

EVENING SITTING  
COMMITTEE OF FINANCE

General Revenue Fund  
Environment  
Vote 26

Subvote (ER01)

**Hon. Mr. Belanger:** — Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. To my immediate left is Bob Ruggles, who's the assistant deputy minister for the programs division. To my extreme right is Dave Phillips, the assistant deputy minister for operations division; directly behind Dave Phillips is Rick Bates, the director of communications. Directly behind me is Lynn Tulloch, the executive director of corporate service division; and of course next to Lynn, to her left, is Ron Zukowsky who is the executive director of the policy and assessment divisions.

And other department officials in attendance: in the back is Stuart Kramer, president of the Watershed Authority; Wayne Dybvig, vice president of operations in the Saskatchewan Watershed Authority; Denis Sherratt, director of the fish and wildlife branch; Sam Ferris, associate director of drinking water quality; Janine Orban, senior labour relations consultant in the corporate development unit; Dave Tulloch, senior manager, strategic financial and performance management — say that three times — of the fire management and forest protection branch.

**Mr. Weekes:** — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I'd just like to welcome the minister and his officials here this evening. There's many members of the opposition that have many questions for you this evening and I'd like to start out by letting the member from Saskatchewan Rivers have the floor and ask a few questions.

**Mr. Wiberg:** — Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and welcome this evening, Mr. Minister, and welcome to your officials also again.

Mr. Minister, I want to start out with a small, specific issue that has been raised in my constituency that is of a concern to, you know, a rather small group of people but it's inside the provincial forest, Mr. Minister.

In the Nisbet Forest immediately adjacent to the city of Prince Albert there's some power lines running through there and electrical power lines. And you probably heard, Mr. Minister, about 10 days ago or so that there was a small fire in that area where a tree fell on the power line, and an old dry tree, and started a small fire. There was a very good and immediate response by the Buckland fire department, by the Prince Albert fire department, and certainly by the Environment and Resource Management. And we applaud that effort.

But, Mr. Minister, it raised an issue, I guess, that of a large concern to the people that live adjacent to that forest, and that is the power line and the old-growth forest that is immediately adjacent to it. Mr. Minister, the power line has a 15-foot right-of-way on each side of the power line so it's a maximum

of 30 feet from the centre of the power line to the edge of the forest. And of course as we're all aware, Mr. Minister, in that area of the world trees certainly grow a lot taller than 15 feet.

So, Mr. Minister, I guess there is a concern in the Prince Albert area that because of the proximity of this old-growth forest to the power lines, because of the, you know, as I've already mentioned, the age of these trees, many of them are easily being blown down by windstorms at this time.

Has your department, Mr. Minister, looked at opportunities where some select cutting could take place in the near adjacent, in that area nearly adjacent to the power lines to alleviate the dangers of the dead forest falling on the power lines and creating more hazards with fires close to the city of Prince Albert?

**Hon. Mr. Belanger:** — Well thank you very much for the question. First of all, I want to thank the member for his compliments of the fire program. I think it's very important that we continue striving for the professional firefighters that are out there and the support staff, that we certainly appreciate your effort.

We do take very seriously some of the challenges associated with some of the power lines that run throughout Saskatchewan. We do have a fuel break program in which we of course clear off a bunch of forested areas and thin out the trees throughout Saskatchewan. And in fact during Arbor Day I was out near Prince Albert and we did plant a tree and have a ceremony in one of the fire breaks around the city of Prince Albert.

What we will be doing is we have been in contact with SaskPower. We do have kind of a continual contact and monitoring system with SaskPower throughout the whole North and in particular the Nisbet Forest.

We also do some party fire monitoring. For example, if folks go out and camp for a day or other folks are out there just enjoying the scenery, that we kind of monitor the amount of folk that are out there and potentially those that might have a fire going, that we make sure that we work with them and educate them and monitor them to make sure that these fires are out.

Secondly, throughout a number of RMs (rural municipality), and I'm sure it's in the Nisbet Forest area as well, we have what they call the FireSmart program where we sit down with the cabin owners and homeowners and talk to them about things, for example, of reducing the natural fuels around their yard, being very careful around and using fire, looking at things like installing or purchasing sprinkler kits.

So I think some of the preparedness and the educational effort that is associated with the fuel break program overall worked well in the event that you've made reference to, but certainly we're doing it throughout the whole province and, as always, the programs continue looking at ways of improving and certainly trying to maximize the educational awareness that is necessary to reduce human-caused fires.

**Mr. Krawetz:** — Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Mr. Minister, I have two specific instances that I want to bring to

your attention and I . . . First question that I would ask is whether your officials are familiar with a problem that is occurring in the RM of Sliding Hills with regards to the replacement of a regular bridge that collapsed in the year 2000 and the attempts by the RM to put in place a low-level crossing type bridge that would still allow for transportation to cross but now has come under scrutiny from the Department of Fisheries, the Canadian Coast Guard, and all of the other federal agencies.

Are your officials aware of the concerns that were raised by the RM of Sliding Hills?

**Hon. Mr. Belanger:** — Thank you very much for the question. I will point out that while none of the officials have specifics in terms of correspondence and discussion with Sliding Hills, we are somewhat aware of the issue of them trying to construct a low-level crossing at the bridge site that you indicated has collapsed.

I would point out that one of the things that is important to note is that DFO (Department of Fisheries and Oceans) is the responsible party when it comes to the whole notion of fish habitat. So in that event I would imagine that the RM of Sliding Hills would have these discussions directly with DFO.

We're obviously not in the position to influence DFO. As always, our department has indicated time and time again that the 30-some officers that DFO has shipped to Saskatchewan to be part of the regulatory regime in the province was something that we did not welcome, but they're here and we have to make the best of it. And we would encourage the RM of Sliding Hills to work through DFO to try and resolve this issue.

**Mr. Krawetz:** — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Minister, I'd like to relate to you some of the circumstances around this to indicate to you that I think officials in your department, in SERM, need to coordinate all of the people involved. And the officials at the RM of Sliding Hills have been working very diligently to try to bring about a resolve to this matter.

And I want to indicate to you so that it is on the record that this bridge collapsed in the fall of the year 2000, and it was raised at that time. In fact, I sent a letter to then minister of Highways and Transportation, the member who represents Saskatoon Nutana at that time, and she responded by saying that a concrete low-level crossing is being assessed as an alternate installation at this site. Preliminary design details have been forwarded to the Department of Fisheries and Oceans and to the Canadian Coast Guard for their assessment under the Fisheries Act and the Navigable Waters Protection Act. Okay? So those are factual statements being made that the RM is to consult with those two groups.

Well what has occurred, Mr. Minister, is that the Department of Fisheries was unwilling to move forward on this because they were concerned about the passage of fish. There are other low-level crossings in the Whitesand River. It's not a problem. There's a full understanding of it, and I believe now the latest response to the RM council is that the Fisheries department is saying, okay, we understand; it's not going to be a problem for the fish. Indeed, they can still go through the culverts that will be there for a low-level crossing.

But the situation is now that the Canadian Coast Guard is concerned that this is described as a navigable river and that canoeists must be able to go through the river at all times. Well there are low-level crossings already in the river and they portage over those crossings.

So what has occurred is that the RM council is caught in a position where they can't get approval. They've been trying to get an assessment done. They're looking for assistance from Environment and Resource Management, the provincial body, that would bring Fisheries and the Canadian Coast Guard together at the same table along with the affected farmers because, Mr. Minister, what has occurred is that with the bridge out of commission, a farmer on one side of the river who has a cattle operation, lives on one side of the river and has a cattle operation on the other side, has to travel nearly 20 miles to go around through the nearest crossing to get around to take care of his cattle. It's a huge impediment to a successful operation.

The RM recognizes it and the RM recognizes also that the cost of building a regular bridge is prohibitive. And they're trying to work with Fisheries and they're trying to work with Canadian Coast Guard and they're trying to work with the Environment and Resource Management officials to resolve this, but nobody wants to bring the people to the table.

So I'd ask that your officials look at this as a problem that a municipal council has. They have raised this numerous times, and as I've indicated 2000 . . . the fall of 2000 and there are communications dated 2001, 2002, 2003.

There are problems in resolving this and I would encourage you that, while I know you understand, you've indicated that the people that are here under the auspices of Fisheries are indeed controlled by the federal Act, yet they are affecting the development or the lack of development in our province.

And I'm wondering whether your officials can work more co-operatively, can influence people to come to the table; and while you've indicated you're not going to influence the decision, and that's appropriate, but we need a coordinating body and I think that that body is SERM (Saskatchewan Environment and Resource Management) officials to bring these people together from . . . that are responsible for the Fisheries Act and are responsible for the navigable rivers Act and to be able to resolve this.

And I'd like your commitment to have officials investigate this problem.

**Hon. Mr. Belanger:** — Thank you very much for the question. The obvious answer is yes, we would certainly be in a position to try and work with DFO and the appropriate RM of Sliding Hills and other RMs that might have similar programs.

I would say that Saskatchewan is not immune to some of the federal government's wishes to have the DFO officers all throughout the province. As the member may or may not know, in Alberta as an example, I think they have 60 DFO officers, twice as many in Alberta that we have here. And I think Manitoba, I don't know what their number is but it seems like Saskatchewan has less of the DFO officers, which we are grateful for. We want less interference so to speak, but more

collaboration. So there's some days I imagine that, like the member, we sometimes wonder what the federal government's doing coming forward and stopping the great development of Saskatchewan as the member noted.

(19:15)

I would point out right now, arbitrarily, SERM does offer technical help to the RMs that request the help in reference to some of the discussions with DFO. We are working on an administrative degree . . . administrative agreement that would do a number of things that we hope to have this agreement in place within a year, for the member's information. And what the administration agreement would entail is collaboration, of course, to reduce overlap and to look at speeding up the process so we don't have to go through three or four years for a simple low-level crossing.

And in reference to the canoe route and the fish habitat, of course the coast guard takes care of the canoe route in the navigable waters argument, and the second argument in reference to the fish habitat, DFO undertakes that role.

We are responsible of course for the fish, we are responsible for the waterway, and this is where I think it's important that both levels of governments coordinate for a speedy resolution to some of these minor changes to the manner in which we cross rivers.

**Mr. Krawetz:** — Thank you very much, Mr. Minister. Mr. Minister, I'd also like to point out that there are other departmental agencies involved in Saskatchewan. I have a letter from the current Minister of Agriculture commenting about a river flow study that would be done by Sask Water. So we have letters from the Minister of Highways, the Minister of Agriculture, Sask Water officials involved, Department of Fisheries involved, the Canadian Coast Guard involved, and the problem is now three years old and it's not been solved.

So I appreciate your comments about resolving this and if copies of any of these letters, if any of your officials become involved in this investigation and if the RM is unable to supply some of those copies to you, to your officials, I'd be glad to do so. Because there is a definite need to work with the RM council to resolve this issue. And we have, we have a cross . . . we have a cross-reference here of many different departments and agencies working together and we need someone to coordinate it. And I think from the province of Saskatchewan, SERM is the ideal body to do that.

Mr. Minister, the second issue is also an issue that while it is, the specific issue is relevant to my constituency, it is also something that is occurring in other parts of the province. And that is, Mr. Minister, that federal officials have been studying the flow of water through various creeks. And I won't even refer to them as rivers because in my constituency this very specific body of water is often referred to as the Lilian creek.

