitment to the municipal sector continues to remain strong.

The reorganization within Government Relations will make government work better, be more focused and efficient on those issues that are affecting our municipal governments. We've taken common programs and services, Mr. Chairman, and combined them into new organizations that we feel have . . . will have a natural fit and can easily be accessible by all people that have issues specifically of concern to those areas.

As one department responsible for government relations and Aboriginal affairs, we have an opportunity to focus more clearly on the relationship between our Aboriginal, municipal, provincial, and federal governments, and those relationships. This is an opportunity to bring a broad policy perspective to issues such as legislation, funding, and, very importantly, infrastructure.

We will be working on building a very strong and positive working relationship among all four government sectors. Our priority will be to consult with the municipal sector about the information and the tools that they require to provide services to their communities. We will be reviewing on an ongoing basis our organization's structure and we will be consulting with SUMA, SARM, and others, to receive feedback on the effectiveness of its service delivery and to explore options for improvement within the context of available resources.

I believe, with co-operation and sound vision, we will be able to continue the work of the municipal sector and provide the tools necessary to meet the needs of all of the residents. All departments, Mr. Chairman, will continue to work together and collaborate on matters of shared interest like environmental and municipal issues, public safety, and other areas.

Now, Mr. Chairman, in response to the member's concern with respect to the community of Elfros, I know this is not going to be the answer that the member wants to hear and not the answer that communities like to hear as well. However I must point out, and in our discussions with a number of communities on similar issues, that it's the municipalities that are in fact responsible for ensuring that they have safe drinking water. The financial support for addressing the safe drinking water needs of our citizens needs to come from a variety of sources, and this is where we need to rely on the co-operative efforts of all our

communities working in partnership, working in conjunction with one another, working together with our neighbours.

(16:30)

There needs to be, and this has come to the forefront and I believe is recognized more so than ever because of certain events that have occurred, there needs to be fair pricing of water to reflect the costs of providing safe drinking water. That's one of the issues that needs to be addressed. There needs to be support from the federal and provincial governments to help pay for these infrastructure costs that are desperately needed in a lot of communities. There's no disagreement about that. Both the federal and provincial governments have provided support and guidance to local governments through a variety of ways. And I believe . . . Well I know that the Minister of Sask Water was here and discussed some of the various ways in which Sask Water is very diligently attempting to offer advice, support, and assistance to those communities that have come looking for help. But it must be recognized that grants from the federal and provincial governments can be part of the solution. But even those resources are scarce and limited.

In 2001-2002, funding was provided for 42 water supply projects and 16 waste water projects through the Canada-Saskatchewan Infrastructure Program and the Centenary Fund. In response once again to the increased need for community infrastructure funds for water and waste water projects, this year's Canada-Saskatchewan Infrastructure Program has increased the proportion of funds directed to these types of projects and the type of projects that the member has brought to our attention.

In this fiscal year, 2002-2003, funding has already been approved for water supply and waste water projects in 111 communities, including 12 in northern Saskatchewan.

So when combined with the commitment from 2001-2002, the federal, provincial, and municipal contributions will result in more than \$60 million having been invested and spent in 169 communities throughout this great province of ours for water and waste water projects, during the initial two years of this particular program.

So I guess, as I say, that's probably not the answer, Mr. Chair, that the member was looking for. He was asking where they might turn for more money. Well there is an opportunity for that community, as with others, to go to the municipal financing board, but . . . and as well to apply for next year's Canada-Saskatchewan Infrastructure Program for this type of a project.

As I mentioned, federal/provincial funds are limited and are not the total answer for all the problems that are faced with the numerous communities throughout the province. The Municipal Financing Corporation is authorized to finance up to 50 per cent of the total authorized borrowing of a capital project, except for sewer and water projects which can be authorized for 100 per cent borrowing. With that approach, plus the application for help next year under the Canada-Saskatchewan Infrastructure Program, that is one of the directions that those communities that need immediate help can follow.

