

The Assembly met at 10:00.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRESENTING PETITIONS

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise again today to present a petition on behalf of people who are very concerned about the shape of Highway No. 49.

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to repair Highway 49 in order to address safety concerns and to facilitate economic growth in our area.

The people that have signed this petition are from Kelvington, Nut Mountain, Lintlaw, and Wadena.

Mr. Elhard: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I stand to present a petition on behalf of constituents and individuals from just outside my constituency concerning crop insurance premiums. The prayer reads as follows, Mr. Speaker:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to take the necessary steps to have Saskatchewan Crop Insurance reverse the 2003 premium increases and restore affordable crop insurance premiums to our struggling farmers.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

Signatories to this petition, Mr. Speaker, come from the communities of Frontier and Climax.

I so present.

Mr. Stewart: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to present a petition signed by citizens concerned with the dangerous and deplorable condition of Highway No. 43 in my constituency. And the prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to repair Highway 43 in order to address safety concerns and to facilitate economic growth in rural Saskatchewan.

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

Mr. Speaker, this petition is signed by individuals from the communities of Palmer, Loreburn, Assiniboia, Gravelbourg, Lafleche, and Swift Current.

I so present.

Ms. Eagles: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, again today I rise to present a petition on behalf of people from my constituency who have grave concerns over the condition of Highway 47 South. And the prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon.

Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to take immediate action and make necessary repairs to Highway 47 South in order to avoid serious injury and property damage.

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

Mr. Speaker, this is signed by citizens of Lampman and Estevan.

I so present. Thank you.

Ms. Bakken: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to present a petition on behalf of citizens of Saskatchewan who are concerned that Moose Jaw is currently without a satellite dialysis unit and the residents of that area are forced to drive to Regina for life-saving medical treatment at their own cost. And the prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to take necessary action to provide the people of Moose Jaw and district with a hemodialysis unit for their community.

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

And the petition is signed by residents of Lafleche, Glentworth, and Edmonton, Alberta.

I so present.

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise again with a petition from citizens of rural Saskatchewan who are very concerned about the contemplated changes to the policy for leasing Crown land. And the prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the provincial government to take the necessary steps to ensure current Crown land lessees maintain their first option to renew those leases.

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

And, Mr. Speaker, this is signed by the good citizens of Kyle and White Bear.

I so present.

Mr. Brkich: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition here with citizens from city of Moose Jaw, concerned with dialysis.

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to take the necessary action to provide the people of Moose Jaw and district with a hemodialysis unit for their community.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

And signed by the good citizens from Moose Jaw, and also I see one from Tuxford.

I so present.

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also have a petition from citizens concerned about the increased premiums to crop insurance. The prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to take the necessary steps to have Sask Crop Insurance reverse the 2003 premium increases and restore affordable crop insurance premiums to our struggling farmers.

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

Signed by the good citizens of Biggar and district.

I so present.

READING AND RECEIVING PETITIONS

Deputy Clerk: — According to order the following petitions have been reviewed and are hereby read and received as addendums to previously tabled petitions being sessional paper nos. 12, 13, 36, 41, 100, 114, and 119.

NOTICES OF MOTIONS AND QUESTIONS

Ms. Bakken: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I give notice that I shall on day no. 53 ask the government the following question:

To the Minister of Justice: for the year 1996 how many Provincial Court judges were in Saskatchewan; who were they and where was each assigned; and in that year, who was or were the Provincial Court judges assigned to Weyburn?

And I'd like the same question for the years 1997, 1998, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2002, and to the present date.

I so present.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Mr. Iwanchuk: — Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to the Assembly, in the west gallery, 75 students from Father Vachon School in Saskatoon. And I'd also like to introduce their teachers, Shawn Lorenz, Rob Brossart, Paul Sanche, Shirley Mang, and they have four chaperones with them as well.

Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the teachers and chaperones who have taken their time to bring the students here to study the proceedings and to see this wonderful building and its heritage. And to the students I say, have an awesome day and I look forward to meeting with you after your tour. And I ask all members of the Assembly to welcome these students.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Members of the Assembly, seated in the Speaker's gallery are four guests whom I would like to introduce at this time. These are parents and siblings of one of our pages, that is of Curtis Dow, and they are — and I would

ask them to give a little wave as I introduce them — mother, Judy Dow; father, Cameron Dow; brother, Tyler; and sister, Andrea.

They have come here to visit our legislature all the way from Invermere, British Columbia, which is also Curtis's home. Curtis reached in a hat; he picked Regina to go to school in and we're glad he did. And let's show our appreciation for the visit from the Dows.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Mr. Speaker, I'd just like to join with you in welcoming the Dows to the legislature. I went to school with Curtis's father, Cameron, and his brother, Colin, and sister, Sheena, both at Estey School and Mount Royal Collegiate in Saskatoon. And I remember their late father and I remember them from school.

And I'd like to welcome them also to the Legislative Assembly. It's good to see them today.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

World War II Veteran Honoured

Mr. Goulet: — Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the Assembly to say that Solomon Goulet, a proud Métis from Cumberland, is today receiving a special medal of recognition from the people of Belgium for his role as a soldier in the liberation of that country.

Mr. Speaker, many of our people fought for their country and for the liberation of Europe. Many of them never made it home. It is indeed an honour to pay due respect to Solomon Goulet and his comrades for their courage, bravery, and sacrifice.

Mr. Speaker, we thank the people of Belgium for honouring our veterans and hope that before all our veterans pass on, a way will be found for a full and lasting legacy to all of them, including Métis and First Nations veterans.

As the MLA (Member of the Legislative Assembly) for Cumberland House it is indeed a special pride that I honour my uncle, Solomon Goulet, as one of the many veterans who put their life on the line for our country and for lasting peace. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Grand Opening of Saskatchewan Landing Golf Course

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This past Wednesday I had the pleasure of attending the grand opening of Saskatchewan's newest 18-hole golf course located in the Rosetown-Biggar constituency.

The Saskatchewan Landing Golf and Country Club is located along the north shore of Lake Diefenbaker in the Saskatchewan Landing Provincial Park on Highway No. 4, just south of Kyle and just north of Swift Current.

The club pro, Jeff Gross, brags about the scenic 6,930-yard, par 72, link-style course. Much of the money to build the \$2.2 million course was raised by the local board, according to president, Don Evans.

The Saskatchewan Landing Golf and Country Club also boasts a beautiful, spacious clubhouse with a great view of the lake and the South Saskatchewan Landing bridge. It contains a pro shop, rentals; it offers lessons and a driving range, and dining services to customers.

Also, just a golf ball's throw from the clubhouse, down at the marina, a superb minigolf course was also officially opened on May 28. Marina Mini Golf is owned and operated by Dale Hope and Lynn Fox. It has a beautifully landscaped marine and nature theme with a tee-to-hole links from 26 to 57 feet. Many shots are either uphill or downhill on the exciting course.

Congratulations to the Marina Mini Golf and the Saskatchewan Landing Golf and Country Club on their big day and a very good future.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

50th Anniversary of the Saskatchewan Teachers' College

Mr. Addley: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, 50 years and some few weeks ago the Saskatchewan legislature passed a Bill which changed the name of the old Saskatoon Normal School to Saskatchewan Teachers' College.

More than the name was changed, Mr. Speaker. As a teacher yourself, you will know that the Saskatchewan Teachers' College, which eventually became the university's department of Education, was instrumental in training teachers of the post-war generation who in turn prepared our parents and perhaps many of us for the challenging, complex modern life of the second half of the 20th century.

Woodrow Lloyd, then the minister of Education, urged the first graduates of the Teachers' College to lead their students by example because, as he said:

Example is stronger than precept, and imitation is the most immediate form of learning.

Sound advice that still applies to teachers and individual citizens alike.

Mr. Speaker, the first graduating class of the Saskatchewan Teachers' College is holding a 50th anniversary reunion next week in Saskatoon. These students began their studies in the Normal School in 1952 and graduated from the Teachers' College on the old Avenue A campus in 1953. In fact the reunion will begin at the same building, now the E. A. Davis Centre.

Mr. Speaker, I'd love to be a fly on the wall at this gathering to hear the stories of former profs, student romances, first jobs, and so on. Fortunately I do have a source. My father, Angus Addley, was one of those students. And I know all the members will wish him and his fellow graduates of the first class of the Saskatchewan Teachers' College a happy reunion.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Canadian Forces Day

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, today I rise in the Assembly to ask all members of the House to formally recognize this Sunday, June 1, as the second annual Canadian Forces Day.

Mr. Speaker, this day was proclaimed to reflect Canada's deep and heartfelt gratitude for those members of our country's army, navy, and air force. Every day at home and abroad thousands of men and women risk their own lives for our freedom, our peace, and our security. They do so without a second thought to their safety and we owe them a great deal.

Mr. Speaker, the theme for this year's Canadian Forces Day is, Protecting Canadian Values at Home and Abroad. Current world events like Iraq, Afghanistan, Rwanda, and the Balkans have increased attention on bringing some measure of peace and security to shattered communities and, at the same time, do all that is possible to combat terrorism. And with our world in so much upheaval, Mr. Speaker, Canada's well-trained and courageous forces are in greater demand than ever before.

To those who think of the Canadian forces only serving overseas, we remind them that when our country's communities suffer great natural disasters, our Canadian forces are called upon for assistance. Whether it be floods, tornado, or an ice storm, their courageous and tireless efforts continue to reunite families and restore order to communities, and that cannot be dismissed lightly.