There seems to be a move from federal officials to have farmers who operate cattle operations, who have cattle operations along creek beds where these cattle pasture, to have these animals fenced out of the bottom of a dry riverbed or a dry creek bed. Is this something that your department is aware of, and could you

tell me how long this type of action has been taken in the province?

**Hon. Mr. Belanger:** — Once again, I would point out that when you look at some of the examples that the member uses in reference to Lilian creek, no, we weren't aware that the federal government was looking at the creeks in the sense of fencing out, even from the particular aspects of a dry creek bed.

And one, I can tell you that DFO is actively involved in managing some of the fish habitat and certainly a creek bed or potentially dry creek bed that could be used, I would imagine at this stage of the game that they would have a role and they'd want to get involved in that particular aspect of protecting fish habitat. We don't generally do this within SERM or within the Watershed Authority.

We certainly work very closely with the farm community in terms of trying to look at the whole notion of fencing from either dry creek beds or from regular creeks that do have water. And it is through the farmers' agreements of the impacted area that we have fencing out of some of the livestock, as well as also different users in the specific area where SERM would collaborate with all the users in terms of putting a fence there to prevent livestock from venturing into the river, or in some cases maybe even a dry creek bed.

But I think clearly what we would point out is that we would encourage DFO to do the same.

We think if we work with the local parties involved, that they have a vested interest in ensuring that the creek bed, whether it's dry or has some flowing water, continues to remain a healthy ecosystem. At the same time some of the best husbandry practices, which include taking water out of the creek to water the cattle further away from the creek, those are some of the practices that many of the agricultural . . . or many of the farmers get involved with.

So we feel that the farming community, the agricultural community is quite responsible and the only time we would put fences around creeks as a provincial government is through agreements with the farmers in the impacted area, or if it's a joint use agreement that we have to respect.

**Mr. Krawetz:** — Mr. Minister, is there an appeal process that the farmers that are affected . . . And just for your information, he's an enforcement officer for Environment Canada. He has given orders to a number of farmers to erect fences to keep their cattle from depositing, and I believe the words are, deleterious substances, in the river. Now, what has happened is the farmers have been given 30 days or 45 days to erect these fences. This happened about a month ago.

Now I can understand, as you've indicated, in agriculture there is no problem with farmers needing to prevent the feeding of animals by a feedlot situation on a riverbank where, or a creek bank, where in the spring along comes a flood of water and clears out the feedlot. That is a toxin that is then deposited through the creek system into the lakes and can cause a fish problem.

This is strictly farmers who have pasture land, who have cattle

pasturing on the bottom of a riverbank, and now federal officials are coming along and saying, by the Fisheries Act we have the power to tell you to fence these animals out of the bottom of this creek.

Now, Mr. Minister, that doesn't make sense to these farmers. They've had their cattle pasturing these creek beds for years and years and years. And there doesn't seem to be an appeal mechanism. They're given the order and the comment to them was, well if you don't like the order you can obtain a permit.

And the question is, who is to offer this permit? Is it SERM? Is it your officials that will grant a permit to a particular farmer to allow them to I guess deposit deleterious substances in the creek and then subsequently into the river, into the lake if that's what would occur? There needs to be clarification and I'm wondering if your officials work with the people from Environment Canada to develop a strategy that will be understood and effective but most importantly, fair.

**Hon. Mr. Belanger:** — Thank you very much for the question. What I'll point out is that first of all I think it is important for the member, and I'm sure the member appreciates the fact that one of the things that we want to do — whether it's the Watershed Authority or it's DFO or whether it's Environment Canada — is to make sure that we look at a number of aspects of protection of water at source. It's one of our most important aspects of our safe water strategy.

And we often want to preach the fact that if you protect the water at source more diligently and vigilant, then what you're going to have is the less requirement for treatment and less costly efforts of trying to clean up the water and so on and so forth.

So obviously I know that member is appreciative of the fact that we often want to encourage farmers and the agricultural community, in which the agricultural community is certainly rising to the occasion . . . is to try and look at ways in which we could reduce the risk of water contamination to the degree as possible to make it, you know, to make it a practice that many of the agricultural community and non-agricultural community can follow to protect the water at source.

What I would ask that member is generally Environment Canada, probably through the Fisheries Act, would put that order in and any federal Act would have to have a federal permit attached to it. And correspondingly, any provincial Act would have to have a provincial permit to it.

One of the things that we're trying to do — and it's a long-term objective, pending discussions and negotiations under the agricultural policy framework — is we're looking at environmental farm planning, a component of that which talks about some of these issues and mitigating some of the challenges to the environment when it comes to agricultural development and of course managing the risk, best practices, and so on and so forth. These are some of the principles that this long-term environmental farm planning component of this agreement would look at.

But I would ask the member for a location of the examples that he's using and we can get more specific information for him

directly or to the constituent that he's making reference to. And we will be very clear as to what the role is. And I believe, if there is an order in place and it is in power through the Fisheries Act, then the Environment Canada officials certainly would have their Act in which they can enforce the whole notion of fish habitat protection, rules and regulations that they would apply in this case.

**Mr. Krawetz:** — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Minister, to clarify, I understand that your officials or your department was involved when there was discussion about waste substances being pumped into Last Mountain Lake. And that was of course human treated sewage. And now we have a situation where this has become a federal issue.

So I'm wondering if there is . . . Is there a responsibility that is separate, that the federal officials are looking after something that involves agriculture and is out in rural Saskatchewan and that SERM was responsible for dealing with Last Mountain Lake?

And the second question, Mr. Minister, is these farmers have been given sort of an ultimatum, a 30-day ultimatum to erect the fences. This is a busy time in rural Saskatchewan with seeding going on. And there are a number of farmers who have contacted my office and said, we're not able to get this fence done; will we be charged under this Act? Will it be officials under Environment Canada or will it be SERM officials who will impose the penalties on these farmers? And who will actually lay the charge on the farmer for not having constructed the fence in the required 30- or 45-day period?

**Hon. Mr. Belanger:** — Well thank you very much. What I'll point out to the member, and I was hoping you wouldn't be suggesting that two wrongs would make a right in terms of some of the efforts that we have to protecting the water at source; that whether it's human cause or agricultural cause or livestock cause that we should undertake to have the notion of protecting the water at source as everybody's responsibility — both provincial, local, and federally — and certainly with the number of environmental groups and organizations that are out there.

(19:30)

And the agricultural community as well appreciates the fact that all kind of material that's going into any river, lake, or stream that we try and do our best to minimize that, to mitigate it, and again use best practices to try and protect the water at source as best as we can.

So I want to reiterate that two wrongs would not make a right in this instance, and that we have to make an effort in both regards.

I would also point out that I think it's very important that if there is an Act laid under the federal legislation, then that federal department and that federal officer will be the one that will be laying the charge.

And in this case SERM, or Saskatchewan Environment will not be proceeding with any kind of court action against that individual unless provincial environmental laws were broken

and were implicated in some way, shape, or form. Then of course we would have to undertake our duty then.

But if it's a federal Act and a federal charge delivered by the federal government, they'll certainly be proceeding with the charges as per their legislation.

**Mr. Krawetz:** — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Minister, I will supply all of the information that I have regarding this situation to your officials, but there's no doubt, Mr. Minister, that many of these farmers are fishermen as well. They obviously want to ensure that the lakes in the Canora-Pelly constituency continue to have fish stock, and for not only themselves but their children as well.

So this is not a matter of somebody trying to pollute a river or pollute a lake. This is a group of farmers who have had a complaint raised by someone that is also . . . By the way, Mr. Minister, the way that this has come to the attention of Environment Canada, somebody phoned in a complaint. They don't know what they were complaining about but through the investigation now, the Environment Canada official has determined that it's time to erect these fences.

Is this a policy that would be in contravention of Saskatchewan's environment guidelines or would your officials and your policies be agreeing with this? That is the question that the farmers are asking. Is it something that the province is wanting to promote as well, or is this just a decision made by a federal official to say, I would like to have these areas fenced up?

There's a total misunderstanding I think of the impact of this kind of decision. So I'd ask your officials to clarify this, most importantly for all areas of the province that are going to be affected by this type of decision, and try to somehow resolve it for not only the protection of our waterways and our lakes and our fish stocks but also for agriculture to continue to survive under the conditions that it has survived for years and years and years.

Thank you, Mr. Minister.

**Hon. Mr. Belanger:** — One of the things I think is a very important principle when we talk about resource management, and certainly trying to engage as many of the stakeholders as possible, is that we believe in SERM that a power through partnerships theme is something that's going to certainly pay a lot of dividends in the future when it comes to collaboration of all the different users and the demands on some of the resources in the province of Saskatchewan.

And what we've done is we've talked to the First Nations, we've talked to the fishers, we've talked to the sport industry, we've talked to the Wildlife Federation. What SERM does, or Saskatchewan Environment does, is it really builds on a solid partnership approach with all the different entities that are out there.

Now what we want to do is . . . the principle very clear is as many people looking after the 94,000 freshwater lakes that we have in Saskatchewan. We believe that in the long run, through good stewardship models of this sort, that having as many

parties involved, that we can continue retaining the freshwater image that Saskatchewan has in having 94,000 lakes in our province.

Now we do a comparison to Alberta, you're looking at roughly 7 or 8 or 9,000 lakes at the most, which they would enjoy having in the whole entire province. So we're . . . They have 10 per cent of the amount of lakes that we have. And I think the tribute of the many people and players that have been involved with this whole stewardship model shows that we're on the right track. Things are moving forward, and we'll continue building on the success that we've enjoyed over the past years.

However it's very important as well in this power through partnership theme is that we do a risk assessment where we look at the real risks. And many times in the agricultural community there's been traditional practices and . . . (inaudible) . . . that on the outside may not appear to be environmentally friendly but in fact don't really pose any threat to the environment.

So part of the risk assessment that we do in relation to some of the agricultural practices . . . of course Ag and Food are involved and we're involved, and as a collaborative approach with Environment Canada and DFO to try and make sure that there's a risk assessment when it comes to the agricultural community, and that we identify the real risks and try to mitigate those risks. And logic and reason and common sense will certainly be the guiding themes when we start looking at building up a framework of rules and regulations when it comes to your example of cattle accessing river beds and lakes and streams and so on and so forth.

So I think there's a lot of good, solid stewards out there of our environment and we know that the big challenge is making sure that the agricultural sector and the urban folks and the many users of our lakes, rivers, and streams are active in the stewardship thought. And in that sense I think we'll continue working very closely with the ag sector and with the farm families and the farming community to make sure that we look at the real risks and we assess those real risks and we put in plans over a period of time to help them mitigate those risks to protect our water at source.

On the other hand, we don't want frivolous charges and we don't want to have a heavy-handed federal government that comes in and disrupts that chemistry that we've developed. So we, in our strength as Saskatchewan Environment, advise the federal government that, we have a good system here; you should adapt with some of your strengths as well so we can all have a common goal of protecting the environment for many years to come.

**Mr. Brkich:** — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I had a constituent call me and he had some concerns and questions about what he called the design flood criterion. Can you give me some information on that?