Now there have been recent reports as you've seen, Mr. Chair, and as the members opposite have seen, where small communities faced with a shortage of water have gone to larger neighbouring communities. And I believe that that again is probably a direction that more communities will have to start looking at with respect to partnering with larger communities; working with Sask Water perhaps on some ideas and suggestions with respect to either piping in water or in fact hauling water — which is the case that a couple of communities have had to resort to.

Those are the types of options that at this point in time the communities that find themselves in a situation have. One thing they can rely on, they can rely on people to listen to the types of concerns that they have and respond — whether it's through Sask Water or communicating their concerns to this department, to SERM or Sask Water — for some type of assistance or at least a sounding board with some advice and/or suggestions as to how a community might proceed.

Mr. Hart: — Mr. Chair, the minister certainly covered a fair bit of ground there and I picked up a couple of statements that I will respond to in a moment. Well in fact I'll respond to one of them right now. He indicated that there's the infrastructure program that communities can apply to. And in fact, the village of Elfros did apply. I have a copy of the letter dated April 9, 2001 — which is your basic we're sorry, there's no money for you letter, that the community received.

They applied specifically for water development and they were turned down. So I mean if the minister is saying go to the infrastructure program, well they did that, as many communities have. Some have got some money, a good number of other communities have got the standard no money letter, as Elfros did.

The minister also took a moment to describe the reorganization of government and said that all of this reorganization was done so that government will work more efficiently, and that they would be able to respond to concerns of the citizens of this province in a more efficient manner. Well, Mr. Minister, I'm not so sure that your new plan is working that well.

Your office received a letter from the village of Elfros dated April 12. I'm just going to quote a couple of paragraphs from that, in which they outline their situation and they provided you with a summary of expenditures that they've incurred since last summer. And the two paragraphs that I will quote is:

Is there any possible way that government can help us? We have just implemented a boil-water advisory . . .

And I said this, as I mentioned, this is dated April 12. Things have changed since that time:

We have just implemented a boil-water advisory and are anxiously awaiting the results of the last well that did turn up some water. We have no idea as yet as to the (quantity and) quality and quantity.

And I might just add, Mr. Minister, that since that time, that well too has gone dry:

We are in a desperate situation. We have transferred our little bit of term money into the chequing account to pay for what has happened. At the moment, the well driller and the person hauling the water for the village are willing to wait to get at least partial payments.

So you can see by this letter, Mr. Minister, that this village . . . these people are in a desperate situation. And as I said, they sent this letter off, it's dated April 12.

Earlier this . . . late last week, my office received a call from the village administrator and they were . . . they had said that they still hadn't any reply from your office and they asked if we could see when they could expect a reply.

When we made the inquiry, Mr. Minister, we were told that Elfros couldn't . . . shouldn't expect any reply from your office at all until April 29. Well, Mr. Minister, in a situation like this where there's 160-some people don't know whether they're going to have any water the next day, I think that that is deplorable. I don't think that's, that's more efficient. I don't think that this new system is working, Mr. Minister.

And I heard earlier, while you were making your reply, the Minister of Industry and Resources chirping from his seat, saying that, that the municipal finance . . . they can borrow all the money and that sort of thing. Well I think the people of Elfros would say we're doing our part. They don't expect the provincial government or any level of government to pay for 100 per cent of the cost.

But what they are . . . there are programs out there, they can't access them. Everywhere they turn, they run into a stone . . . to a brick wall.

And furthermore, if that Minister of Industry and Resources had done his job in the last couple of years to get this economy of this province percolating and growing, there would be more resources available to everyone to solve these problems, Mr. Minister.

As a result, your government is managing a shrinking economy and people of Elfros and people in other situations are finding that there isn't anybody out there that will lend a helping hand. And I don't think that's acceptable, Mr. Minister.