Mr. Speaker, as one who served in Canada's military and has seen first-hand the devastation that can be brought following disasters of war, I'm honoured to have been able to serve my country in this manner.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all members of the Assembly to recognize the second annual Canadian Forces Day this Sunday and to say a heartfelt thanks to those men and women who have done so much for our country. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Summer Programs for Saskatoon Community Groups

Hon. Ms. Junor: — Mr. Speaker, today on behalf of the Minister of Culture, Youth and Recreation, I will be presenting \$4,000 from the Communities Initiatives Fund to the Saskatchewan Cerebral Palsy Association for its Camp Critter program.

Camp Critter is a wheelchair-accessible day camp specifically designed for children four to six who have cerebral palsy or other neuro-motor disabilities. Some of the daily programming will include sharing circles, stories, and field trips. The camp is fun for the kids and provides their parents some welcome respite.

(10:15)

As well, Mr. Speaker, on May 19, the Sturby Place Tenant Association of Saskatoon was also presented with \$4,000 from the CIF (Community Initiatives Fund) to help with its summer programs. These programs will be offered to children under the age of eight from Sturby Place. Activities will include arts and crafts, trips to libraries, and outdoor sports.

Mr. Speaker, the summer programs offered by these community organizations provide opportunities for children that they might not otherwise have. And as part of our commitment to healthy families in vibrant communities, the government is happy to support their efforts. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Prairie West Regional College Graduation

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last night I had the privilege of attending the graduation at the Prairie West Regional College in Warman, Saskatchewan. And it was exciting because the number of graduates has probably doubled or tripled what it's been in the past years.

And I'd just like to give a couple of numbers of what happened there. In adult education for grade 12, there were seven graduates; grade 10, there was one; one took office education. A rather interesting one, teacher assistants, Mr. Speaker, there were 41 graduates for that particular area, and that's because the Saskatchewan Valley School Division has done an outstanding job in special education; also some extra pressure put on them because Social Services puts a lot of students into that school division for the extra help that's given. Truck driving training was seven and youth care worker was fourteen.

So it was a large event and it was an exciting event. And I think special recognition goes to the staff that's been involved in the instruction, the educational partners that are involved in that, and also the families.

Last night was exciting because all of the graduates had quite a number of family people there who had to provide a lot of support for those individuals to get their particular classes and also to the graduates who have worked very hard in some very difficult circumstances to go ahead and get their certificates. So congratulations to those grads, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Saskatchewan Students Win Awards At National Science Fair

Hon. Mr. Wartman: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, a couple of weeks ago I made a statement about some bright and talented students from this province who were going to Calgary to compete in the Canada-Wide Science Fair.

Mr. Speaker, it is no small feat to get to the national level. These students had already competed against more than 1,500 others in regional science fairs across the province to win the right to move on and compete against students from all across the country.

And now, Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to report that two students

from Saskatchewan won national awards. Mr. Speaker, Brittany Faye of Foam Lake won a bronze medal in the engineering category for a project titled Canola, a Choice for Light, in which Ms. Faye used canola oil to produce efficient, environmentally friendly candles.

And, Mr. Speaker, Jonathon Berthiaume of Regina won a bronze medal in the life sciences category for a project called Dogs versus Humans, that compared the bacteria found in a dog's mouth to that of its owner — interesting, maybe somewhat unappetizing, as an idea.

Anyway, Mr. Speaker, I ask all my colleagues to join me in congratulating Ms. Faye and Mr. Berthiaume on their accomplishment. It is thanks to inquisitive and innovative young people like them and their fellow contestants that Saskatchewan's future is truly wide open. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ORAL QUESTIONS

Consequences of Occurrence of Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

Mr. Hermanson: — Mr. Speaker, the Saskatchewan Party is absolutely incensed with the comments coming out of the Ontario government. Ontario is now threatening to close their border to Western Canadian beef. It's an appalling statement.

But what's even more appalling is our NDP (New Democratic Party) minister's inaction. He said that he won't even pick up the phone and call the Ontario Minister of Agriculture until Monday.

Mr. Speaker, every day that passes costs Saskatchewan millions of dollars and threatens the livelihood of Saskatchewan cattle producers. Now the Ontario government is threatening to make things worse, and what's our minister doing about it? Absolutely nothing.

To the Minister of Agriculture: Saskatchewan people say, do your job. Will the minister pick up the phone immediately, call Ontario, and tell her that she's dead wrong?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Speaker, I would be pleased to hear what the Leader of the Opposition has heard from Ontario because I expect that he has not heard this, Mr. Speaker. This is what he has not heard.

We had a conversation, Mr. Speaker, on Wednesday of last week — of this week, of this week. We had a conversation on Wednesday, Mr. Speaker, with all the ministers, of which we all agreed that this would be a national issue, that we all would be compensating on a national basis, Mr. Speaker, and that in fact we would be participating in any kind of adjustments that we would need to make on compensation for Canadian farmers across the piece, Mr. Speaker. And I have that from the minister from Ontario as well, Mr. Speaker.

Yesterday at noon we had a conversation with the minister's office who reconfirmed again that there was no press release, Mr. Speaker, out of Ontario, as the member from Watrous said. No press release from the Ontario government, Mr. Speaker.

And I say, Mr. Speaker, that my office had a call this morning from Ontario again. And Ontario said again this morning they are going to participate on this package as a national program — not one-of as the Leader of the Opposition suggests they are. Do your job and get the information . . .

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our Minister of Agriculture has his head in the sand. When the Saskatchewan Party Agriculture critic raised this issue yesterday, the Minister of Agriculture said we were making it up. He said the Ontario minister never made these comments and he's saying the same thing today.

Well she was making these comments on CBC (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation) Newsworld again this morning, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, immediately the Premier of Alberta replied. He said that they were outraged. But what did the NDP government do? What do they even know, Mr. Speaker? This minister . . .

The Speaker: — Order, please. Order, members. Order. Order. I'm able to hear about six or seven conversations but I would like to be able to hear one and to hear it properly. I ask members to keep that in mind and I ask the Leader of the Opposition to continue.

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier of Alberta responded immediately with his outrage on behalf of Western Canadian beef producers. And this minister doesn't even know what's going on.

Every day that passes means millions and millions of more dollars lost here in the province of Saskatchewan. Why won't the minister do his job?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Speaker, I said to the Leader of the Opposition and I said to the media yesterday that I am confident and of full appreciation of the Ontario situation, Mr. Speaker, which is that they are absolutely onside with the national package, the national program in developing strategies.

And I say that, Mr. Speaker, because I have here a letter. I have here a letter, Mr. Speaker, which is from the Minister of Agriculture from Ontario, Mr. Speaker, which was delivered to me today, Mr. Speaker. And this is what the Minister of Agriculture from Ontario says. And I quote from her letter, Mr. Speaker. She says:

Immediate federal-provincial co-operation at the highest levels of our governments is needed to address . . . (the very real issue, co-operation collectively).

These concerns include all of these issues, Mr. Speaker:

. . . financial viability of the beef production and processing sectors, requirements for . . . (enhancement and) surveillance, potential for easing (the) trade restrictions . . . (potential of easing the trade restrictions and) low risk products, and (finally) national standards for (the) movement of downer animals, (and) meat inspection . . . (across the country, Mr. Speaker).

That's from the Minister of Agriculture this morning.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hermanson: — Mr. Speaker, the minister is absolutely in the dark. What Ontario is calling for, Mr. Speaker, is to receive no more beef from Western Canada so that they can export their beef to the United States. That's the kind of co-operation that Ontario is asking for. And our Minister of Agriculture doesn't even know it.

Mr. Speaker, when we think about what the Ontario government is saying, we're absolutely livid. This is coming from a province that is currently quarantining people due to the SARS (severe acute respiratory syndrome) outbreak. But has Saskatchewan told our residents to stop travelling to Toronto? Absolutely not. But when it comes to BSE (bovine spongiform encephalopathy), the Ontario Minister of Agriculture is saying we don't want any Western Canadian beef, Mr. Speaker, and it threatens to close its borders.

That is no way to build a country. It is wrong-headed and if this government had any courage, it would be telling Ontario so.

Mr. Speaker, my question . . .

The Speaker: — Order, please. Order. Order. Would the member put his question.

Mr. Hermanson: — Mr. Speaker, my question, if the Minister of Agriculture is not going to do his job, will the Premier of Saskatchewan pick up the phone, call Ontario, and get things straightened out?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Speaker, I have the letter from the Minister of Agriculture from Ontario. And I say, Mr. Speaker, this is the letter this morning. And the Ontario minister clearly states, Mr. Speaker, in her letter, and I'll read again, Mr. Speaker, and I'll table the letter for the House, Mr. Speaker. It says that the . . . And I quote again, Mr. Speaker, what she says:

. . . (the) national standards for movement of downer animals, meat inspection and handling of . . . (these specific) risk materials (Mr. Speaker, are of a national issue).

And I want to know, Mr. Speaker, why it is that the Leader of the Opposition today stands on his feet, from the Saskatchewan Party, and says you know what, we should be beating up on Ontario, Mr. Speaker, because they've made the statement that they have. Well not more than two weeks ago, his Agriculture critic from Watrous stood on her feet and saying, you need to join Ontario and not sign the implementation agreement for

Canada, Mr. Speaker.

So a few weeks ago the minister . . . the Leader of the Opposition's critic stands up in the House and says, you should not be . . . you should be joining Ontario, you should be hugging them and embracing them, to sign the . . . not to sign the agreement.

Today the Leader of the Opposition says, you should get up and you should punch the bag as much as you could in Ontario to make sure that they in fact comply. And they're complying, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our minister is caught short, doesn't know what's going on, and so he's changing the subject, talking about an entirely different issue where our Agriculture critic is absolutely correct.

Mr. Speaker, it's not just the Ontario government. The Premier of Quebec, the PEI (Prince Edward Island) Premier, the NDP Agriculture critic in Nova Scotia, all of them are talking about setting up regional zones for beef exports. Mr. Speaker, this is an absolutely ludicrous idea. It won't work. But just the fact that they're talking about it hurts Saskatchewan. It hurts our efforts to reopen the US (United States) border.