**Hon. Mr. Belanger:** — Thank you very much. I think the design flood criterion is very simply is we would ask a constituent or a proponent that has a development along a riverbank or along a watershed as to what they're, are developing along that watershed — whether it's a subdivision

or whether it's a private home or whether it's a cottage — that we would look at imposing certain rules on that development, taking into account the probability of the waterline.

And we do a number of . . . using different models to estimate what the probability of the high waterline would be. So we would look at the criteria to have a flood-prone area along that bank, maybe one, you know, in 500 years as to what the probability of a flood is. And of course I wasn't around 500 years and . . . but so this is why we use modelling, to give a good estimate of what is . . . what we envision or what we think might happen of a flood once in 500 years. And that's kind of what the design flood criterion is in its simplest form.

**Mr. Brkich:** — Mr. Chairman, when you bring the 1 to 500 years in, is that a recommendation, or is that what they have to follow?

**Hon. Mr. Belanger:** — Thank you very much for the question. Just to point out that there's a couple of examples here. For example, if the Municipal Affairs department wants to approve a subdivision through their planning branch, then of course they would ask us for advice on this whole argument of the flood plain. And obviously local municipal involvement and input and also some of the bylaws that may be in place, they would also have a role to play as well.

But they would ask us for advice on the flood plain and what we would do is then they would either accept that recommendation or, again, subject it to discussions with other players such as the local municipal body that may have a different bylaw in place. That's how, generally that's how the recommendations work.

And overall they have accepted the recommendations. And what we're simply trying to do there is to make sure folks are aware that above a certain peg line that there is the risk of flooding and it's, you know, we use the model 1 in 100 years, and you do calculations. And really, 1 in 500 years and 1 in 100 years calculation, there isn't much deviation in both those models so this is the reason why we go to 1 in 500.

(19:45)

And some of the national . . . For example, the CMHC (Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation) folks, they may not approve a mortgage if it's below a peg line pending the recommendation either received by Municipal Affairs if it's an approved subdivision and if there's collaboration and agreement by local municipal bodies to their bylaws.

**Mr. Brkich:** — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. That was kind of my next question to you because the constituent, he had mentioned British Columbia has a 1 in 200 years and Winnipeg, Manitoba is 1 in 160 and the rest of Canada 1 in 100. So I was wondering how much change it was from 500 years to 100 but apparently you're saying it's very similar in Saskatchewan.

This particular constituent is planning on building a house on a piece of property. And on that piece of property it sounded like it was . . . The RM had gone to Sask Environment, I believe it's Environment, and they had given them these recommendations. So now they're enforcing it on him.

But I was wondering if an RM further down on the same line didn't have the same bylaw, would that recommendation apply to him? Would he be denied a permit to build a house there? Or just because that particular RM doesn't have the 1 in 500, might have the 1 in 100 or maybe doesn't have any stipulation, I guess the question I'm asking you is would you step in and enforce that on another RM along the same river basin, same river?

**Hon. Mr. Belanger:** — One of the things as I mentioned before is I think it's very important that we point out that if in the event that there's a subdivision to be approved by Municipal Affairs, of course the Municipal Affairs branch will ask for advice, and we'll give them the advice, and generally they've accepted the recommendation of this 1 in 500 flood plain.

However, if a local municipality or a local body decides that they don't want the 1 in 500 scenario, that they want a lesser kind of flood plain deviation from what we think would be a safe area, then they would run the risk at putting that particular home builder at risk of having their home flooded or their home at worst being washed away.

Now one of the things it may seem extreme in the 1 to 500 year flood plain that we're looking at but I would point out that again the first argument is that the 1 in 100 year time frame and the 1 in 500 year time frame, the deviation isn't that significant. And all we're doing is adding extra caution and care to those folks that wish to take that advice in the event that they want to look at ensuring that folks aren't building in a flood plain area.

And that may seem to be extreme but if you can remember in the early '70s when we did set the standard in the early '70s, we had extreme flooding throughout the province — '74, '75, '76 — in which we seen the 1 in 100 year levels the flooding being higher than the 1 in 100 year standard. And this is the reason why we went to 1 to 500 standard, is to provide that extra caution.

And while the examples that you've used are less extreme than ours, we'd point out in the prairie landscape that we're fairly comfortable that the 1 in 500 year flood plain is something that we could certainly be recommending to folks that are building.

And the other example is that we're not the most extreme case, of course. You have the Ontario government that doesn't use a flood plain, but rather uses a Hurricane Hazel standard which is of course much more extreme.

So my advice to the local municipality that if they do put a bylaw that looks at having construction happen below a 1 in 500 peg line, they would run the risk of being held liable for approving a development in that area in the event that the flood area does get the water that is needed to make the home at risk. So that's certainly advice they can take or not take.

**Mr. Brkich:** — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. My next question on that is, when you develop the 1 in 500 . . . and I was trying to find some information for the constituent and I know that your office, I think, is planning on sending me the information on it. They said the bundle hasn't shown up last time I talked to my CA (constituency assistant). But the only information I found with the . . . was 1989 there was a study done by the *Hydrology of Floods in Canada* by Edgar Watt, Queen's University in

Kingston, Ontario.

Is that where you got this 1 in 500, or did you kind of develop your own? Or did you just use this studies?

**Hon. Mr. Belanger:** — Thank you very much for the question. We have over 400 stations throughout the province of Saskatchewan where we've had records that date as far back as 1910. And so what we do is we've used our own modelling and not the guide that you had made a presentation on. And what we do over, say an example, over a 25-year period, is we analyze all the data.

And then from the data we use different modelling to determine what the extreme — again, based on all the suggested data — as to what the extreme flood plain might be. And it's easy. It's a standard practice in which we're able to determine an accurate flood plain, again using statistical information. And it's a standard practice across Saskatchewan, across the country. And we would point out that we're fairly comfortable with that science.

So the answer is clearly we've used our own information. We've got over 500 stations across the province . . . or sorry, 400, and some of this information went back to 1910. And again we do a lot of calculating to determine where the flood plain could eventually arrive. Even over a 25-year period, we're fairly comfortable with that kind of modelling.

And to make a long story short, it is something that we've been using on a constant basis and we're very confident in this kind of projection.

**Mr. Hart:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, the area that I'd like to discuss with the minister has to do with the water levels in some of the lakes in the Qu'Appelle River system, particularly the Pasqua, Echo lakes and the other two lakes near Fort Qu'Appelle.

There's an issue that . . . an unresolved issue that has been raised in this legislature earlier dealing with the flooding of some First Nations land and a dispute between PFRA (Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Administration) and First Nations over water levels in the lake, in these lakes. I believe that same problem extends to Crooked and Round Lake.

I guess my question, my first question would be to the minister is, are any of the weirs located in such areas that they cannot be accessed except by crossing First Nations lakes or land? And secondly, what First Nations land would be flooded, have been flooded in the past and would be flooded this year if the water levels in the lakes were at their . . . at the levels that they have been in past years?

**Hon. Mr. Belanger:** — Again in reference to the Qu'Appelle Valley in terms of which structures are where, first of all we point out to the member that we have seven bands that we're currently involving with this whole notion of the Qu'Appelle Valley water system. And what's at question here is approximately 2,000 acres of First Nations land that is being flooded. And the only structure that is on First Nations land is the Round Lake structure. The other two structures, Echo and Crooked, as a result of their operations there's some backwater

on First Nations lands.

So again we're dealing with seven bands and 2,000 acres of land being flooded. And there are three structures, one on First Nations land and two others that actually cause the backwater on to First Nations land.

**Mr. Hart:** — Minister, I take it that this whole issue hasn't been resolved. And some time ago your department or the Watershed Authority issued a statement indicating that the water level in the lakes affected would be at least a metre lower than their customary level. Are you still holding to that forecast as far as water level, or do you feel that perhaps the water level may even drop below more than a metre from its normal level?

(20:00)

**Hon. Mr. Belanger:** — Thank you for the question. I think one of the things that we want to do is first of all advise the cabin owners of the potential challenges that we will face in the event that some of the structures are not being utilized. I would point out that as a result of some of the increased moisture this year, that the runoff and so on and so forth has kept the lake levels dropping a lot slower than we anticipated.

But clearly within a month we're fairly certain that the drop could be as high as a metre, and we're simply advising folks that that could be easily achieved within a month. But again depending on the moisture and the rainfall and the runoff, that will also have an effect.

So while the runoff is good at this stage of the game — there is a lot less dropping of the lake level, at a slower rate — but within a month we feel that the 1-metre drop-off is certainly a target that would be accurate.

**Mr. Hart:** — Minister, as I understand this issue, it seems like there's two parts to this issue. One deals with, I understand, that the federal government through PFRA is negotiating with First Nations. And there has been some compensation paid in the past but it appears that the federal government is digging in their heels as far as compensation to First Nations in the future, and there has been . . . Federal officials have indicated that perhaps the province has a responsibility.

Now I know, Minister, you, during question period when a colleague of mine asked questions regarding this issue, you had indicated that your department and the province has been dealing with the issue and regard this as a serious issue. You indicated that you have written letters and have been talking to federal officials.

Have you, as a facilitator and a mediator, have you brought both parties to the table and have you had face-to-face discussions with both parties on this issue?

**Hon. Mr. Belanger:** — Very quickly, all the parties were brought together on April 2003. Nothing was resolved at that time, and I would ask the member do you believe that we should pay this compensation or not? I certainly wouldn't mind hearing your opinion on the matter.

**Mr. Hart:** — Mr. Chair, it's not an issue of whether the

province should be paying for this or not. It's an issue of we've got a situation that will directly affect the well-being of the economy of this province. And at the very least I believe the province has a responsibility to act as a mediator and a facilitator to get the two parties together.

And you'd indicated, Minister, that there was a meeting in April 2000. Do you have meetings . . . future meetings planned?

I mean it's quite fine to say that we've written some of the federal ministers and some of the federal officials and we called a meeting and neither party could agree so I guess there isn't anything we can do about it. In the meantime we have people who have significant investments in the tourism industry in this area of our province.

And certainly, if the situation is allowed to continue, that we will certainly see a fairly large negative impact on that industry which will mean the province will suffer, revenues will be down, and therefore the province certainly has a responsibility to see that this issue is resolved.

And so my question, Minister, is what further action have you got planned to resolve this issue?

**Hon. Mr. Belanger:** — Again just to clarify, the last time the parties got together to talk about this matter was April 28, 2003. And I would ask that member once again, what is your position on the matter? Do you believe the province should pay? In your earlier statements you said that this is not an issue of whether the province should pay or not, you indicated, and I would say to you that is the issue.

The federal government is telling us you have an obligation to pay here and we're saying here hold it here. You set the precedence by settling with Standing Buffalo, you set the precedence. The Indian Claims Commission clearly pointed out your role and now you're sitting there saying well that's not the issue.

Well the issue is very clear. The issue is very clear. The federal government wants us to pay their bills, and I'm going to ask you today, the Sask Party, and I asked the critic of that several days ago in question period, does he believe we should pay the federal government's bills? And that member got up and he said, oh all you've done is written a few letters. Well we're taking the position at this stage of the process that the provincial government is not about to pay the federal government's bills.

Now I'm going to ask that member, if you insist on stroking the discontent associated with this particular challenge, at least have the courtesy — at least have the courtesy — to tell those folks that are listening tonight whether you think the province should pay or they shouldn't pay. The answer I would ask you to give me is a yes or a no.