So I would ask once again that you re-examine your situation and at least reply to their concerns and their letters in a timely fashion, Mr. Minister. Will you do that?

Hon. Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. In response to the question, I . . . There's a letter dated April 12. I'm not sure why anybody would, you know, pre-empt the response by suggesting why there was a specific date that they would have to wait before they got a reply. I'm sorry; I'm confused about that. I'd like to know why they were told, don't expect anything till April 29.

Which is not inordinately lengthy, given . . . And I truly appreciate and respect on behalf of the community of Elfros, Mr. Chairman, what the member's bringing forward. And he's echoing, Mr. Chairman, similar concerns that many, many other communities have throughout the province.

In that specific situation, with Elfros, they did in fact apply in the last fiscal year for the program but were denied because there were other communities that were rated as a higher priority for projects dealing with water and waste water projects. So it's not a matter of an insensitive department or government that says, well tough beans, you're out of luck.

I just want to clarify that in 2002-2003 for example, Mr. Chairman, there were 445 applications received for this Canada-Saskatchewan Infrastructure Program.

Now that program, and I believe the member's aware that it's managed by a project review committee or management committee that is . . . that consists of people from the province, two from the province, two from the federal government, two people from SARM and from SUMA (Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association). This is a committee that reviews and takes into serious account the situations that communities submit requesting assistance under this particular program.

So you can imagine, when there's only so big a pie and so many people want to share it, even if you cut it into the smallest slivers, you know eventually the pie is going to dissipate, disappear and there won't be any, unfortunately, until the following year for those that did not have the urgency during their initial application, and later on did not apply for 2002-2003 and then ran into a problem when the pie has already been divided up for all those other communities that had critical priorities to address some of their projects.

The Project Review Committee takes a look at all these 445 applications and scrutinizes them closely, determining through criteria that they have set out for themselves — whatever those two provincial people, federal people, SARM and SUMA decide on — the criticality levels, if you wish, and then they determine here are the numbers that we can . . . Based on the dollar amounts being requested, we have to cut the number off at a certain place. But we'll deal with those that are most critical, that we find most critical during the course of our review. So those are the ones that are recommended ultimately by the project review committee.

And once those are all recommended and the money's been allotted, then people like Elfros, unfortunately, those communities that after the fact find they have an immediate problem, they have to go to other initiatives. That's the reality.

And I might point out that . . . at the outset, as I said and it may sound harsh, that municipalities are responsible to ensure good quality, safe drinking water. And I commend . . . I've said it before in this House and publicly, I sincerely commend the leaders of the communities that take those responsibilities and they take them seriously, members on council. It's not an easy task for those people in public office representing their citizens and their communities and meeting their responsibilities. I commend those that . . .

And there are communities that — even prior to this type of a Canada-Saskatchewan Infrastructure Program coming into place, coming into being — took the initiative because they were faced with a situation that was critical to them, that they felt they needed to proceed with fixing, repairing, replacing their water infrastructure.

However they did it is as a result of their own initiative. Whether they were fortunate enough to have reserves that they could dip into or whether they had to go to the Municipal Financing Corporation to assist them with a long-term loan at very reasonable interest rates — same as the borrowing rates for the province — and proceeded with upgrading or building, in some cases, state-of-the-art water treatment systems and infrastructure within their communities, now coming to me and saying, where's some help for us? We fixed our situation and you're telling us that there's no help for us, but there is for people that are now in the same situation we were.

(16:45)

It's not easy to be able to say well, I'm sorry, the program wasn't in place at that time, and it's not retroactive.

So, Mr. Chair, I guess what I'm saying, with all due respect to the member opposite and to the communities that are faced with these situations, the alternatives that may be available, and if there are alternatives that the Department of Government Relations or Sask Water or Environment I'm sure can offer or suggest, there are people there that certainly will. It's not that folks are insensitive to the problems that exist out there.