What's so appalling, Mr. Speaker, is that the NDP are part, through their inaction, of a move that's going on to hurt Saskatchewan cattle producers. Mr. Speaker, these comments hurt everyone and they must stop now. Is the Premier going to call the other premiers who are part of this regionalization idea and tell them to stop hurting Western Canada?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Speaker, I said to the media yesterday and I said to the House yesterday and I say to the House again today that I have utmost confidence and value in all of the Ag ministers who I work with across the country, Mr. Speaker. And when one of my colleagues across the country says to me that they are supporting the national strategy, Mr. Speaker, you know what? I support the wisdom and the decision that that minister makes to me. And I have correspondence that says that, Mr. Speaker.

But what we've done, just as the Leader of the Opposition from the Saskatchewan Party has been asking me the questions, Mr. Speaker, is that we actually called Ontario because I heard the Leader of the Opposition say, from the Saskatchewan Party, that Helen Johns, the minister from Ontario, was on Newsworld this morning, Mr. Speaker.

Well this is what . . . My staff passed me this note. Helen Johns was not on Newsworld this morning or anything else, Mr. Speaker, and nor are they, Mr. Speaker, not going to be involved on the national strategy. That comes from Ontario right now, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hermanson: — Mr. Speaker, I cannot believe . . .

(10:30)

The Speaker: — Order. Order. Order. Order. Order. Order. members. Order.

Mr. Hermanson: — Mr. Speaker, I cannot believe that our Agriculture minister is standing up in this Assembly and defending other Agriculture ministers across Canada when he's hurting livestock producers, meat processing workers, within the province of Saskatchewan. Where are his priorities, Mr. Speaker?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hermanson: — It's extremely frustrating when we see the cattle industry . . .

The Speaker: — Order. Order. Order!

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. They're making a lot of noise but they're not making noise on behalf of the beef industry in Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hermanson: — When the cattle industry and our regulatory agencies were working to solve this problem, only to see their efforts torpedoed by comments from Prime Minister Jean Chrétien and the Ontario government, none of these comments, Mr. Speaker, are helping us to get the US border reopened. In fact we know they're making matters worse.

When this problem first began, Lyle Vanclief, federal Agriculture minister, said that he hoped the borders would be reopened in two weeks. Now Lyle Vanclief says it's going to be a while yet.

The Speaker: — Order. Order, members. Order. Order. Order. Order. Now, members, it's a sad thing, members, that members . . . Order. It's a sad thing, members, that members must be reminded this is a forum for debate and not a forum for hollering one down. And I speak to both . . . to members on both sides of the House and I ask for the leadership on this side of the House and for the leadership on that side of the House to keep that in mind and allow the debate to go forward.

And I ask the Leader of the Opposition to start again so that we can hear the question and have the question properly put.

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Both the federal Minister of Agriculture, Lyle Vanclief, and our own NDP Minister of Agriculture said they hope the border would reopen in two weeks time. Well, Mr. Speaker, the clock is ticking. And now Lyle Vanclief is saying it's going to be a little while yet.

Mr. Speaker, does the minister have any indication as to how much longer the US border will be closed to Canadian beef?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Serby: — In our conversations with Mr. Vanclief and the Agriculture ministers, Mr. Vanclief advises me that he's in constant contact with the secretary from the US, Ms.

Veneman, that we will not see the borders open this week. The Minister of Agriculture's hope is that the borders will be opened in the new week, some time in the new week. He's not giving a timeline for us on that.

Clearly what needs to happen is that the work that's currently being undertaken by CFIA (Canadian Food Inspection Agency) to bring this matter to resolution, to try and find where in fact . . . whether or not there are any other animals that have in fact been infected, that's the issue, Mr. Speaker, that they're working on today.

My hope is that early in the new week that we'll get some better intelligence out of the United States. But in the meantime our industry here in Saskatchewan is working collectively with the government at the national level, their committee, to look at what can be done for producers and those affected by this particular issue for all of the . . .

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I have a NewsWatch bulletin here from CBC Newsworld, May 30, 2003, 7 hours 10 minutes. Headline says, "Ontario agriculture minister Helen Johns threatening to ban the import of beef from the west."

Mr. Speaker, Jennifer Gates was the host and she says in her story:

However Ontario's Agriculture Minister says banning Alberta beef from . . . entering Ontario is drastic, but it might be necessary.

Mr. Speaker, in the conclusion of the story, Mr. Speaker, Jennifer Gates says that:

. . . Helen Johns (is) again saying that zone designation would show that each provincial market is run independently.

Mr. Speaker, I again challenge our Minister of Agriculture to get into the game, protect Saskatchewan beef producers, phone Ontario, tell that minister that her position — even if she's musing about it on Newsworld — is absolutely unacceptable.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Order, order. Order.

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Speaker, I have outlined for the House and the media yesterday and again will today, if I'm asked, exactly what's happened here in terms of our involvement and contact with Ontario, Mr. Speaker. And I have the correspondence from Ontario.

And I want to say this, Mr. Speaker, that we have a tremendous amount of respect for each other as Agriculture ministers across the country because we've been working together on some very difficult issues in Canada . . .

The Speaker: — Order. Order.

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Speaker, I have a tremendous amount of respect for my colleagues across the country, Mr. Speaker. And if there were ever to be, Mr. Speaker, a notion that a province in Canada, Mr. Speaker, would in fact be making a decision to ban our Canadian beef, Mr. Speaker, if there were ever to be that, this Premier and this ministry and this government would be saying that we do not support that position, Mr. Speaker.

But I can tell you unequivocally today, Mr. Speaker, I can tell you unequivocally that Mrs. Johns was not on . . . Mrs. Johns was not on Newsworld this morning, Mr. Speaker, as the Leader of the Opposition says she was, in the Saskatchewan Party, and that the member is supporting a national process . . .

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

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well the Minister of Agriculture here in Saskatchewan may have respect for the other Agriculture ministers across Canada, but they are showing absolutely no respect or interest in our Minister of Agriculture. They didn't for Mr. Upshall, they didn't for Mr. Lingenfelter, and for the member from Yorkton, they don't even put him in the loop and let him know what they're doing across Canada.

Mr. Speaker, our Agriculture minister's ineffectiveness is hurting the beef industry in Saskatchewan. And, Mr. Speaker, he can wait until Monday before he does anything. That is far too long. He should have been acting yesterday, Mr. Speaker, when the Saskatchewan Party first raised this issue.

Mr. Speaker, immediately after question period the Saskatchewan Party will move an emergency motion expressing our extreme displeasure with the Government of Ontario for making these comments. Will the Ag minister get on board and support this motion?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Order.

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Speaker, I can appreciate, I can appreciate what the Saskatchewan Party Leader of the Opposition said . . .

The Speaker: — I apologize to the member but I just want to ask members for order here.

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Speaker, I can appreciate what the Saskatchewan Party Leader of the Opposition just said a minute ago. He said that yesterday they waded into the issue on this . . . on the BSE, and that's right. Yesterday they waded into it.

We've been working on this issue, Mr. Speaker, since last Monday, last Monday at the national table with all of the governments across the province, or across the country, Mr. Speaker, with the federal government. Why, Mr. Speaker? Because this is a national issue. We're all engaged on this national issue. We're all on the same page, Mr. Speaker, to sort this out, Mr. Speaker, is what we are.

And I can understand why the Leader of the Saskatchewan Party is concerned about his presence on agricultural policy, Mr. Speaker. And today he's trying to find yet another place that he can inject himself because we know where they stand on crop insurance, which is to sell crop insurance, as the member from Wilkie says. We know what they'd do to crop insurance, Mr. Speaker. They'd extend the time line from 15 years; they'd reduce it to eight or nine. They'd take the \$600 million, Mr. Speaker, and they'd want it shared as trade injury, is what the late member from Watrous said. They sell out agriculture and Canadian farmers every chance they got.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Agriculture is caught short, made another big mistake, so now he wants to talk about crop insurance, not about the BSE problem in Canada. That will not work, Mr. Speaker.

Just yesterday — and I bet you the minister doesn't know this either — just yesterday the USDA (United States Department of Agriculture) regulations were amended to add Canada to the list of countries from which beef exports are banned due to BSE. The USDA is now inviting comment on this decision until July 28. The posting on the USDA Web site then states the following:

We will consider any comments we receive during the comment period . . . After the comment period closes, we will publish another document in the Federal Register. The document will include a discussion of any comments we receive and any amendments we are making to the rule.

Mr. Speaker, what does that mean? I ask the Minister of Agriculture: does it mean that the current ban will remain in effect until at least July 28?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — If the Leader of the Opposition would do a bit more research on the way in which the Houses in the US operate, he will know that when in fact, Mr. Speaker, a decision is made by a secretary or a governance person in the US, what happens is that information then gets tabled in the Legislative Assembly or in a House like ours does, and it then needs to follow the processes that give the kinds of notices to all of the residencies within the country. That's exactly what's happened here.

This is a legislative process or a parliamentary process requirement that needs to occur, as they've done. Does that mean, Mr. Speaker, that there will be a ban on Canadian beef for the middle of July, the end of July? Not at all. It means that that process is being followed today within the US Congress in the way in which the legislative and parliamentary processes in the US work.

It is our view, Mr. Speaker, as best I know from Mr. Vanclief, the federal minister, he is on the phone on a daily basis with the secretary from the US. They are talking to them about lifting the ban. They're trying to show them that our Canadian process works in terms of identification and tracing and food safety. And it's our view, Mr. Speaker, that from a national perspective, as provincial ministers and the federal government, we'll find a resolve to this for Canadians.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, we're unhappy with a lot of the things that the federal minister, Lyle Vanclief, has done over the years, but at least Mr. Vanclief is on the phone. That's a whole lot better than our Minister of Agriculture here in Saskatchewan, who's sitting at home and twiddling his thumbs while the Saskatchewan beef industry suffers.