**The Chair:** — Order, order. Order. Order. Hon. members . . . Order. Now, hon. members, we are starting to move into an area that I wouldn't like to go to, so I would ask all the members to lower the tone a little bit if we could. Thank you very much.

**Mr. Hart:** — Mr. Chair, the minister seems intent on asking questions rather than answering the questions. It seems to me a

role of the minister of this government should be to answer the questions. Certainly the minister used that tactic of not answering and asking questions in question period. That member may after the next election, if he's lucky, be sitting on this side of the House and he will have ample opportunity to ask the questions and he will certainly receive answers, Mr. Chair.

And as far as the province paying, if the province through its inaction doesn't get this issue resolved, the province will pay in one form or another. So there I ask again of that minister what plans has he to resolve this issue in the immediate future? Property owners, people that are using the resort facilities are asking the questions. They want this problem solved and it's that minister's responsibility to see that this problem gets solved.

And so again I ask the minister, what plans has he got to resolve this issue?

**Hon. Mr. Belanger:** — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would point out first of all the other answer has been very clear. We answered the member this evening. We answered the critic several days ago where we said no, we're not about to pay the federal government's bills. They've set a precedent in reference to Standing Buffalo. We're standing by that position.

Now what I would appreciate a little bit is some clarification from the members opposite on their position and on their issue.

Do you believe that we should pay the compensation? The simple answer is yes or no. That's a simple answer. We're saying no on this side and you guys haven't said a peep as to your position. Now to have somebody with the fortitude to stand up and express the Saskatchewan Party position on this whole notion of the Qu'Appelle Valley water system, the answer's very clearly yes or no. On this side we're saying no. What is your position?

**Mr. McMorris:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's interesting that you're trying to frame . . . the minister is trying to frame the whole argument as to, it's a one issue thing. Either you pay or you don't pay. Either you're in the negotiations and discussions or you're not. Well frankly that is an absolute untruth, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because you can be at the table and you can negotiate and you can take part in the negotiations, and without having to pay the bill.

Now I don't know how much work the minister has done on the file, but I have done a lot of work on the file and I've talked to a number of people in PFRA that are not saying anything like that at all. They are simply saying that the provincial government has a role to play but is scared to go to the plate. And it's not necessarily dollars and cents that that role is. He won't get to the plate to even talk about it. All he's simply done is sent a letter saying, oh I hope you resolve this.

The structures were put in place in the '40s for agriculture use. There is no agriculture use of those structures anymore; it's pure tourism. And the spinoff from those structures at Echo, at Katepwa, and at the end of Round Lake are pure tourism usages. The water level on those lakes is for the recreation of the people through that whole area.



And Fort Qu'Appelle alone in that area puts through at least 15,000 people a year. They depend on the lake. And what they've heard from the provincial government is, we're going to send them a letter. I'm sure that will solve it.

And you talk to the federal government and the federal government says there is a responsibility for this provincial government but like so many other issues you can't get them to the table to talk about it.

It's not a dollars and cents issue to the people that I've talked about through the federal government. It's not a yes or no answer, either you get to the table and you pay your \$12 million; that's not the issue. As much as you try and frame it's the issue, that is not the issue.

Get to the table and find out what the other issues are. You haven't even been there so how can you stand in the House and say it's a one issue dispute?

**The Chair:** — Order, order. I have attempted to not . . . I've attempted not to interfere in the natural order of the debate but it is becoming more personalized as each speaker gets going, so I would ask the speaker to put . . . Order. I would ask that the comments be put to the Chair and through the Chair both by the minister and by members.

**Mr. McMorris:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. To the minister, how will the minister know what the issues are around the table when they refuse to go to the table? He can use scare tactics and he can make it as oversimplified as he possibly can, Mr. Speaker. The minister can try and frame the argument around a one issue, a \$12 million bill. And, Mr. Speaker, that is not the only issue that's being discussed around the table.

There have been many water structures that the provincial government has taken responsibility of that were set up by PFRA for agriculture use and have since changed. And what was the cost to the government in those instances? Very little. This one, they're trying to frame it around a \$12 million bill and that is not the only issue.

But once again, talking to the people in the federal government, when this provincial government won't even come to the plate to listen to what the other issues are and then come into the House and say that's the only issue there is, is a complete disservice.

Now if that's your position, I would ask you to come out to the cottage owners in July, when the water is a metre below the normal level, where the fish stock are having a hard time surviving, when the tourism has dropped off to nothing, when the bill that the provincial government is more or less sending out, when the businesses of the Fort Qu'Appelle area are sending in their PST (provincial sales tax) and it's about a quarter of the amount of what it was last summer and then ask if the provincial government doesn't have some responsibility in this area? It's too scared to go to the table to even find out what the issues are?

I think it's naive at best for the minister to think that he has no responsibility in this area. And unfortunately what he will do is play scare tactics, scare tactics with the people and say it's only

a \$12 million issue.

Well quite frankly it isn't a \$12 million issue and I would press the minister to get to the table and find out some of the other issues. Because some of the other issues are not the past compensation for land flooded out, it's the future of who mans the water structures. It could be as simple as that, but how would the heck . . . how would he ever know . . . how the heck would he ever know when he's never at the table?

So I'd ask the minister, I'd challenge the minister to get to the table and find out what are some of the other issues around because certainly there are more than the one that he's been spouting about.

(20:15)

**Hon. Mr. Belanger:** — Thank you very much. What I'd point out is that certainly we've been working very closely with a number of organizations in and around this particular matter, Mr. Chairman.

I would point out one of the most important things is that we talked about a water co-management agreement and sharing that we worked with the First Nations and QVIDA (Qu'Appelle Valley Indian Development Authority). We certainly advised the federal government that they've set precedents in terms of the Standing Buffalo settlement.

We also agree with the fact the First Nations lands are being flooded. They are being flooded; we've agreed with that. And I think the other factor as well, Mr. Speaker, is we want to let common sense prevail on this whole process of discussion and negotiations in terms of who pays what. And we've got to be very clear there to make sure that we work alongside all the parties and, at the same time, we come across as the people that are going to provide the solutions.

And one of the solutions that is being asked of us to provide, besides the co-management agreement . . . Besides the correspondence and the discussion that's been going on between a number of ministers on this side, and the discussions we've been having in cabinet, and the meetings that we've had with the . . . with both the QVIDA group and the joint group that we've had on April 28, 2003, we've been very active with this particular file.

And when it comes down to it, the bottom line is there's a \$12 million compensation claim and the federal government is saying to us, okay you guys negotiated a co-management agreement with the water rights in terms of . . . not the water rights, but the water issues, in terms of accessing the river. You've talked about respect of the First Nations, which we have. We also accepted the fact that there is flooding of the First Nations land which should not be happening.

We also understand that PFRA operated these structures for a number of years since the 1940s. And we even went back and researched some of the QVIDA First Nations inquiry report. And I'll quote from page 215 of that document, where it says, recommendations:

Having found that the Government of Canada owes an

outstanding lawful obligation to the QVIDA First Nations with respect to the PFRA's acquisition of the right to use and occupy their reserve lands for flooding purposes, we therefore recommend:

- 1 That Canada immediately commence negotiations with the QVIDA First Nations to acquire by surrender or expropriation such interests in land as may be required for the ongoing operation of the control structures at Echo Lake, Crooked Lake, and Round Lake or, alternatively, remove the control structures.
- 2 That the flooding claims of the Sakimay, Cowessess, and Ochapowace First Nations be accepted for negotiations under Canada's Specific Claims Policy with respect to
  - (a) damages caused to the reserve land since the original construction of the dams in the early 1940s, and
  - (b) compensation for the value of any interest that Canada may acquire in the reserve lands, (and a subsection to that is) and future damages to reserve lands.

Now as you look at some of the other recommendations to Standing Buffalo, and so on and so forth, there is nothing in the whole document under the recommendations in terms of negotiations that involve Saskatchewan. Now what we have done is we have inserted ourselves as a province because we are concerned with the effects that that member speaks about in reference to tourism and the provincial park systems, and the opportunity in that particular area.

We understand and respect the challenges that the cabin owners and the folks in the entire area face. We also respect and understand that the First Nations are having their lands flooded. We understand that as well. And we also understand that the inquiry clearly pointed out that Canada has the obligation to negotiate and settle.

Now what the member is suggesting that we're doing is we're not doing enough. The issue here is we have talked co-management, we have inserted ourselves into discussion, we have written correspondence, we've had meetings, we've had discussions. We've warned the cabin owners of the potential challenge with the non-operation of the structures. We have accepted the recommendations of the inquiry. We have also agreed that the First Nations lands that are being flooded, which they should not be settled. We went through all this process and we've accorded patience and respect to all the groups.

So I ask the member again very calm and reasonably: the issue left at the end of the day is whether we should pay the compensation amount or not. Now what we don't want to do . . . If you want to make sure that calm and reasonable approaches to mitigating and addressing this particular challenge is undertaken, that is what we want to do. We want to mitigate any future challenges with this particular issue so that we may be able to coexist for many years.

All those points clearly state that we have been working very

hard on this matter. In fact my colleague, the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs, has been diligently working on this particular issue and has worked many, many hours. So I think this is not an issue of us scooting off a few letters. We have researched the issue and clearly I think Canada has been referred to in our discussions; Canada has been referred to in the precedents with Standing Buffalo; Canada has been referred to in the inquiry. So again, we feel that we should not be paying the federal government's bills.

**Mr. McMorris:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. I mean, you covered a lot of points here and none of those we are disputing. We are certainly not disputing that the issue of flooded First Nations land should be compensated for. That has been agreed on prior, through the . . . I guess it would be the treaty land claims entitlement decision. And so there's some compensation that needs to be paid. And we believe that that's a federal issue.

But to just simply stop at that and then back away and say there are no responsibilities, the minister now has talked about, we're certainly working a lot harder. He talked about the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs dealing with the issue. Well that certainly is an awful lot different than the answer that we got in *Hansard* back on May 12 when all the answer was is, oh, you just want us to pay the federal bill. That has absolutely nothing to do with it at all.

What we want . . . Because right now I would say that the two sides, the federal government and the QVIDA or whatever, Qu'Appelle Valley Indian Development Authority, are entrenched and aren't moving on the issue. And we've been fortunate that there's been enough water flow that the water levels haven't changed much at all right now. But by the end of July we're going to see a significant drop in the water levels and I know the cottage owners along the Calling Lakes especially, I'm sure all the lakes, have received a letter from the Watershed Authority saying what to expect.

It's great what to expect. We know the issue. We see the two sides entrenched. The minister has just said, we're working very hard and we've researched the issue. The first . . . The Minister of Aboriginal Affairs has done a lot of work on the issue. What is the work when all he's trying to frame it around is who pays the federal government's bill? Obviously that's not the only issue. If that was the only issue then what department, as he is saying, is doing all this work, the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs is doing all this work, when it's a one-issue problem which he keeps going back to?

We have no question with the claim. We have no question on who pays it. But right now they're entrenched and they're not getting any closer together. And the persons and the people that are going to pay for this problem, this lack of agreement, is going to be the provincial government through lack of income, through PST and tourism and everything else.

You've said . . . The minister has said that he's done a pile of work on it. I would like to know what is the work that he has done without getting to the point that, oh, you just want us to pay the federal bill again.