But it's within the limits of the resources that are available and the program criteria that is not totally set . . . that criteria is not totally set by the province or by SARM or by SUMA. The federal government has some very serious, strict criteria that they have asked us to follow as well.

However, having said that again, I need to say thanks to the federal government for allowing us to go to 74 per cent of the allotment of the funding for green water and waste water projects. Prior to this year it was 50 per cent and the rest for other projects and highways.

So I know that's not much consolation. I wish I could say yes, my letter . . . wait until the 29th, it'll be payday and we'll be able to, you know, send out some money. But I'm afraid that's not available.

But I would just encourage the community to apply next year. Consider some of the other alternatives, initiatives and . . . but apply for that program for their project for next year.

Mr. Hart: — Mr. Chair, the minister, in his reply, outlined the situation that his government finds themselves in and certainly is sympathetic to the plight that the village of Elfros and other communities find themselves in and . . . but he also says, well, there's just no more money — the pie isn't big enough.

And he also stated that it's the village council, the municipal government that's in place in these communities, it's . . . they're responsible to provide good, clean drinking water to their residents. And, in fact, their government is also saying that if those council members don't do that, that we're going to put you in jail. And they're implementing these type of . . . this type of legislation later on in the session, I believe, Mr. Chair.

Well it's fine to just say, well the feds aren't giving us enough money and our pie isn't big enough and that's all the money there is, apply again next year. There's been a number of

communities that have applied several years in succession and have been turned down.

And I wonder if it ever dawns on that side of the House that maybe the solution to some of our problems is that we need a bigger pie. We need to grow this economy. We need to have more taxpayers so that we have more tax dollars so that we can fix some of the problems out there.

And the unfortunate thing from this particular minister, Mr. Chair, is that that minister had an opportunity to force that government over there to implement the type of policies that would grow this province.

But the minister and his colleague, they opted for the easy way out and now we find ourselves in this situation and the minister is . . . finds himself in the situation where he is apologizing for the shortcomings of his NDP colleagues, Mr. Minister.

But having said that, that still doesn't solve the problems that the people in the small communities find themselves.

And I think, Mr. Minister, I think you should reconsider some of the decisions that your government has made in the past. We need to have a bigger pie. It's not good enough to say to the mayor and the council of Elfros that look, it's your responsibility to make sure your citizens don't get sick from their drinking water; in fact, that there is water when they turn the tap on; and in fact, if you don't do that, we're going to send the long arm of the law after you. That's not an acceptable answer, Mr. Minister.

And I would encourage you when you're sitting around that cabinet table to encourage your cabinet colleagues to get with the program and get this province growing and bring something to the people of this province that will generate the type of tax revenue that will solve these problems, Mr. Minister.

Hon. Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. At the outset of our deliberation of estimates for Government Relations and Aboriginal Affairs, I had anticipated by the questions from the member opposite that he was genuinely concerned about the problems that some of our smaller communities throughout the province face.

Now, with the last question, I gather, it's merely playing politics with serious situations that exist. I have responded to the situation that exists with the efforts that's being made, and if there's no genuine, sincere interest in what we are trying to do . . . I know the communities and the municipalities appreciate it very, very much. They don't call us and criticize us for whether we are trying to do the very best we can or not. They recognize that we're doing the very best we can.

And the commitments that have been made for these kinds of programs, the federal-provincial contributions of \$17 million in projects for last year and \$98 million for the coming year. So I'm not just sure where the member is coming from as far as what programs should then he suggest, Mr. Chair, that this government cut in order to now fulfill what his playing politics should fulfill? I'm just not sure.

I thought this was going to be a genuine concern that we

recognize and appreciate throughout the province with small communities that need help, and we have offered the help the best we can. We're available to help with advice and direction from each of the departments that may be involved in this type of a situation. It affects all our communities throughout the province.

So I will continue to answer the questions that are asked pertinent to the department's commitment to our communities and to our municipalities.

The committee reported progress.

The Assembly adjourned at 16:56.