Mr. Speaker, if the minister is so knowledgeable about the procedures in the United States, can he tell this House, can he tell the people of Saskatchewan who are dependent upon jobs and livelihood from the beef industry, just how that time period can be shortened up so that the ban will be lifted prior to July 28?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Speaker, there has been no information from our federal minister that the ban on the US beef will be held until July 23. There has not been any.

And then the member opposite, the member opposite from Rosetown-Biggar constituency, should not be saying to Canadian farmers, and to Saskatchewan producers, that our beef will not be moving yet until July 23. You should not be fearmongering, Mr. Member. You should not be fearmongering. You have today a national group of men and women, including the industry, Mr. Speaker, who every day are out there trying to show that we have a safe system in Canada and that we have a process that's working, Mr. Speaker, to get our borders open.

And when we have the member, the Leader of the Opposition from the Saskatchewan Party standing up and saying to Canadian producers, to Saskatchewan producers, that in fact the borders are not going to be open until July 23 because it's some kind of a notion that's been stated by the US, it's absolutely false, Mr. Speaker. And it's political fearmongering at its greatest height, Mr. Speaker. And it should stop because the industry, Mr. Speaker, needs our support — needs our support, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(10:45)

ORDERS OF THE DAY

WRITTEN QUESTIONS

Mr. Yates: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm extremely pleased today to stand on behalf of the government and table a response to written question no. 568.

The Speaker: — Response to 568 has been tabled.

Why is the Leader of the Opposition on his feet?

Mr. Hermanson: — Mr. Speaker, to move a motion of urgent and pressing necessity under rule 46.

The Speaker: — Would the member state the nature of the

motion and perhaps read the motion into the record?

MOTION UNDER RULE 46

Marketing of Western Canadian Beef

Mr. Hermanson: — Mr. Speaker, as you are aware from question period, there is discussion by the Minister of Agriculture in Ontario about banning Western Canadian beef from entering the province of Ontario. We feel that is of an emergent nature in the province of Saskatchewan. And so I have a motion that reads:

That this Assembly expresses its extreme displeasure over the outrageous suggestion by the Government of Ontario that Western Canadians' beef be banned in this province in light of the single case of BSE, a move that would harm efforts to reopen the United States border to Canadian beef and would worsen regional tensions in this country.

The Speaker: — Thank you very much. Order.

Leave not granted.

The Speaker: — Order. Order. Order. Order. Order.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

ADJOURNED DEBATES

SECOND READINGS

Bill No. 31

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Osika that **Bill No. 31 — The Alcohol and Gaming Regulation Amendment Act, 2003/Loi de 2003 modifiant la Loi de 1997 sur la réglementation des boissons alcoolisées et des jeux de hasard** be now read a second time.

The Speaker: — Order. Order.

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think we're starting to see why we need to take a lot of time on some of these Bills. It's because this NDP government is totally out of touch and that out of touch runs across from Bill to Bill to Bill.

This morning you saw, Mr. . . .

The Speaker: — Order. Order. I would bring to the member's attention that the item before the Assembly is Bill 31, The Alcohol and Gaming Regulation Amendment Act. And as a matter of relevance, would the member address the comments to the Act, please.

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The relevance to this Act is that we have a government who's just placed before us Bill No. 31 — a government that is totally out touch, a government we can't trust, a government that's not taking care of the people of its province. And we've seen that today. That is the example, Mr. Speaker, that underlines the necessity to look at Bill No. 31.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Heppner: — Bill No. 31. We just had a minister get up, Mr. Speaker, get up and say that it didn't exist. Then we presented . . .

The Speaker: — Order. Order. Order. I will give the member one more opportunity to get to the topic.

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's incompetence that makes us . . .

The Speaker: — Order. Order. Order. The motion before the Assembly is adjourned debate, Bill 31, The Alcohol and Gaming Regulation Amendment Act.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, this Bill No. 31 is about the liquor and gaming Act, Mr. Speaker, an Act that this government is placing before the people in how to develop the economy of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, gaming and alcohol is one segment of society, one segment of the economy, Mr. Speaker, which we hope will generate revenues for Saskatchewan.

But we see examples, Mr. Speaker, of how this government deals with the economy. We see the examples, Mr. Speaker, of this BSE situation in Saskatchewan and how the government deals with the economy in that particular area.

When we come to dealing with liquor and gaming, Mr. Speaker, we have to look at other segments of society as well, as to how the government is dealing with the economy in those areas, to understand how the government deals with the economy of Saskatchewan and developing the liquor and gaming industry, Mr. Speaker, and how they're dealing with that.

We see their absolute disregard and disrespect for the cattle industry and those workers in that area, Mr. Speaker. So how can we believe that the government is going to have respect and understanding in the liquor and gaming industry, Mr. Speaker?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. D'Autremont: — We see a minister, Mr. Speaker, who is so out of touch that he cannot even pick up the phone to talk to a fellow Agriculture minister . . .

The Speaker: — Order, please. Order, please. There will be time for a debate on all of these questions, I'm sure. But if the member would like to debate some other thing, perhaps he can ask for leave to go . . . (inaudible) . . . other item. But I would bring to the member's attention that his remarks should be predominantly on The Alcohol and Gaming Regulation Amendment Act.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, we're talking about respect and understanding for an industry. This Act talks about defining First Nations gaming authority.

Well, Mr. Speaker, to deal with the First Nations you have to deal with them with respect and understanding. You look to the government for examples in other areas and how they have

dealt with people. Mr. Speaker, they're not dealing with the cattle industry with respect or understanding. So why would you think that this government and that minister, Mr. Speaker, any of executive government ministers, would deal with respect and understanding in any segment of society when one of the primary industries of Saskatchewan, the cattle industry, is being neglected by this government, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, when you look to a government you hope that that government would have understanding of the issues involved in your industry. The First Nations in dealing with gambling, with the gaming industry, look to this government and hope that there's understanding and respect. But they look at how that government treats other segments of society as well.

And this Minister of Agriculture, along with his colleague, the minister of Gaming, are ignoring the needs and the issues in Saskatchewan. They're ignoring what's happening in the rest of Canada, Mr. Speaker. Gaming is a national industry, controlled in every province by the provincial government.

Agriculture is as well a national industry, Mr. Speaker, where the provincial governments have a great deal to say about it. When you ignore the needs of the people, Mr. Speaker, whether it be in gaming, First Nations gaming, or in any other segment such as the cattle industry — that this minister is doing — the governments have failed the people.

We see this Minister of Agriculture and the minister of Gaming and the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Corrections and the minister of community services all failing the people of Saskatchewan, Mr. Minister. Why would the people believe that these ministers would not fail them as well under this amendment, Mr. Speaker? They have no confidence; they have no trust.

We have seen the past minister of Economic Development, Mr. Speaker, six years of deception, Mr. Speaker — six years of deception — on SPUDCO (Saskatchewan Potato Utility Development Company). So why would the people involved in the liquor and gaming regulations, Mr. Speaker, the First Nations gaming authority, want to trust this government? How can they trust this government? They can't. It's that simple; they cannot.

Ministers of the Crown stand in their place and say, it didn't happen; it didn't exist because there was no news release, Mr. Speaker. Why would anyone sitting down from the First Nations to negotiate a gaming agreement with these . . . this government, Mr. Speaker — they even sully the word with their attitude and their actions, Mr. Speaker — why would anyone sit down with this government and negotiate an agreement?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. D'Autremont: — Mr. Speaker, we see the actions across Canada that are impacting on Saskatchewan. We potentially see the impact across Canada that might impact on our gaming industry.

And we see the ministers glued to their chairs, unable to pick up the phone — on a phone company they own, Mr. Speaker. They can't find the phone numbers for the Minister of Agriculture in

Ontario. They can't find the phone number for the Prime Minister. They can't find the phone number for the Premier of Quebec. And they certainly can't find the phone number for their colleague, the Agriculture critic in Nova Scotia, John MacDonell, the NDP critic.

No, Mr. Speaker, when it comes to alcohol and gaming in this province, when it comes to making arrangements and contracts with anyone — including the First Nations, Mr. Speaker — this government is not to be trusted.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. D'Autremont: — This government, Mr. Speaker, does not understand the impact of any of the economic segments of society. Yesterday, Mr. Speaker, in this House, we were talking about the need of understanding and sensitivity for workers in this province who may be laid off because of BSE. And what does the Minister of Labour stand up and say — well how can the opposition possibly make a comment about workers when you don't support the minimum wage that we put in?

Well, Mr. Speaker, we believe that the workers of this province deserve more than the minimum wage.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. D'Autremont: — They deserve jobs, Mr. Speaker, that pay more than the minimum wage. And, Mr. Speaker, the alcohol and gaming industries in this province are one of those industries that provide better than minimum wages, Mr. Speaker, just as the cattle industry, the livestock industry, the feedlot industry, the trucking industry, Mr. Speaker, provide better than minimum wage, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. D'Autremont: — Mr. Speaker, there is a lot about this particular piece of legislation that is of concern, but there's also some good points to it, Mr. Speaker. The Bill puts out an appeal process which the Saskatchewan Liquor and Gaming Commission can hear appeals of on-reserve gaming decisions made by the Saskatchewan gaming . . . Saskatchewan Indian Gaming Licensing provisions, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, there is a need for an appeal process. There is a need to be able to appeal governments' decisions. There is a need, Mr. Speaker, as well, to be able to appeal governments' inactions — just as they are doing in the BSE situation, Mr. Speaker, to say, Mr. Speaker, as the Minister of Agriculture said yesterday, I talked to the minister from Ontario on Wednesday and I don't have to talk to her again until Monday.