**Hon. Mr. Belanger:** — Thank you very much for the question. I would point out that Saskatchewan has agreed in writing to

both QVIDA and the federal government to participate in a co-management discussion with QVIDA to help resolve some of these issues.

And co-management involves looking for effective mechanisms for co-operation, consultation, and communication. So again, QVIDA and the provincial government have talked very clearly about co-management, and we believe that's a very important, valued contribution that we have made as a province towards this exercise.

Now we've also had a number of correspondence, as I mentioned to you. We've had a number of meetings and I, along with the former minister of Justice — I think it was in December sometime — we met with QVIDA. We spoke about the co-management role that they could play, and I felt at that time there was some excitement.

And we have been involved with three negotiation meetings on these issues. We have been very clear and very fair when it comes to acknowledging and making sure that the cabin owners throughout the whole system are aware of some of the potential challenges. We have not hid nothing from them. We've also agreed with the commission in terms of the First Nations land being flooded, that they should not be flooded.

And I would ask that member, in the recent request, and we got a licence to operate those structures, and that licence is going to cost the province \$12 million. The bill was sent to both the federal and provincial governments from QVIDA — \$12 million licence fee. Now how it's broken up, of course they leave that whole notion for us to decide.

So that is what the difficulty is at this stage of the game — the request for \$12 million for this licence. Now who pays that? Co-management, they agree. Flooded land issues, we agree. Correspondence, we agree. The work effort that is needed, we agree. Calm, reasonable discussions, we agree. Making sure that each party knows what's going on, communication, we agree. Flooded lands shouldn't be happening, we agree.

The last thing that come to the front was who pays this \$12 million licence. And that's a simple position that we're taking forward is that clearly a precedent has been set with Standing Buffalo, when they settled with Standing Buffalo. And I would ask that member, we have undertaken extensive consultation, we continue to remain optimistic, but clearly the federal government has to pay this particular bill and we're encouraging to do so, so we can get on with continue to having a peaceful coexistence and building the economy and ensuring that this situation doesn't occur again.

Now we appreciate the advice of the opposition but clearly we can't play politics with this matter. Leadership is necessary, decisions have to be made, and we certainly have to continue looking for solutions, and this province will certainly be continuing to look for those solutions.

**Mr. McMorris:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. The minister talked just now of the meetings that they've had with the Qu'Appelle Valley Indian Development Authority. And you've had a number of meetings and you've talked about co-management and all those issues and you're finding some common ground

there.

Quite frankly the dispute is between the Qu'Appelle Valley Indian Development Authority and the federal government. You've talked, you've sent a couple of letters to the federal government, you've had extensive talks with the QVIDA. What have you done with the federal government to push them on this issue other than a couple letters?

Have you sat down across the table and expressed your concern rather than just correspondence? A couple letters to a couple of federal ministers? What meetings have you had with the federal government on this issue, or have you had any and just corresponded through letter?

**Hon. Mr. Belanger:** — Thank you very much for the question. I think one of the most important things that we want to point out to folks is that we are very clearly committed to finding a solution. We've always maintained that and one of the things and the promises that we want to do is to ensure that the province is not seen, as the member wishes to portray, of us sitting back and saying, well you guys figure this out.

We have inserted ourselves at great risk and peril to try and come up with a solution. And the risk and peril I'm talking about here clearly is to be on the hook for some serious federal bills that may result from some of the discussions.

However I know and I'm privy to the fact that yesterday, I believe, that the Intergovernmental Affairs minister, the member from Prince Albert Northcote, had discussions with Mr. Pettigrew, the national minister on this particular issue.

And while Mr. Pettigrew of course couldn't find the solution over the telephone conversation, I am aware that tomorrow that the federal lead negotiator will be meeting with the president of the Saskatchewan Watershed Authority, Mr. Stuart Kramer for two hours tomorrow.

And following that discussion again our federal . . . or our provincial Intergovernmental Affairs minister, again the member from Prince Albert Northcote, will be travelling to Ottawa to have discussions with federal officials. And I believe the federal minister Ralph Goodale will be privy to those discussions and issues that he's bringing forward. And we continue keeping an open line of communication clearly trying to find a solution here.

And what I would ask that member is that we think — we think — a calm, reasonable approach by all the parties involved will find the perfect solution which I think will not only solve this problem today, but understand that: (a) there's some economic challenges we face if we don't resolve it; (b) obviously that we've got to stop flooding First Nations land, because we're simply . . . that's been going on for a number of years and the First Nations should not have their lands flooded; and (c) that we don't have a continuing, huge, tremendous amount of money to pay each year for the enjoyment of all people of the Qu'Appelle Valley river system. And that is what we hope to have happen.

(20:30)

Now what we have to be very careful of is that we don't sit by and watch things happen; by the same token we don't compromise our provincial position. The federal government needs to resolve some of these matters financially on their own.

**Mr. McMorris:** — I guess, just my final comment is, it's taken us 40 minutes to have the minister stand up and say that, we will be meeting with the federal government; we'll be meeting with the federal government as opposed to sending letters.

We've asked what the government has been doing. And every time at the start of this session, he would say it's a \$12 million issue and we're going to stay right away with it. You want us to meet and have to pay the \$12 million, and that was the answer.

Could have you just said . . . And I'm glad that you have said that the provincial government will be meeting with the federal government to try and insert themselves more than just through letter correspondence into this disagreement because the impact for the provincial government is huge.

I'll be looking forward to hearing what the person in charge of the Watershed Authority finds after he has his two-hour meeting with the federal government. Hopefully there's some area for movement. And that's simply where we were going at the start of this whole session, is what is the provincial government doing to inject itself into the dispute. Thank you for your final statement.

**Hon. Mr. Belanger:** — Mr. Speaker, as we've indicated . . . I'm sorry. Mr. Chairman, as we've indicated, it's very important that we point out to folks is that at the end of the day, the clear argument is whether we're going to insert ourselves as payee to this challenge.

And I certainly on this side have said, look if there's no solutions coming from the opposition, then don't try and stroke this thing because it doesn't serve any purpose. You know, if leadership is required in this matter, then this provincial government will rise to the occasion.

**Ms. Julé:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. And good evening to the minister and his officials. Mr. Chair, this whole debate has been quite interesting and it reminds me of the many times that I have received letters and correspondence from Métis as well as First Nations people asking for some assistance to be able to resolve disputes between the federal government and First Nations or Métis people.

And the fact remains, and it seems it remains today, that there isn't a mechanism in place, there doesn't seem to be a body that . . . people or an organization that will deal with these disputes. And I recall asking former ministers of Aboriginal Affairs whether or not . . . what their role was, whether their role included dispute resolution, mediation, that kind of thing.

The very fact, Mr. Chair, that we continue to get these letters and these requests for assistance to resolve these disputes tells everyone in this House something, that we don't have a proper process in place to assist when there are disputes, and this situation in the Qu'Appelle Valley is evidence of that once again.

Now I just want to make that comment because it's important I think that in this province of Saskatchewan we maybe have to incorporate into the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs' roles and responsibilities, the responsibility to be there when there is a dispute between the federal government and First Nations/Métis people.

Thank you for that moment of being able to put that forward. I think it's very important and we've got to do something about it.

Mr. Chair, to the minister. I wanted to ask the minister some questions this evening regarding the fire towers in northern Saskatchewan. I submitted some questions through written questions in this Assembly to the minister's department regarding, I guess, processes that were underway to deal with fire towers that were not in very good condition.

Mr. Minister, at this time I'd like to ask you, when it was determined that there may need to . . . that we may need to have to take a look at those towers to ensure that they were in top-notch condition and safe, was the Saskatchewan Safety Council asked to assess the condition of the fire towers?

**Hon. Mr. Belanger:** — The answer I believe is no. We didn't use that particular association or that organization. We got two separate engineering assessments on the towers and we can provide the names of those engineering firms very quickly here.

And this year, as we've mentioned time and again, we've got six towers being built and there's two separate designs for those towers. And basically, from what we can gather from the information that the engineers have said, that these towers are safe and sturdy and steady for use.

**Ms. Julé:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, I need to ask the minister a fairly direct question.

Mr. Minister, when Murdoch Carriere became the director of forest protection services in Saskatchewan for the North, I'm wondering — actually not wondering — You had made a former statement in this Assembly to one of my other colleagues that he had a plan in place for forest protection services in this province.

I'm asking you today, Mr. Minister, was the plan or part of the plan for aerial surveillance of the forests for fire protection reasons rather than to have towers in place?

**Hon. Mr. Belanger:** — Certainly I think one of the things we want to point out is that the fire program looked at the surveillance and the whole notion of making sure that we respond to fires as soon as they've started.

We began that process with towers. And roughly two years ago, 49 of the 50-tower system that we had in place were basically condemned. And so as a result of that we're now in the process of looking at a mixture of towers versus planes. And to further add to the mix, what we're doing is we're undergoing an independent, thorough analysis through the forestry centre as to what is the best scenario to respond to some of the firefighting challenges that we face. Is it towers? Is it planes? Is it a mixture of both? Both have their attributes.

And this independent assessment being done by the forestry centre, we anticipate that report to be received by this fall. And we'll certainly look at the ways and means in which we could improve our forest fire surveillance system and thus be very responsible when it comes to the taxpayers and the costs of operating the fire program throughout the province.

I would add that there's no question that we've had some success despite the fact that there's been droughts and the global warming challenges that we face. As an example, when we look at the Alberta cost of forest fire fighting, you're looking at well over 300 million. And last year — we've had a terrible year — that was their cost of operating in Alberta versus the 119 here in Saskatchewan.

So I think in doing the analysis that we're . . . While we're not doing anything negative towards Alberta, we're just simply reaffirming that our manner in which we fight fires, all the while improvements can be made, it's still something that we can be proud of.

**Ms. Julé:** — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Chairman, to the minister. Mr. Minister, in some of the previous questions regarding this issue of replacement of fire towers, it's my understanding that there are only, I think, five or six towers that have been replaced and rebuilt. And one of my colleagues brought up when they were speaking with you last during estimates that there was some question about whether those towers — the new towers — were safe in themselves.

We have heard that there weren't even guide wires, so I'm not too sure who was monitoring this, but that is of concern to me. If there's going to be money put into this kind of thing, I think that we would certainly . . . I would hope that you would monitor the situation from here on in ensuring that whoever gets the contracts to do these is constructing them in a safe manner.

Mr. Minister, are there aerial . . . airplane depots for aerial surveillance in northern Saskatchewan? And I would ask you if you could inform the Assembly which airline company is in fact contracted to do aerial surveillance right at this time.

**Hon. Mr. Belanger:** — Okay. Thank you very much. Certainly we appreciate the concern in reference to the safety of the towers. And there is two different type of towers that we have developed. One is almost . . . like both of them are on three, three sections so it is kind of a tripod style tower. And then one, of course, has an extension and then the observation deck versus the second scenario or second satellite tower which has the three legs that protrude and, of course, the observation deck directly on top of those three legs.

And we are aware of the sway factor. I think roughly the sway factor is about a foot either way. We've mitigated that somewhat. Although the design, we've been assured by the engineering firm that the design is safe. It is felt that there was . . . because of the concerns that the firefighters or observation officers may express, we put a collar and guide wires as well to make sure that these, the observation decks with the extensions on them are more sturdy and certainly again with the concurrence and blessing of the engineering firm.