Well, Mr. Speaker, when you're talking about appeals in the liquor and gaming Act, why aren't there appeal segments in other areas of government? Why can't you appeal this government's inaction, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Speaker, the government has signed a 25-year gaming agreement with the FSIN (Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations). Mr. Speaker, we believe that that gaming agreement was signed for too long of a term. However, it is signed, Mr. Speaker, and we believe that FSIN, while it had a great deal of

difficulty earlier in handling this particular file in the Indian gaming industry, has certainly improved its circumstances and is moving forward on this, Mr. Speaker.

(11:00)

We would have liked to have seen those improvements in place before the agreement was signed, Mr. Speaker, rather than after. And not all of the recommendations that have come forward have been dealt with, Mr. Speaker. However in signing a 25-year agreement this government seems to be recognizing that the industry needs some stability and needs some support from government.

But why is that understanding and lack of support not being demonstrated across the economy? Why is it not being demonstrated in the cattle industry today, Mr. Speaker?

The members opposite supported a motion yesterday calling for the federal government to recognize that there was a need for the reduction of EI (Employment Insurance) from the two-week waiting period. Mr. Speaker, that's a recognition of the need for long-term stability, just as signing a long-term agreement with FSIN to provide on-reserve gaming, that's a recognition, Mr. Speaker, of long-term stability in the province, of the economy. Just as there needs to be a recognition of stability in the cattle industry in this province, Mr. Speaker, and this government is failing to provide that leadership.

The minister of Gaming provided leadership in this. We may not necessarily agree with all of his leadership and all of the ways it was done, but he did step forward and do it, which is not what the Minister of Agriculture is doing today when it comes to dealing with the situation in Ontario, where the Minister of Agriculture in Ontario has called for a ban of Western Canadian beef.

Mr. Speaker, the ministers of the Crown need to show leadership in gaming, in the alcohol industry. They need to show leadership across the economy and in this time of crisis they need to show leadership in the agriculture industry.

Mr. Speaker, the Premier stepped forward and supported the 25-year agreement in liquor and gaming, the signing of the deal with FSIN. And yet the Premier seems to be allowing his Minister of Agriculture to wander in the wilderness with his head in the sand, Mr. Speaker, and ignore the statements that are being made by other ministers across Canada. It's time, Mr. Speaker, for the Minister of Agriculture to pick up that phone that he owns with SaskTel and phone the Minister of Agriculture in Ontario.

The Speaker: — Order, please. There are a couple of members, one on each side here, that appear to want to get into a debate of their own. I would ask them to respect the person who's got the floor. Order. Order, please. Order, please.

I would also mention to the member for Cannington that in his remarks, there's this . . . slang word for it I guess would be bootlegging. He's bootlegging a lot of extraneous information into the debate, which is quite enjoyable in a sense, but I would ask him to make the majority of his remarks on the topic at hand.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, this agreement, this Act is very important to the people of Saskatchewan. And at times, Mr. Speaker, to understand the context of an Act you need to be able to use analogies and examples, Mr. Speaker. And the people across Saskatchewan sometimes understand one analogy, sometimes they understand another but Saskatchewan in general is . . . We're still very much a rural mindset even though we may live in Regina or Saskatoon. We still are very much connected with the land, Mr. Speaker. And so the analogies that most people understand are indeed those that relate to the land.

I remember the Minister of Environment quite often using the example of Grandmother's Bay in any of his discussions, regardless of what the particular item he wished to discuss was. Because that was an example that his constituents, Mr. Speaker, could feel and could understand. And that's why at times, Mr. Speaker, we use various analogies that may not directly relate to liquor and gaming.

And, Mr. Speaker, one of the items that is happening in this particular Bill is a change from the First Nations trust to the First Nations Fund. And, Mr. Speaker, while it's not a very large change, it is a change in the attitude of the use of that particular fund, Mr. Speaker. A change in the attitude can have a large impact on how the issue is dealt with and how people feel about it, Mr. Speaker.

And it's very much like the case about BSE. It's a matter of trust and feeling and how you . . . the issue is dealt with. When someone across Canada says that we have a concern, perhaps there should be a ban put in place on Western Canadian beef, then it becomes a matter of attitude and trust on how the issue is dealt with.

Just as, Mr. Speaker, the change of the word from First Nations trust to First Nations Fund has an impact on how people react to that issue, how they have an understanding of that issue, Mr. Speaker.

When a minister of the Crown says, I don't have to be involved in that issue, I don't have to pick up the phone — dealing let's say with the First Nations trust fund or the First Nations Fund, Mr. Speaker — there is an attitude there that indicates lack of interest and lack of respect in that particular item, Mr. Speaker.

Same as when the Minister of Agriculture says, I don't have to pick up the phone to phone the Minister of Agriculture in Ontario because she's talking about banning Western Canadian beef, it shows a lack of respect, a lack of interest, and a lack of understanding.

In either case, Mr. Speaker, that kind of an attitude is unacceptable — whether it's dealing with the First Nations trust fund, whether it's dealing with the cattle industry in Saskatchewan — it's unacceptable from a government minister, Mr. Speaker.

Liquor and gaming industry, the First Nations gaming, Mr. Speaker, is very much about employment. It's about people working in the industry. I know when White Bear first established their casino, they had a great deal of pride, Mr. Speaker. Those employees working in there had a great deal of

pride that they were doing it. It wasn't somebody else doing it; they had a great deal of pride that they were doing it. They were establishing that casino. They were working there. They were making it succeed, Mr. Speaker.

That is no different than the feeling that the people have such as the McCrea family about their cattle farm. They made it. They established that herd over 40, 50, 60 years. It was theirs, Mr. Speaker. They developed it; they built it. They were the ones that were making it successful.

So, Mr. Speaker, when we talk about alcohol and gaming industry, when we talk about the First Nations trust fund — or fund, it's going to be called now — when we talk about the FSIN agreement with government, it's about employment. It's about giving people pride. It's about giving people the opportunity to establish and work for themselves, Mr. Speaker.

You know you take a look at the people working in the Minister of Labour's riding, at the packing plant in Moose Jaw. Those people were proud of their jobs. They were making a good livelihood. Now that livelihood is threatened, Mr. Speaker, because of one single incidence of BSE, because of the closure of the border by the US. Now it's being threatened, Mr. Speaker, by statements from the minister from Ontario that our Minister of Agriculture seems to be either ignorant of or sticking his head in the sand and trying to ignore, Mr. Speaker.

So the same sort of thing happens, Mr. Speaker, in many industries. I guess we should take a look and see what happened to the White Bear casino and how those people felt. Because it was, I believe, in 1994 the casino was up and operating and this government, led by the then minister of Justice at the time, Bob Mitchell, raided that casino.

Men in black suits and machine guns, Mr. Speaker, descended on that casino and arrested a number of people — everybody's laid out on the floor — hauled away their slot machines, Mr. Speaker. And I know in talking to the chief of the day, Mr. Bernie Shepherd, Mr. Speaker, he was inviting the RCMP (Royal Canadian Mounted Police) to come up to that casino and lay a charge. He said, I want the sergeant to come up here in his red serge uniform and we will give him a slot machine. We will accept his charges because we want to go to court to establish the jurisdictional issues.

But that's not what happened. The minister of Justice and the RCMP descended at 2 o'clock in the morning on the casino in a raid, with machine guns and men in SWAT (special weapons and tactics) uniforms, to apprehend everyone. That was the respect that this government showed, Mr. Speaker, and that's the respect that they're showing today to the cattle industry.

Mr. Speaker, this government has lost its moral compass. It's lost its direction. It has no idea where it wants to go or how it's going to get there. The only purpose that this government has today is to try to hold on to power, only for power's sake. Well, Mr. Speaker, they are failing in that measure. If the Premier should be able to screw up the courage to call an election, they will find that they have most severely lost the trust of the people of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, at this time we're prepared to allow this particular

Bill to move forward to Committee of the Whole where we do have a large number of questions to ask the minister of Gaming.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Bill No. 35

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Osika that **Bill No. 35 — The Saskatchewan Gaming Corporation Amendment Act, 2003** be now read a second time.

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Bill No. 35 is The Saskatchewan Gaming Corporation Act and it's an amendment or an Act to amend that. And we're going to need to look at that because there are some directions that have been set. Now how these directions are going to be carried out, that, Mr. Speaker, that is the question.

The minister has said that this is going to improve the issue of accountability — the issue of accountability — and we welcome that. But when we see where the statement comes from and we look at the record of this government talking about accountability and what's supposed to be happening, we realize that there is much to be questioned, much to be doubted, because the chances of this actually developing the way it's been set out, Mr. Speaker, are very, very slim.

We've seen that over the last number of days, Mr. Speaker, in different sorts of issues where this government has gone ahead and set up a direction and then lost its way totally. As the previous speaker just mentioned, this is a government that has truly lost their way — they have truly lost their way.

Accountability. We're going to want to see exactly how that accountability is going to occur before this Bill will be able to proceed and to move on.

For several years, Mr. Speaker, the First Nations Fund has come under criticism by the Provincial Auditor, Mr. Speaker — I'm not talking about a particular political party on this issue; it's the Provincial Auditor — and because, as he said, it just simply was not open to scrutiny.

Now what has been done in the meantime? What has been done in the meantime? Not very much. Not an adequate amount. The government's handling of this file over the years, Mr. Speaker, has been totally disgraceful. And I guess the most frustrating thing and the most hurtful thing about this all is when we go back to the whole concept of gaming, what is its purpose? What is its purpose?

It's not particularly to provide entertainment, because we could play liars' dice or bridge or something else.