In reference to the aircraft companies that we've hired, there are seven of them . . . I'm sorry, 12 of them in total. We have the Northern Dene. We have the Meadow Air. We have the Ile a la Crosse Airways. Again we have the Northern Dene with a different style aircraft. And then we have Pelican Narrows, Courtesy Air, Transwest, National Aviation, National Aviation — some of these companies I name twice because they bring two different types of aircraft to it — Mitchinsons and Jackson airways.

(20:45)

**Ms. Julé:** — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Chair, to the minister, I have a couple of direct questions to you and I would challenge you to answer yes or no to these questions, as you had requested one of my colleagues do just a few minutes ago.

So, Mr. Minister, after the Murdoch Carriere investigation was complete, did the minister get a copy of that finalized investigation report on his desk?

**Hon. Mr. Belanger:** — As the member may know, there is a lawsuit being logged against this government, and we will not be making any comments in reference to that particular matter.

**Ms. Julé:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. To the minister, one more direct question. Did the minister, did the minister get a copy of the deputy minister's response to that investigative report? Did the minister get a copy of that from the deputy minister or from anyone, to inform him of what the deputy minister's decision was in this case?

**Hon. Mr. Belanger:** — Once again, Mr. Chairman, I would point out to that member and the member very well knows, that this government's under a lawsuit and we refuse to make any comments on this matter pending the challenges associated with the lawsuit.

**Ms. Julé:** — Thank you. Mr. Minister, in response to the sexual harassment complaints, the report, and subsequent events that were brought to the attention of this House, the minister of the Public Service Commission asked for some clarification and a review into the zero harassment policy.

Mr. Minister, from your knowledge about that report and the recommendations that came forward, could you tell me today just what you think has been accomplished by that report? From your perspective as a minister, do you think that it's satisfactory? And after you answer that question, I would ask you one more question before turning questioning over to my other colleague.

**Hon. Mr. Belanger:** — Thank you very much. The department received a copy of the Public Service Commission review of the government's anti-harassment policy. We have distributed that review to the senior managers and are working with the Public Service Commission to implement the new provisions. So the answer is, we have received a copy and we are working with the PSC (Public Service Commission) to look at the new provisions.

**Ms. Julé:** — Thank you. Mr. Chair, to the minister, I didn't really ask you if you'd received a copy. Mr. Minister, what I

was wondering is, from your perspective as the Minister of the Environment, you were, you were . . . I guess it was your department that held a responsibility in a sense for this issue, and making sure there was policy in place and that the policy was understood, and that there was application of policy measures in place to ensure that that policy was carried out, and the consequences of sexual harassment would have been dealt with properly.

Now clearly that was not the case because even though there was a zero tolerance for sexual harassment policy in place, there weren't provisions for the application. And that's why the minister of public services ended up having the review done and new recommendations came forward from that.

From your perspective as a minister now, do you feel confident that if there were a situation that came forward like that again in your department, that all the gaps would have been filled in now, that you would have no concern about proper process taking place, as far as application of policy goes?

**Hon. Mr. Belanger:** — Thank you very much for the question. Again as I mentioned at the outset, we received a copy of the Public Service Commission's review of the government's anti-harassment policy. And certainly we're working with our staff in future situations and will continue to develop respectful workplace improvements. And of course, all our government's learning from this.

**Ms. Julé:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Minister, a more direct question. Mr. Minister, if someone came to you that was in the public service, that was working in any capacity in your department or under your department, and they complained to you of sexual harassment personally, what would you do with that complaint?

**Hon. Mr. Belanger:** — Certainly as we've maintained, the deputy minister, who's the permanent head, would be looking at the whole matters of the employees, and not the minister. And obviously there's an obligation to take it to the permanent head and the permanent head has to make sure that they take in every complaint. And zero tolerance means that every complaint will be dealt with seriously.

**Ms. Julé:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. To the minister, Mr. Minister, in the event . . . well I shouldn't say in the event. It's my understanding that some of the complainants, at least one, in the Murdoch Carriere harassment case did come to the minister's office, did speak with the minister's office, whether it was directly to the minister or not but they did come to Regina to talk to people in the department about the harassment that they were undergoing and they went home very disappointed — didn't seem to get a response that was looking into their best interests.

And so that's why I ask you the question, Mr. Minister. I mean some of this we don't know. I mean, we don't know. We hear both sides of things and . . . but I wanted to bring that to your attention.

Mr. Minister, there's one part of the recommendations that states that there will be a manager's checklist and that was a recommendation that was to assist managers in case complaints

came to a manager about sexual harassment.

However, where I see a bit of an impasse in some of the recommendations or I guess a gap in the recommendations is specifically, what if the harasser is the manager as it was in this situation? I don't see anything in those recommendations or application of the zero tolerance for sexual harassment policy as it stands now that would deal with an issue if the manager was the person that was committing the offence.

So, Mr. Minister, are you assured that in the event that a manager . . . in the future, a manager was the one that was committing the offence that there would be some measure that could be taken for a complainant? Because I don't . . . I'm not confident yet that that aspect of this whole issue has been resolved.

**Hon. Mr. Belanger:** — Thank you very much. I was not aware of any telephone calls or visits that I personally received as a minister in my minister's office of the complainant or any other individual coming forth to complain about harassment. And of course if we did, we would refer that matter to the permanent head.

And I'd also point out that we're not of course making any comments on any cases — that is to be said without even saying it.

(21:00)

And secondly, the other point is that while we would like to refer the specifics of the answer in reference to whether senior managers, if they are the problem here, that the Public Service Commission minister would give you the very specific answers as to how that situation would be handled, and I'd like to defer that answer to her at a later time for her to answer in detail.

However, there are many other access points that the person that may be feeling harassed at the job site, they can approach the human resources staff, they can approach their unions, they can approach other senior managers. There are various points that they can forward their concerns and complaints to besides their manager. But again, I would ask that that be clarified and expounded upon by the Public Service Commission minister.

**Mr. Weekes:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'd just like to thank the minister and his officials. We know the government has to get the next set of officials in for Learning estimates, and we look forward to the minister at the next set of estimates and hope the minister would be more open and co-operative at that time. So thank you very much.

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

**Hon. Mr. Hagel:** — Mr. Chair, having made extremely significant progress, I would move the committee report progress and proceed to estimates in Department of Learning.

**General Revenue Fund  
Learning  
Vote 5**

**Subvote (LR01)**

**The Deputy Chair:** — I recognize the minister and ask the minister to introduce her officials.

**Hon. Ms. Junor:** — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair. Beside me is Dr. Craig Dotson, deputy minister of Learning; beside Dr. Dotson is Dr. Michael Littlewood, executive director of school legislation and administration; and beside Dr. Littlewood is Joylene Campbell, Provincial Librarian, Provincial Library. Behind me is Nelson Wagner, executive director of facilities; beside Nelson is Dr. Margaret Lipp, executive director of Saskatchewan Learning; on Dr. Lipp's left is Don Sangster, executive director of school finance; behind Mr. Sangster is Glenda Eden, manager of financial planning corporate services; and behind Dr. Lipp is Kevin Hoyt, director of finance corporate services.

**The Deputy Chair:** — Thank you.

**Ms. Draude:** — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair. Welcome to the minister and welcome to your officials. I look forward to the opportunity to discuss a number of issues with you this evening.

And I know that all of us will realize in Saskatchewan when we talk about education most people don't really talk about education or what's happening in the school system as much as they talk about funding education. And it's the issue that I understand.

And I realize the minister and the Minister of Finance have put forward a commission that's going to be dealing with financing K to 12 (kindergarten to grade 12) education and they've announced that Ray Boughen of Moose Jaw has . . . is going to be heading this independent commission on financing education, K to 12.

It's something that I know the general public is going to be interested in and I'm also glad that the work is something that's going to be completed this year, although I would wonder if it will be completed in time to make a difference for next year's budget.

But this year's budget, Madam Minister, has concerned a number of school divisions already because even though the government says they've increased funding by \$32.3 million — and I agree there has been, it was 477.6 in 2002-2003 and this year, 2003-2004, it's 509.9 — but at the same time there was special warrants in September for 9.2 and for January for 6.9 for a total of 16.2. And that's half of the total amount of increase that we've been talking about.

Madam Minister, the calendar year increase for teachers' salary this year is going to be \$23.3 million and we already have 6.9 million of that. In order to keep your commitment, or the government's commitment to cover the teacher salary costs, we're going to need \$16.2 million be spent by the end of December.

Is the minister able to commit to paying the other \$7 million that'll be required to pay for the balance of the teachers' salary increase that was negotiated in the contract for the first three months of next year?

**Hon. Ms. Junor:** — Thank you for the question. We have

committed to paying the complete cost in 2002, which we did. We committed to pay the complete cost in 2003, which we did. We have not done our 2004 budgeting. That will remain to be seen.

**Ms. Draude:** — Thank you, Madam Minister. So I know that in a number of press releases and a number of times both the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Learning have indicated that the government is covering the increased costs of the teachers' salary negotiations but you were indicating that this is only to the end of this year, which will probably already send some shivers of worry down the back of a number of school boards.

Madam Minister, can you tell me what the basic cost of increasing the basic rate recognition to \$233 in most of the province and 254 for Regina and Saskatoon . . . what will be the total cost of that for the province for this year?

**Hon. Ms. Junor:** — Thank you. The total increase, year over year on the basic rates, was \$34.5 million.

**Ms. Draude:** — Madam Minister, could you also tell me what the increase for special education and transportation will be for this year?

**Hon. Ms. Junor:** — Year over year, increase in recognized expenditures in special ed was 1.9 million and in transportation, 2.2 million.

**Ms. Draude:** — Madam Minister, I know that on budget day or shortly thereafter, every school division gets a printout of the departmental increases and I'm wondering if we could receive a copy of that printout over here so we can look at some of the other increased costs.

**Hon. Ms. Junor:** — Yes, we can send you the printouts.

**Ms. Draude:** — I appreciate that, Madam Minister. On budget day the other thing that happened is that school boards were given . . . realized that the computational mill rate was increased by 0.4 which of course meant that there was going to be more money expected from the local boards. Can you tell me what that figure will amount to?

**Hon. Ms. Junor:** — Thank you. Changing the computational mill rate has no necessary effect on the local mill rate or the local taxes. It has a distributional effect on the grants. The point four mill rate increase in the recognized revenue in the formula is 15 million.

(21:15)

**Ms. Draude:** — Thank you, Madam Minister. So that does mean that there is \$15 million is going to be expected to come from taxpayers, from property owners because it decreases the amount of funding the boards can receive in provincial grants. So of course, as indicated when we first started this discussion, the number of school boards that talk about the education issue as a money issue is something that we all know is happening.

Earlier in this session we talked about the fact that there are 65 school boards that are going to be in . . . 65 per cent of school

boards will be increasing their mill rate this year. And from the information I've received, there are eight school divisions who actually are going down. Everybody else is going to have to go up.

Madam Minister, I have had some letters from some school divisions, and I'm sure you've received the same thing, where they are indicating that because of a decline in enrolment the money that they were receiving from a provincial grant will not be enough to cover the salary increases. Davidson school board is saying that. Outlook school board is saying that. Rosetown, which is a zero grant board, is forced to close one school and cut back funding to another school. And the list goes on and on.