(11:15)

One of the key things that underlines the whole concept of gaming was to raise monies through the First Nations gaming and then that this money is supposed to go out to help First

Nations. And that, Mr. Speaker — that, Mr. Speaker — is where this concept has failed. The money that should be going there is not going there to the same extent that it should. And that's why, Mr. Speaker, the auditor, very specifically, had concerns about accountability, because the money that was supposed to be going to the people that needed the help in our First Nations community was not going there.

What is really frustrating about this, Mr. Speaker, is that it's been this NDP government that has flown a few flags throughout the province. They used to say they represented agriculture. That's where Tommy Douglas came from, little rural community. So they started the CCF (Co-operative Commonwealth Federation). Well that's failed, Mr. Speaker. That's failed.

How many people do they have sitting on that side that are truly from a rural constituency? One. One truly rural constituency. And we have some city people waving. You can recognize a city person from an NDP, but I will not put it on record how we do it, because it shows in the two whose hands were up.

And so anyways, the one minister that they have from a rural one won't be there any longer. But here, you have the NDP government who used to have that rural component. That has evaporated.

They became the NDP, tried to go ahead and pick up on all sorts of other issues. That has failed. They just failed that very recently, Mr. Speaker, in the last week because we've had people laid off in the meat industry — people laid off in the meat industry. And that has just about been aggravated when we've had the Americans close their boundaries.

And now, we have Eastern Canada is talking about doing the same thing. And the Agriculture minister gets up and says well, it wasn't an official news release. Well I didn't know that Agriculture ministers got little sheets of paper in the morning that says this is what somebody has said but if it doesn't have a heading on the top, official news release . . .

The Speaker: — Order. I have been listening very carefully and deliberately in trying to, in my mind, draw a relationship between the member's comments and the Bill and I have been unable to do it. So I would ask the member to clarify and stick with Bill 35.

Mr. Heppner: — Okay. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Bill 35, Saskatchewan Gaming Corporation Act, an amendment to that, is there to address the concerns that the auditor had about accountability in how this NDP government's been handling the finances of monies that was supposed to go to help the people in the First Nations community — that's the key thing.

This NDP with its pretend social conscious has failed there, Mr. Speaker — has failed there. Therefore we have to look at this particular Bill and wonder if they're failing again. Is this concept that they want to fly around the province that they have a social conscious, is there any validity left to it? I suggest, Mr. Speaker, it isn't.

Because when a bean counter, the Provincial Auditor, looks at it and says there are failures in this, there are failures in this, we

couldn't have a more credible person, Mr. Speaker, address the fact — address the fact — that this NDP has lost its way. It has lost its way, Mr. Speaker, even if we use their own compass, by their own compass they are lost.

Hon. Mr. Hagel: — A point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: — What is the member's point of order.

Hon. Mr. Hagel: — Mr. Speaker, I note with interest — and unfortunately like you, Mr. Speaker, I have been listening as well — but I note with interest, Mr. Speaker, that the hon. member referred to the Provincial Auditor as a bean counter.

I don't think he said it in a way that he intended to reflect the respect for an independent officer of the Assembly, Mr. Speaker, and I am sure that the hon. member would want to withdraw that remark and rephrase it so as to properly respect the . . . or to represent the respect that is required by this Assembly for the officers of the Assembly.

The Speaker: — I thank the member for his point of order. I was listening intently and I did hear the remark. And I chose not to raise it at the time because I felt that the tone in which it was expressed was not derogatory.

So I thank the member for his point of order. I believe his point of order is not totally well taken, but if the member does want to clarify, I invite him to do so.

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will rest on your judgment on this issue.

Mr. Speaker, Bill No. 35, the concept of accountability is what this Bill is all about. And as we've just been discussing, the whole concept around Bill 35 is to ensure that the monies that are being raised through the gaming industry go where they're supposed to go. That, Mr. Speaker, this government has done an abysmal job of, and we have in the last numbers of years raised questions on that on numerous occasions in this House.

The extent to which those questions were validated were indicated when the Premier actually had to move people out of his cabinet because they were doing such a poor job in that particular area and replace them with other ones. So we know that this government knows that they've done a poor job on that.

We hear the minister state that if the terms and conditions for accountability are not met, the department can step in, that the department can step in. Well, Mr. Speaker, it must be frightening from the perspective of the First Nations to look at this and say, well we've had this government that has had all these fiascos going on in this area for the last three, four years, that they are prepared to say, well if this particular Bill, Bill No. 35, The Saskatchewan Gaming Corporation Act, doesn't work quite right in our effort to go ahead and improve accountability, the department can step in. That's what the minister has said.

Well I wouldn't want this government to step in and try to straighten out anything. I think we've got probably thousands of people, family farms, employees in the meat industry, that right now says, the last thing we need is an NDP government to step

in.

We've watched the NDP dragging its feet and ignoring the SIGA (Saskatchewan Indian Gaming Authority) matter for the last couple of years and we do have many questions, Mr. Speaker, about Bill No. 35. But I believe that we can probably deal with those questions best if we let this at this particular point go to Committee of the Whole, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

COMMITTEE OF FINANCE

General Revenue Fund Information Technology Office Vote 74

Subvote (IT01)

The Chair: — I would recognize the minister to introduce his officials.

Hon. Mr. Thomson: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I'm joined today by two officials from the Information Technology Office. The chief information and services officer for the province, John Law, is seated to my left. And directly behind me is Richard Murray, who's the chief technology officer.

Given the way the debate has been going, I was tempted to bring Agriculture officials this morning. Hopefully I won't need them as we proceed through the discussion.

The Chair: — And to clarify, it's not department; it's office.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman, I guess we could ask questions about how the Information Technology is handling the information out of Agriculture. And we may actually get there at some point in time, whether or not the Internet connections between Saskatchewan and Ontario actually work or whether they work to the Prime Minister's office or whether they work to the Premier of Quebec or whether they work to the NDP caucus office in Nova Scotia.

But right now, Mr. Speaker ... (inaudible interjection) ... That's right. Or whether or not the government has access through the Internet to NewsWatch's Web page to confirm or deny whether or not NewsWatch actually exists and whether people actually do interviews on it and whether or not the Minister of Agriculture from Ontario was on NewsWatch this morning at exactly 7:10. So, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Chairman, we won't ask those immediately.

An Hon. Member: — You said an interview on NewsWatch.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Excuse me, on NewsWorld. NewsWatch was the ones that record that.

Mr. Minister, I guess the first question would be, since this is a

new office that was established and reported in the budget book I believe for the first time this year — I don't recollect it being reported as an office previously — exactly what the purpose of this office is and what the policy direction is for this particular office.

Hon. Mr. Thomson: — Mr. Chairman, this is the first time that the Information Technology Office has appeared as a separate vote in the Estimates book. It's previously ... The office has existed for some time under the auspices of Industry and Resources, or Economic Development as it used to be known.

The mandate of this office is largely twofold. First of all it has a responsibility to provide simple coordination of approach to dealing with internal information technology issues within the government.

The second is to help work with Industry and Resources department on sectoral development issues in the IT (information technology) sector.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Minister, you have a staff, an FTE (full-time equivalents) staff of 18. Was this number simply transferred from other areas into this office, or are these new people that have been hired and the people who were dealing with IT in other segments of government have remained in place?

Hon. Mr. Thomson: — Mr. Chairman, these are in fact a straight transfer of both PYs (person-years) and the personnel who fill them, from Industry and Resources.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. One of the areas that I think is of great deal of interest to all IT people across this province — whether or not they're in private industry, whether they're in government — is the policies that this government is about to pursue, is pursuing and about to pursue when it comes to the strategic plans for IT.

(11:30)

What are the government's plans in that area? How is IT going to be dealt with within government internally? How it's going to be dealt with externally with the rest of society; with industry; with third party groups like hospitals, schools, various segments of society across the province.

So how is ... What's the strategic policy and plan internally within government and externally across the province?

Hon. Mr. Thomson: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. There are in fact two parts to this question. Let me start with the internal issues that the member has raised.

The decision-making process within government around IT systems is largely decentralized and housed in each individual department. Individual departments have IT officers, they have their own IT support branches. In some, I think in most departments there are outsourcing arrangements in place where we deal with private sector suppliers, CGI, EDS (Electronic Data Systems), ISM (Information Systems Management Corporation), a number of other small ones.

There is, at this point, largely a coordinating role that is played by the ITO (Information Technology Office) in terms of working with departments to make sure that we've got an ability for departments to work together.

One of the changes in approach that we've had is, as a result of the reorganization last March that the Premier embarked on, was to create a separate ministry of Information Technology. And this . . . The departmental structure attached to that is the ITO. But a lot of this discussion and focus that we are putting to this is, how do we find a way to move the government systems from a largely decentralized disparate set of systems to a more integrated network type approach throughout government? How do we start to address the efficiency issues? How do we address increased productivity? How do we address moving with new ideas in terms of government on-line?

That is the challenge that we face internally. And there are a number of structural issues that we can certainly talk about today or in the future as to options available to us. But at this point we have largely a decision-making process that is decentralized into each of the departments and we've got a very broad set of partners that we deal with throughout the community.

On the external issues that the member raises, certainly the pre-eminent piece of the ITO's responsibility focuses around CommunityNet, which is a program that has been several years underway now. In fact, we believe we'll finish the rollout this year. CommunityNet, as the members know, is a program to bring wired broadband to Saskatchewan communities. We anticipate this year that we'll complete the rollout to the 366 communities we had initially identified.

The benefit of this, of course, is that we are able to hook up schools, libraries, the health facilities, government offices on one common set of hardware. And the obvious benefit to rural communities has been . . . an associated benefit has been the ability to bring in, behind that, high-speed Internet connections through SaskTel for individual businesses and consumers.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Well thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Minister, you mentioned CommunityNet. Does internal government utilize CommunityNet or the CommunityNet structure for its communications, for its IT services throughout the province?