It's a huge issue. It's something that has to be addressed and when we talked about the . . . listened to the government talk about education being a priority, this is something that has to be looked at in the near future so that we can actually encourage the people to move to this province.

Madam Minister, I've had a letter from Bankend School who is really concerned about keeping their school open and they've . . . I'm not sure if you had the opportunity to receive this letter as well, but I want to read you part of it. And the lady has indicated that we should live up to what we're trying to promote in this province of Saskatchewan and that is in Saskatchewan our future is wide open.

Securing the future of Rural Saskatchewan, which includes . . . communities, schools, people, and especially . . . children, who will be our future, is the most essential priority we can have today.

Integration, amalgamation, (and) degradation seems to be what happens every time we change the structure of this Province. For example, look at health care, we allowed integration and amalgamation to happen and now (what do we have left). There are very few, if any hospitals left in Rural Saskatchewan . . . leaving residents trying to obtain health care.

We are securing your . . . asking for help in securing our rural schools and the future of the children in Saskatchewan.

Madam Minister, what is your government reply to the school boards and to parents who are very concerned because the amount of funding that is given to schools is not adequate to keep the schools open?

**Hon. Ms. Junor:** — Thank you. The issue facing rural school boards . . . school boards of education is particularly declining enrolments. Despite the declining enrolments, we have increased provincial operating grants every year. And particularly one of them that I'll mention is the isolated schools which we have an isolated school factor that we calculate in for truly isolated schools which we're spending \$16 million on.

**Ms. Draude:** — Madam Minister, there's been a decrease in the number of students in Saskatchewan over the last five years. And even though there may have been some increased money, when you think about the number of students per pupil grant, you don't have to be spending more money on students because we have a lot fewer students than we used to have. It's not a . . .

It's something that every time that statement is made there are a number of school boards who are very frustrated because when you spend the same amount of money on fewer students, of course there's going to be more money per student.

So it's not something that we can say, hey look, we're really doing something great because the people of the province still know that they're paying more money in property taxes to cover not just costs of the salaries, but support staff and education and 22 per cent increase in SaskEnergy and all those type of expenses that are beyond the control of school boards. So I take it school boards are going to find little solace in saying that there's been an increase in the isolated school factor. I'm hoping that your department is looking at a bigger issue than that.

Madam Minister, I'd like to go on to the issue of libraries because I know last year we, the Department of Learning took over the library system from Municipal Government, and I'm wondering if you can give me first of all an outline of what's happening in the library system, how if anything has changed now that it's now part of the Department of Learning.

**Hon. Ms. Junor:** — The public library system has not changed as a result of its coming under the Department of Learning.

**Ms. Draude:** — And, Minister, how many people are employed in the provincial library system?

**Hon. Ms. Junor:** — There are 27.3 people employed in the department, the Provincial Library branch. We don't know how many people are employed out in the library system itself; they're not our employees.

**Ms. Draude:** — Madam Minister, there must have been a reason for moving libraries from Municipal Government into Learning. If there was no changes, then there was no point in doing it. Maybe you'd care to further expand on what is actually happening now that the libraries is under the Department of Learning.

**Hon. Ms. Junor:** — Just a little bit of history. The department of Municipal Affairs and Housing no longer exists, which was where libraries were housed. Now we've put into . . . under one department four separate entities which are early childhood development, K to 12, most of post-secondary, and the provincial library system. And of course Learning has focused on lifelong learning, and the provincial library system supports lifelong learning outside of institutions.

**Ms. Draude:** — Madam Minister, I'm sure that you're aware last year when this change happened, a move from Municipal Government which is no longer in existence — I guess it's Government Relations, I am corrected — there must have been a reason and I do know of some cases where the library system was into the school and it worked very well.

I'm wondering if you've had any . . . you've measured some outcomes, if you've had any reports back saying, this is a good idea, this is a bad idea. What is actually happening out in the real world when it comes to moving libraries into the Department of Learning?



**Hon. Ms. Junor:** — The combination of the four separate entities in the department has only been ongoing for the last year, as we all know. There are continuing to be explorations of partnerships and synergies that can be developed between the library system and the colleges, the library system and SIAST (Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology), the library system and the universities, and the library system and the schools.

If you're talking about combining local public libraries in schools, this is a local decision and that is governed by The Public Libraries Act. And when they do agree to a joint facilities, they have . . . it provides there has to be a written agreement. And the written agreement allows the parties to define the purpose and the common vision and to address potential problem areas. The successful implementation depends on the involvement in the agreement from the key players including the regional library boards, the local library boards, the municipal councils, and the school division boards.

**Ms. Draude:** — Thank you, Madam Minister. How many agreements or potential agreements have been signed or are being worked on between towns and regional libraries in a town and maybe between the school showing that they actually are interested in having some sort of shared facility.

**Hon. Ms. Junor:** — There are approximately . . . there are 30 such agreements in place. The most successful is the joint venture library in Tisdale where the community complex includes grades 6 to 12, regional college, a community health clinic, a performing arts theatre, and a library that delivers school, college, and public library services. And this was due to local community development of this initiative — the success.

**Ms. Draude:** — Thank you, Madam Minister. I knew that you would get excited about this. Madam Minister, how many regional libraries are there in the province?

**Hon. Ms. Junor:** — Seven.

**Ms. Draude:** — And is there still a number of mobile book vans in the province?

**Hon. Ms. Junor:** — Wheatland has the only one left.

**Ms. Draude:** — Madam Minister . . .

**Hon. Ms. Junor:** — Second part to the answer, in the Saskatoon public division.

**Ms. Draude:** — Thank you, Madam Minister. So I . . . there is no tracking by the Department of Learning as to the number of employees there are in these various regional libraries around the province, I understand. Is there set salary rates for them? Are they part of any of the unions that are within the Department of Learning system?

(21:30)

**Hon. Ms. Junor:** — Some employees are unionized and some are not. The ones that are unionized are represented by CUPE (Canadian Union of Public Employees) and we have nothing to do with the collective bargaining process setting any of the

things like wages or hours of work that are covered by collective agreements.

**Ms. Draude:** — Madam Minister, I see that there is an increase in this part of the Department of Learning of about, I believe, \$11,000. Can you give me an idea of where this money is going to?

**Hon. Ms. Junor:** — This year's budget provided for an increase in the grant pool for public libraries, the provincial public libraries, and those monies are being distributed according to a formula.

**Ms. Draude:** — Madam Minister, what kind of formula? Is it the formula that your department has brought forward or is it something that's happening in each region?

This is something that's great. It's exciting. It's an opportunity to do something to get people working together in the community, to get the school system part of the town system, to have people . . . When we have the library in the school, we're going to have people using the school for more than just education of K to 12 students.

I think it's something that could work very well. It can save some money. It could be an opportunity for people to actually feel like they're back into the school system and the school being part of the community again.

So I'm wondering, can you give me some more information and show me that this is something that we're going to be building on? We've talked about amalgamation of school divisions. Are we talking about working these library systems into the . . . into a . . . town offices into the schools? Are you sending letters out to town councils? What are you doing to encourage to people to ensure . . . to make sure that they know what's happened with this new move?

**Hon. Ms. Junor:** — Thank you. The formula that we use for distributing the money to the public libraries is a formula that's been recommended by a committee of professionals in the library system — and it's been in place for several years — so we took their recommendations and continue to disburse the money through that formula.

We too are excited about what libraries can do — connecting to schools, universities, colleges — and the thing that we're seeing that's very exciting is the e-library services. With CommunityNet now out in the communities, it's being able to connect the schools and the colleges and the campuses; and this is where people are going to learn differently and learn outside of institutions that we traditionally have seen.

So this is very exciting and it is one of the reasons why we've put together a department that covers all the learning and the learning avenues and venues and capacity that we have in our whole province.

**Ms. Draude:** — Thank you, Madam Minister. We're really warming up now because this I think is something that can be exciting. Can all the libraries now, the regional libraries are all connected to the Internet, are you saying?

**Hon. Ms. Junor:** — Thank you. All regional libraries are connected to the Internet and about half of the provincial library branches are connected to CommunityNet, which is about 170.

**Ms. Draude:** — Madam Minister, can you give us an idea of what the per capita grant is for the libraries?

**Hon. Ms. Junor:** — The amount of money will vary region to region according to the formula.

**Ms. Draude:** — Madam Minister, does that mean that a small town will receive less money than a larger place?

**Hon. Ms. Junor:** — Like the funding that goes to the school boards, it goes to the whole area the school board covers. So the funding to the public library goes to the region, not individual towns. But if there is a particular region that you're interested in, we can give you that. If that's . . . if you've got some particular one in mind, we can find that out.

**Ms. Draude:** — Could you give me the information on the Wheatland area, please?

**Hon. Ms. Junor:** — We don't have it here, but we will send it to you.

**Ms. Draude:** — Thank you, Madam Minister. If you can get me the information for this year and last year, that would be great.

Madam Minister, the equipment that's in these libraries, are they owned . . . Is some of the assets on the books of the Department of Learning or do they all belong to the libraries?

**Hon. Ms. Junor:** — None of the assets belong to the department. Legally they belong to the regional libraries.

**Ms. Julé:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Good evening to the minister and her officials. Madam Minister, I just wanted to ask you, it's sort of a general question and it would be thoughts on policy development in education and the certain services, facilities needed, and that kind of thing.

I read with some interest how the Saskatoon (East) School Division, Saskatoon (East) board, dealt with their budget process this year. They said they have completed another challenging budget process, and they go on to say in this memorandum:

This year the board was faced with teacher salary increases negotiated by the provincial government which effected costs in the range of \$400,000. The board also faced a 25 per cent increase in insurance premiums and between 20 to 22 per cent in fuel costs. Our net grant increase from the provincial government was \$147,000.

So this did leave them in a precarious situation. What they did was they made cuts to peripheral programs and they transferred some money from reserves so that they could deal with the situation. They also increased their mill rate by 2.64 per cent in order to balance their budget. So their new mill rate is set at 19.81 right now.

I don't want or expect you to have to start tabulating anything with these figures. What I was finding about this information that was really quite commendable was that this same school division was looking for ways to find efficiencies and savings and in order to provide that they entered into a partnership with the Saskatchewan Valley School Division to share busing facilities and personnel. That partnership is going to save them \$67,000 this year, and contribute to a lower rate of taxation than otherwise they might have had to impose on taxpayers.

So, Madam Minister, I'm . . . when I read this it reminds me of something I see in some of the cities. In Regina when I'm here throughout the legislative session, as well in Saskatoon, is just great numbers of school buses travelling within small areas. And some of them no doubt are for the Catholic school division, some for the public school division, and some for the French schools.

And it has occurred to me, and I know my colleague from Kelvington-Wadena has mentioned this before and she may have entered into discussion about it with you, but have you ever explored the possibility of getting those players together from those different school divisions and suggesting that possibly partnerships would be very beneficial in cutting costs?

It just seems that if these two school divisions did this and they're experiencing a great saving in the cost of busing, that it might be very advantageous for other school divisions within the province to look at doing the same.

And I'm wondering if there has been negotiations, discussions, whatever you choose to call it, to effect this kind of a change so we would have more efficiencies.

(21:45)

**Hon. Ms. Junor:** — Thank you. It's difficult for the department to know what individual school divisions and their neighbours need. So while we support initiatives that different divisions have started and have entered into with their neighbours, we can't bring people to the table without knowing they don't share the same routes; they don't . . . we don't know what they all share. They themselves at a local level are developing partnerships and entering into agreements that are finding efficiencies and are serving their populations quite well.

**Ms. Julé:** — Thank you, Madam Minister. Madam Minister, do you have knowledge of any other school divisions that have partnered for sharing their busing services?

**Hon. Ms. Junor:** — A couple of examples. Buffalo Plains, Cupar, and Indian Head are sharing buses. Eston, Elrose, and Rosetown are sharing a bus garage. Those are a couple of examples of ongoing . . . and that's been going on for quite a few years.

**Ms. Draude:** — Thank you, Madam Minister. Madam Minister, I know that with the cutback for capital construction this year there's a number of school divisions that are concerned about where they are on the priority list for building. And Hudson Bay School Division has been talking about . . . talking lately, I guess, for a number of years about the school in Porcupine Plain.

I know that they had made a B-1 application, that Mr. Kirby had been out in 2001 and in 2002 again. And this year when they saw the decrease to the budget, they were concerned and they were wondering where this facility is on the list of priorities for your department.

**Hon. Ms. Junor:** — The priority list comes out in June and Porcupine Plain, as other divisions that have submitted priorities, will find out in June where they are on the list.

**Ms. Draude:** — Madam Minister, this morning the Council of Ministers of Education Canada released the results of a major national writing test under the school achievement indicators program. The assessment was administered to 24,000 13- and 16-year-olds in all the provinces and territories except for Nunavut.

The results among 13-year-olds in Saskatchewan is very troubling compared to their peers in Alberta, BC (British Columbia), Manitoba, and really in Canada as a whole. According to the test, on a scale of 1 to 5, 13-year-olds should be achieving scores that would put them in at least a level 2.

According to the results released this morning, there are significant concerns in Saskatchewan. Among 13-year-olds tested in this province, 25 per cent did not attain level 2 scores. This is quite different from the results in other Western provinces. In Manitoba and Alberta, 17 per cent didn't achieve the level 2 scores, and in BC it jumped to 20 per cent, and then 17 per cent as a whole when we look at Canada.

When we examine the results in this way, there is significantly greater numbers of students in Saskatchewan who are not achieving the level they should be compared to the rest of Canada. When we look at the number of 13-year-olds in Saskatchewan who did achieve the appropriate scores, they are still almost 8 per cent below the national numbers.

Can the minister tell us what . . . if her department is concerned about the results and what they think could be done to improve the students' performances.

**Hon. Ms. Junor:** — We're quite proud of our school system but we do know that there are things that can change. We have a curriculum called the Evergreen Curriculum which means it's always changing, and it's changing in response to survey results. And we participate in surveys at several different levels and with different national/provincial partners so that we can continually improve our system and our way of teaching.

**Ms. Draude:** — Madam Minister, this result . . . these tests that we received today, or the results of the tests that we received today should be, and I'm sure are, very upsetting to a number of people. Because I do believe that we have a good school system and yet when we do measure up, there seems to be a problem here. And I know that whenever there's a problem as in education or as in any other department, as soon as you look at it, as soon as you realize that there is a problem, the sooner we can start working on a solution.

So I know a couple of years ago we had a concern about math scores and that's something that was worked on. And now we're seeing that 13-year-olds have problems in this area. I

know . . . I'm not blaming teachers. I'm definitely not blaming school boards. I'm saying that there's an issue here that has to be dealt with. What is your department going to be doing as quickly as possible to deal with this issue?

**Hon. Ms. Junor:** — As you pointed out, the results have just come today. And this isn't something that we respond to in a knee-jerk way. We have several things that we'll be doing. We'll be looking at the results within the department, and then we'll be looking at the results with our partners, and then we'll be looking at a joint solution to what we can see as our options to address the results.

We have a detailed assessment for learning process. This year it's focused on mathematics and next will be the English language. So this isn't something that these 13-year-olds acquired today or yesterday. This is something that has been acquired over time and will take some time to address.

**Ms. Draude:** — Madam Minister, we are . . . I understand that it's not something that can be solved overnight. But I also know, as I know your department knows, that when it comes to building this province and it comes to growing the province, we're going to need a skilled, educated workforce. And it means that everybody has to be involved.

When we understand that there is a problem and we are given the information that shows there is a problem, we have to be dealing with it immediately. And yes, of course there has to be consultation but there has to be an immediate reaction and a knowledge that things are going to change. Because to continue to do the same things over and over again when you know there's a problem is definitely not going to be helping our students who are the key to the future of this province.

So I'll be waiting to hear what you're . . . what you and your department are going to be doing to deal with this issue.

The math issue is something that I understand is still being talked about. I understand that things move slowly in government but when we're talking about children that are three or four years away from graduating, we don't have a lot of time to be working with them. They have a lot of things that are going to be changing.

Madam Minister, one area of Learning that we think we need to discuss is the correspondence classes. And I know now with Internet and with some of the programs that are available on-line, that correspondence is . . . maybe the importance of it and the uses of it is maybe decreasing. Can you give me an idea of the number of students that are taking correspondence classes and the number of classes they're taking?

**Hon. Ms. Junor:** — There are approximately 5,000 people registered at any given time, which has remained constant for quite a while. The increase that we do see is in on-line correspondence and learning.

**Ms. Draude:** — Madam Minister, it's kind of surprising to me that there isn't a decrease in the number of students taking correspondence classes with the on-line learning capabilities.

Is your department discussing this issue? Is there any

encouragement to see students use the on-line method rather than the correspondence classes? And can you again tell me how many classes they're taking?

**Hon. Ms. Junor:** — The consistent 5,000 number has reflected a modest decrease in the pencil and paper type of correspondence, and an increase in the on-line correspondence.

**Ms. Draude:** — Madam Minister, is there a breakdown between the traditional pencil-paper type of correspondence and the on-line?

**Hon. Ms. Junor:** — I'm . . . certainly there is and we'll send it to you.

**Ms. Draude:** — Madam Minister, is there a difference in cost, and can you tell me what the cost is for taking these courses?

**Hon. Ms. Junor:** — It's 350 for the print correspondence method, and 500 for the televised learning. There's no charge right now for the on-line learning since it's in the . . . still in the developmental stage.

**Ms. Draude:** — That answer leads me to believe that there is going to be a cost in the future for the on-line learning. Can you tell me how much money the department receives from these courses and tell me where it shows up in estimates?

(22:00)

**Hon. Ms. Junor:** — There is estimated revenue in the current year of \$2 million.

**Ms. Draude:** — Madam Minister, on page 93 of Estimates, it says, correspondence school revolving fund as subsidy. Can you explain that, and will you also explain what the statutory recovery is?

**Hon. Ms. Junor:** — The 439,000 is the amount that we subsidize the program for. The \$2 million revenue plus the 439,000 — that's the cost of the program.

**Ms. Draude:** — So this 2.439 million means that that's what it costs to have the 5,000 students taking these courses. And what does this statutory recovery mean?

**Hon. Ms. Junor:** — We don't have the official here to provide that answer but we will provide it for you.

**Ms. Draude:** — Thank you, Madam Minister. I didn't mean to ask you a question you didn't have the official here for.

Can you tell me how many teachers are involved in this correspondence school and perhaps what the other costs are besides the cost of hiring teachers for marking these exams?

**Hon. Ms. Junor:** — There's 22 FTEs (full-time equivalents) of teachers in the correspondence branch from the Department of Learning. And the other costs are the cost of materials and the cost of exams — marking and exams.

**Ms. Draude:** — Madam Minister, in a number of provinces they have virtual classrooms now. Is this something that the

department's looking at?

**Hon. Ms. Junor:** — A lot of our on-line courses are offered where the teacher is in one place and the students are all over the province, so the province itself is almost a virtual classroom.

**Ms. Draude:** — Thank you, Madam Minister. The number of classes . . . out of the 5,000 courses that are being offered right now or being taken right now, are there more in rural Saskatchewan? Or I guess what I'm asking is if there's more of a shift in the number of classes that are being taken in rural areas where perhaps there's a difficulty getting teachers to fill positions in math, science, that type of thing.

**Hon. Ms. Junor:** — Rural schools do access the system, both in print and television more so, but so do urban students because there are congregated masses of them. But yes, rural schools do have a high incidence of usage.

**Ms. Draude:** — Madam Minister, there's a number of schools in the province now that are joint-use facilities, and there is a differing opinion on them, depending who you talk to. And I'm wondering, after some time now, if your department has a position on it and if you can expound on what you feel are the virtues or the problems with joint-use facilities?

**Hon. Ms. Junor:** — There's basically two kinds of joint use, and one of them is the high school/college model and that's in Yorkton, Estevan, Weyburn, North Battleford, and Melfort. And people are very happy with this model. They share several things in the buildings, most notably the industrial arts capacity of the schools.

And the second one is the K to 12 where two schools share, like Yorkton Catholic and Yorkton Public, and Regina Catholic and Regina Public.

**Ms. Draude:** — Has there been any assessment made to determine if there's actually any real savings in the school system, between the public and Catholic system, when there's a joint-use facility as opposed to two separate buildings?

**Hon. Ms. Junor:** — The department okayed joint-use facilities with the understanding that there . . . or the expectation that there would be a 10 per cent cost in capital . . . or reduction in capital costs and the cost of land. And we believe that that has happened in the examples I have cited.

**Ms. Draude:** — Madam Minister, you say you believe that's happened. Has the schools actually showed you that that has happened when it came to the actual construction costs? I've had indication that there was no savings in the construction and I am also wondering what their . . . what the thoughts are in the operation of the school building. Has there been any analysis to determine if there's any cost savings in the operation of the building — a shared-use facility as opposed to a single facility?

**Hon. Ms. Junor:** — We've not analyzed the cost of operations of joint-use schools. And what we do believe that the expected 10 per cent savings in capital construction and land acquisition has been achieved.

**Ms. Draude:** — Madam Minister, are there any joint-use facilities on the books right now or planned for in the future?

**Hon. Ms. Junor:** — There are school divisions that are discussing the joint use of their capital projects that they're ongoing at the moment that haven't finalized their presentations.

**Ms. Draude:** — Madam Minister, there are a number of school divisions feel that they are going to go up the priority list quicker if they do say they'll be a joint-use facility. I don't know if the boards actually feel that this is going to be a benefit to their students individually or whether they just believe it's the only way they're going to be able to get the school, and get the school more quickly.

I would think until there was an analysis done to determine if there's actually a cost benefit, not just in building the school but in the operation of the school, it should be something where it's not held over the school board's head as a hammer to ensure that they would get a joint-use facility as opposed to a stand-alone facility.

(22:15)

Madam Minister, I would ask that . . . your comment on that to tell me if it is something that is used in the priority listing when determining which schools are going to be built.

And also, as we're going to be closing, I'd like to thank your officials very much for their help this evening.

**Hon. Ms. Junor:** — Yes, there is a modest premium given to the joint-use proposal. And I'd like to thank you for your questions, and thank the officials tonight for attending.

The committee reported progress.

The Assembly adjourned at 22:19.



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