I'm thinking of, say, the Department of Environment which would have offices spread around the province. Are they tied in through CommunityNet or do they utilize their own system? Because you mentioned that the departments, up until now, have been relatively separate from each other. Are they utilizing CommunityNet?

Hon. Mr. Thomson: — Mr. Chairman, the short answer to the member's question is yes. All departments do use CommunityNet for their linkages, both within the city of Regina and throughout the province. This is the system we use.

We're not aware of any anomalies where departments would use a different system. But this is the standard that we use and has been for two years now.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Minister, one of the concerns that government should have, the public does have, is dealing with security and control of access and information gathering through the Internet.

How does that security work? And I don't mean by the exact detail but rather the management control of security within CommunityNet. Is it every department would look after their own security, their own control systems? Or does CommunityNet provide that and impose their security over every department? How is it all isolated one from the other so that, say, SERM (Saskatchewan Environment and Resource Management), someone in SERM is accessing information in the Department of Health? Who looks after that management control and how is that done?

Hon. Mr. Thomson: — Well, Mr. Deputy Chair, I can tell you that with these kind of questions where you think it's always easy to give a nice simple, quick answer and say, yes, in fact there is a great deal of detail to this.

Without getting into too much of the technicality around it, which I have been enjoying listening to, I think the easiest answer to this is that, yes, CommunityNet does have across it a standard in terms of its security features. These are dealt with, managed by SaskTel. There are firewalls within CommunityNet. Each individual department has firewalls.

There are common standards that we apply in terms of filters across CommunityNet for Internet access. And there are within individual departments, usage policies around everything from e-mail to different security levels in terms of which employees can access which information.

The ability though, as the member alludes to in his question, for an official in the Department of Environment to access information say in the Department of Health would not be possible without appropriate authority being given by the department that houses the information.

If that's the — in terms of the overall Internet and CommunityNet type of access — the question, I think that's a sufficient answer. If the member is wanting to ask about information gathering and policies for securing privacy, that is a different set of issues that we can get into.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, no. The minister's still heading down the road I'm intending.

Each department then has its own firewall. Who establishes the criteria for access through that firewall? Is it CommunityNet? Is it SaskTel? Is it the department?

Hon. Mr. Thomson: — Firewall access is determined by the department that is responsible for the data.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you very much. Within the department, now let's say SERM which has offices spread out all over the province, is it possible for SERM to establish firewalls within their piece of CommunityNet, not just at the gate where CommunityNet accesses SERM, but SERM within its structure could firewall office A from office B and establish their criteria and establish it in such a manner that different

offices might have different criteria?

Hon. Mr. Thomson: — Yes. In fact this is common practice within departments. There will be different levels of security employed within individual departments, largely based around the types of information that are being dealt with in terms of who needs access to them, who should have access to them. These tend to be held discreetly within the departments.

Obviously HR (human resources) records, information containing citizen-collected data is handled differently than we might handle more general aggregated information that the government might collect.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Does the same system and criteria then work for that area outside of government, so the external CommunityNet connections — be that third party groups, be that various communities — is the same security and management control in place for those segments?

So let's say SARM (Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities), the municipalities wish to access CommunityNet. They wish to establish their own server system so that the various municipalities can interact with their central SARM headquarters plus connect to the various RMs (rural municipality) and municipalities across the province. Can they establish their own firewall system? Can each one of those municipalities establish their own firewall with their own criteria as to who has access into that system?

Hon. Mr. Thomson: — In terms of firewall access, the member would be accurate to say that organizations that are involved with the CommunityNet program are allowed to set their own firewall standards. CommunityNet though does have a certain set of protocols that have to be adhered to within it, so you cannot dumb down the system. It is a question that you can add it in additional enhancements but you cannot violate the privacy and protocol pieces that are built into CommunityNet as it exists.

Nothing prevents any users on the system from establishing a higher standard or restricting additional access. This is one of the pieces which we believe is working fairly successfully within the system now.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. I'm surprised you say that it's working successfully because I have received some complaints about that very issue dealing within the education system; the ability to firewall individual divisions to a certain criteria, not dumbing down but raising the standards or raising the standards of individual schools over that set by the division. The school in question is being told that you have to adhere to the standard being put forward by the Department of Education — not raising the bar, but you're not physically able to change that.

I wonder if the minister's officials will be able to address that issue through the minister and indicate whether or not it's . . . they are physically able to raise that bar on their firewalls within that school.

(11:45)

Hon. Mr. Thomson: — As we start to deal with departments' relationships with outside agencies that they may have under their purview, whether it's — or that they have a relationship with — whether it is municipal governments' dealings with RMs or whether it is Department of Education's dealing with school divisions and then subsequently down to individual schools, we start to move in to a set of decisions and policies that are perhaps better addressed by individual ministers.

This question that the member raises is one that is being dealt with through the Department of Education. As I had indicated at the start of my comments, one of the difficulties that we have as we're trying to move forward with IT technology and the policy issues around it is that a lot of the decision making is housed in the individual departments. So the issue that the member raises, I am not directly familiar with and may in fact be better addressed to the Minister of Learning under her estimates.

Suffice it to say though that the standards that are imposed by CommunityNet apply across the departments. The departments then can deal with additional security provisions as they see fit. But it is them rather than CommunityNet that deal directly with the divisional partners.

Mr. D'Autremont: — I can certainly understand the need to talk to, say, the Minister of Education about the policy.

But I'm wondering more about the management control that the . . . Well I use the word physically able; it's in a virtual world. Are the individual schools, the individual RM offices, the individual SERM offices able to firewall individually and still be part of the greater department connection, their intranet? Is it possible for a programmer to program in a higher standard into the firewall for an individual location, assuming the policy allows for that?

Hon. Mr. Thomson: — The question the member asks has again, I think, two different sets of issues within it. First of all within the government departments there are standards that are applied within government. So the way that we would deal with the regional office of any government department is different than the relationship that we have with a school division, which is of course an autonomous body, or an RM.

CommunityNet does not have on it a server-type system, so when a school participates in CommunityNet they don't then turn over their information systems to the provincial government. They would still be responsible for having their own hosting system in their division. And on that system they can establish the firewalls as they see appropriate for their division. The CommunityNet in that particular case serves largely as a, for lack of a better term, really as a set of pipes that hook up them to the larger Internet.

Within the government departments though there are different policies that different departments will have, although standards are applied the same in the main department as they would be in regional offices.

Mr. D'Autremont: — So you're saying on a physical side, on a server side, Mr. Minister, that in the case of the school that I described, the school server with the firewall on it would be perhaps at a central location within the division and they're all

connecting to that. Or the school could establish its own server if they wish to firewall at that location, and then connect in to the unit server, and thence on to the grander world of the connection to the entire province.

So it would be up to the school then to provide that kind of a server and that kind of a firewall. Physically for the system, a server and firewall at the school location then henceforth at the unit location henceforth connected to CommunityNet, would not physically cause any problems to the CommunityNet service?

Hon. Mr. Thomson: — I think the short answer to the member's question is in fact yes, that this is the case.

In fact yesterday I had an opportunity to meet with Regina Catholic School Division here, and that's very much the set up that they have, individual servers for Web servers, e-mail servers. They've got a different system for the student management. You could have a different server within a school that then hooks up to the divisional one or the unit one and then would connect in through CommunityNet.

CommunityNet has across it a set of standards in terms of the type of access that's provided. And in fact there is, as I understand, certain Web-blocking pieces on there; that we make sure that there's a standard in terms of access to the Internet.

My officials caution me of course in these technological matters there's always a possibility that there is something there that may cause us to need to impose that . . . a change in the standard as we move back down the chain. But we're not aware of anything at this point as we've done the rollout to just over or just about 800 schools, that has come to our attention on this.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Another one of the issues that has been raised over the last few months dealing with government IT has been this procurement policy. And I'm just wondering if the minister would explain the current procurement policy for ITO for the government?

Hon. Mr. Thomson: — The ITO does not have a unique or a discreet purchasing policy separate and apart from SPMC (Saskatchewan Property Management Corporation), so in that regard we follow the government's standard in terms of the both the thresholds and the type of mechanisms we would use in purchasing and procuring IT services.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Minister, your office or the government was looking at going into an arrangement with EDS last fall to handle a significant amount of the government's IT services.

That obviously raised some concerns throughout industry in Saskatchewan that the smaller players were about to be frozen out. They do provide a significant amount of service today to the government and wish to continue to provide or at least to have an opportunity to provide that service.

And their concern was that if the government entered into a long-term contract for IT services with EDS that they might potentially be froze out. They certainly I know talked to the minister about that. They talked to us about that. They talked to

the media about it.

Not only were the software and hardware industry, IT industries in Saskatchewan concerned, so were the current workers within government. The IT people within the various departments were concerned that their livelihoods would be jeopardized as well.

I wonder if the minister can outline the reasons why government was looking at that proposal; what the government hoped to accomplish by making those changes?

Hon. Mr. Thomson: — Thank you very much for the question. Of course this has been a topic of significant debate over the last, well longer than six months it seems.

But the issue is in terms of why we were interested. It very much goes back to in fact what I had first mentioned within the mandate and some of the challenges this department faces. Namely, how do we move from a decentralized decision-making process with a number of, a variety of different applications being run — often with the case, the fact they are unable to communicate with each other — how do we move over to a more integrated networked approach to dealing with government on-line, both from a government-to-government basis to improve our government business services and to move into the newer area of government-to-citizen contact?

The EDS proposal that came to us was not in fact a procurement initiative. This was very much one where we were taking a look at a strategic partnership that would allow us to leverage additional economic development out of existing spending.

The second objective that we had within looking at this approach was, so we've got first of all the integration we're looking at; the second question is how do we . . . can we leverage additional economic activity with using existing spending.

And the third is can we find efficiency, financial efficiencies within the system that can then help for a renewed build out?

Those were three of the key drivers to us taking a look at the proposal by EDS.

The discussions as they moved forward were interesting as we got into the discussion with the industry because there is a very . . . It is a highly competitive industry. And there are two main segments of that industry we have to deal with beyond the hardware/software division, which are obvious I think. There are the large information supplier companies like EDS, IBM (International Business Machines Corporation), ISM, CGI.

And then you get the smaller group of companies who are more niche marketed within government. These may deal with independent applications that are in the legacy systems of departments like Environment. They may deal with the overall government e-mail system like we have in place. So there's that discussion as to what the balance is between the large suppliers and the smaller suppliers.

There is, as the member pointed out, also a very significant

dynamic around the whole question of outsourcing. Obviously all the private sector companies want the government to move to a much more aggressive outsourcing approach. On the other hand, we have a large number of unionized workers within the industry who are worried about that. You can add onto that an additional dynamic where, interestingly enough, some of the suppliers accuse the government of in-sourcing too much.

And in fact, as a result, moving away from the view that the government should . . . had initially set up, or the previous government had set up, is they had outsourced the government's IT systems through . . . from SaskComp to Westbridge, Westbridge to ISM in its current existence. So this was a bit of a . . . The issue becomes a bit of a Gordian knot. It's very hard to figure out how to untangle this and to move it forward.

I think it is fair to say that the EDS discussions were . . . well obviously were not concluded. But there were a number of reasons for that and none of which, I would say, are related to procurement issues; more related to finding the right balance and to finding a proposal that met the government's initial objectives.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Well thank you, Mr. Minister. While it may not have dealt with directly the idea of procuring a new computer for someone's desktop or a new piece of software to operate on that computer, it certainly did involve though the procurement of IT services in general for government — as to who would be managing that system, who would be managing the procurement, who would be managing the decisions as to what kind of a system was being operated, what general software was being utilized throughout the entire government structure — by integrating those items, by bringing together the departments under one roof.

Certainly there are efficiencies to be gained because you have bulk buying, you have a common software throughout the entire government structure so that everyone, say, is using one particular word processor, everyone's using one particular database collection system, everybody's using one particular spreadsheet. And so it's easy to transfer information from the Department of Health to the Department of Education if that need arises.

And there's certainly value in doing that. When communication systems can't talk to each other, no one's communicating. And it's the same in IT. If one IT service can't communicate to the other, then that's a problem in government. Information is not reaching the points that it needs to.

(12:00)

So the overall structure that was being contemplated by the government as brought forward by EDS, while it may not initially have dealt with who's going to buy that computer or who's going to supply that computer, the overall process of having EDS manage IT services would have directly impacted on that process of procurement.

And that's . . . A large number of the businesses across the province were concerned about that whole process. Once one of the major players — EDS, ISM, CGI, whomever it might be —

gained the management control, who else was going to be allowed to participate in the system was a concern to them. How was access to the system going to be allowed? Were the other large players going to be froze out because one had the contract to manage the system? Were the small players going to be froze out because one large operator had that management control?

There was also a great deal of concern that if the bidding process to either provide software, to provide software in the sense of management controls or procurement in the sense of hardware, if the small players had to provide the major player with their tendering process and their information, would that affect them some other place? Now that a major player knew and understood how the small player was making their bids for government, would it affect their relationship when it came to making a bid in another sector outside of government? And there was a great deal of concern about that.

So I think we need to take a look at the process that originally generated these concerns. How did government enter into negotiations with EDS for the proposals to handle government's IT? Was this a request from government, that we want to integrate our entire service, we want to bring all of government IT enterprise under one roof to run it more efficiently, to better manage it? Or did EDS approach government and say we have a proposal for you to do those things, to bring it all under one roof, to better manage it, to be more efficient? How did that process occur?

Hon. Mr. Thomson: — Mr. Deputy Chair, let me start back at this question as to what some of the objectives were. First of all I want to be very clear that at no point was the government going to outsource its management responsibility. The control over the management of information, management of the systems, was going to be retained by government in this particular scenario. Indeed I would argue it needs to . . . I know it's a little hard to follow in here, but one of the things that, Mr. Deputy Chair, I think we need to remember is that government intended to keep the management here. And in fact I would argue government needs to maintain the management of the systems, both in terms of managing contracts but also having overall ability to manage the policy directions.

In terms of the discussion that we were getting into with EDS, we were not in fact looking at establishing a common set of applications across government. What we were looking at was how do you integrate the applications? As you move from a system of largely decentralized, departmentalized, stovepiped operations where individual departments may have within it a number of different applications and databases, how do you start to move forward to better integrate that?

EDS's discussions were largely focused around systems integration — not only standardization, not only around consolidation of decision making, but largely around systems integration. What does that mean? Well simply enough put, what it means is that if you have . . . Say in the Department of Health which has 200 different databases, how do you help to make sure that the applications can work among them?

We may have within that on a simple piece of data — like collecting citizens' data — you may have something as simple

as last name categorized in three or four different ways. It could be classified on one database as surname, could be in another as last name, could be in another as family name, could be in one as a code number. The question is how do you make . . . apply certain standards, or how do you integrate across that so that those databases can communicate, so that we can make sure that we move over to more of a management type of a system?

This was a big part of the discussion that we were into with EDS. And how do you do that without disrupting the partnerships that are already in place, either internally within government for information that's developed by government systems programmers, or externally dealt with through individual companies? It's a big challenge, not simply one that the Government of Saskatchewan has but one that's faced by larger corporations around the globe.

We believed that by entering into the discussions with EDS that we could find a workable systems integrations approach to moving forward.

I think where this fear started to arise within the . . . some of the smaller players, and may I say I think it was fed by some of the larger players who obviously wanted to be into the discussions with us, was around this view that this particular supplier was not only going to deal with systems integration but in fact was going to take over applications development.

There are a large number of companies who do apps development for government and in fact we continue to work with them. This proposal had always had built into it the view that there would be an offset within it for existing suppliers and vendors on their specific project to continue in that direction until they came back up to tender, at which point obviously we would go through a normal process for purchasing those applications. And the systems integration piece was one that we were looking at with EDS.

To address the second question the member raises, in terms of how did we get into the discussion with EDS. After I was appointed minister in March of last year, we embarked on a series of discussions with large and smaller companies across the province about how to enter into reform of our IT systems within government. Now one of the issues that obviously came up was, as we started to identify how we were going to move forward with IT reform, this was something we'd identified with each of the big players.

Now I appreciate the fact the member is right, that it does with this long answer appear that time has stood still, and hopefully we won't go on this for too much longer. But let me conclude by saying this. Individual companies, I think, were aware of what we were interested in doing within the IT system.

EDS took it on their own initiative to bring us a proposal that outlined and dealt with the major initiatives that we had identified and added a very significant piece that no other supplier to date has come forward with. That was the ability for us to use the existing expenditure to leverage industry development in a very significant way to create a very core competency area in Regina around systems development.

The EDS proposal had a lot of potential; it had a lot of promise.

It had a huge number of jobs attached to it, both in terms of call centre jobs attached but also in terms of other opportunities that were attached for systems development. The end result of it was, as we looked at this, setting aside industry issues, there were a number of reasons that we decided not to pursue the EDS proposal, not the least of which was that because of the disparate nature of government systems, it was hard to identify what the savings were going to be.

In many ways the management model became complicated as we had reached the agreement in order to maintain the unionized workforce, not only in terms of the body but in terms of the bargaining unit. And as we started to take a look at how that was going to work, we obviously traded off some in savings for that, this became a complicated initiative. And as we looked at how to meet our overall objectives, we decided that rather than moving on to the second phase, the more detailed negotiations with EDS, that it was better to set this aside.

The obvious question is, what are the next steps? How do you move back towards a systems integration approach? How do we deal with the equipment renewal that's necessary within government? How do you establish the integrated architecture? What do we do to make sure the platforms are established with some commonality across? How do we consolidate decision making so that we don't have department X operating on a completely different approach than department Y?

How do you put over top of that a privacy framework that works for all of government and takes into account sensitive information that may be collected by the Department of Health, the Department of Finance, but also takes a look at the need for us to have aggregated . . . statistical information available on a broader basis?

How do we make sure that we've got a system in place where we can move forward on government on-line, both internally so that simple things like increased productivity that we could derive through that, from something as simple as having an on-line expense form, is able to be generated rather than going through a paper that has to be stamped by four officials along the way? How do you build that into the system?

That set of questions remains. It was a set of questions we thought could be addressed by the EDS proposal. And in fact, I think, would have been addressed by the EDS proposal except that these other issues, we believed, at the end of the day outweighed the benefit that we were going to see out of it.

Mr. D'Autremont: — A very short question, and I'll want to pursue this at a later date, but a very short question on this, and you may have answered and I might have missed it but I'm not sure.

Did government approach EDS or did EDS approach government on this proposal?

Hon. Mr. Thomson: — Mr. Deputy Chair, we have talked with each of the large vendors and many of the small vendors about issues within the government IT system.

EDS came forward to us with an unsolicited proposal to pursue

this and it contained these other elements which were of interest to us. I can say that of all of the vendors I have met with, this was a truly unique, and to this day remains a unique proposal. I don't know that we'll see anything like it again.

With that I'd like to thank the member for his questions today, appreciate my officials coming out, and I would move that the committee rise and report progress.

Mr. D'Autremont: — I'd just like to thank the minister and his officials for coming today and answering questions.

The Deputy Chair: — Everybody have a good weekend.

The committee reported progress.

The Deputy Speaker: — Have a pleasant weekend.

The Assembly adjourned at 12:15.

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