

The Assembly met at 10:00.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRESENTING PETITIONS

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today on behalf of people who are concerned about the amount of education tax paid on property.

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly urge the provincial government to take all possible action to cause a reduction in the education tax burden carried by Saskatchewan residents and employers.

The people who have signed this petition are from Saskatoon and Wadena.

Mr. Gantfoer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today on behalf of citizens of Moose Jaw and district who are concerned about a lack of dialysis services. The prayer reads as follows:

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.

Signatures on this petition this morning, Mr. Speaker, are from the cities of Moose Jaw and Regina, and I'm pleased to present on their behalf.

Mr. Elhard: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The petition today, Mr. Speaker, is in regard to crop insurance premium increases for 2003. 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.

Mr. Speaker, the signatures on this petition come from the communities of Consul, Eastend, and Frontier but to show how widespread the concern is, there's also signatures from Calgary and Quebec.

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. 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 Gravelbourg, Coderre, Lafleche, and Regina.

I so present.

Ms. Eagles: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, again today I rise to present a petition on behalf of people from this wonderful province who have deep concerns regarding the condition of Highway 47 between Estevan and the Boundary dam resort. 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 the citizens of Estevan, Roche Percee, and Regina.

I so present. Thank you.

Mr. Yates: — I rise today to present a petition signed by Saskatchewan citizens who are concerned that deregulation and privatization in the electrical industry is causing electrical rates to rise dramatically in other jurisdictions. And the prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the Government of Saskatchewan and the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan to assure the people of Saskatchewan that deregulation and privatization of the electrical industry in Saskatchewan, including SaskPower, will not be allowed.

Mr. Speaker, this petition is signed by the good people of Regina and Saskatoon.

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise again with a petition from citizens of various parts of Saskatchewan who are concerned with the deplorable condition of Highway 43. And the petition reads as follows:

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 is signed by citizens from Regina, Lafleche, and Gravelbourg.

I so present.

Mr. Dearborn: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today on behalf of citizens of west central Saskatchewan concerned with the lack of cellphone coverage and the dangers this poses specifically for our oil patch. And the prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to construct a new cellular telephone tower at Coleville, Saskatchewan.

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

Mr. Speaker, this petition is signed by the good folks from Coleville and Kindersley, Saskatchewan.

I so present.

Mr. Brkich: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition here with citizens opposed to the Saskatchewan Crop Insurance 2003 premium increases.

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.

Signed by citizens from Davidson and Tugaska.

I so present.

Mr. Lorenz: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, presenting a petition from citizens that are concerned about the deterioration of Highway 14. The prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to recognize the deplorable condition of Highway 14 from Biggar to Wilkie and to take necessary steps to reconstruct and repair the highway in order to assist safety concerns and to facilitate economic growth in rural Saskatchewan.

As duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

The petition is signed by citizens of Wilkie, Landis, and Lloydminster.

I so present.

Mr. Hart: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I rise to present a petition on behalf of the citizens of this province who are very concerned with the inaction of this government in dealing with the issue of the Qu'Appelle Valley river/lake system. The prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the provincial government to do everything in its power to work with the First Nations people and the federal government to bring a prompt end to the dispute so that water level of the Qu'Appelle River system can return to normal and end the economic harm and uncertainty this dispute has caused.

Signatures to this petition, Mr. Speaker, come from Pasqua Lake and Regina.

I so present.

Mr. Allchurch: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I rise in the Assembly today to bring forth a petition signed by citizens of Saskatchewan that are very concerned with the government's handling of the Crown land leases. 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 in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

Mr. Speaker, the signatures on this petition are from Saskatoon and Shellbrook.

I so present.

Mr. Van Mulligen: — Mr. Speaker, I rise to present a petition signed by Saskatchewan people who are concerned that deregulation and privatization in the electrical industry is causing electrical rates to increase dramatically in other jurisdictions. The prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the Government of Saskatchewan and the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan to assure the people of Saskatchewan that deregulation and privatization of the electrical industry in Saskatchewan, including SaskPower, will not be allowed.

Now this petition, Mr. Speaker, is signed by people from Estevan, Glenavon, Bienfait, Macoun, and Rocanville, Mr. Speaker.

And 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, 18, 27, 41, 100, 114, 119, 120, and no. 124.

NOTICES OF MOTIONS AND QUESTIONS

Mr. Dearborn: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I give notice that I shall on day no. 63 ask the government the following question:

To the Minister of Culture, Youth and Recreation: could the minister please provide an explanation for the process for allocating taxpayers' dollars from this province for the production of the Toronto, Ontario program *Designer Guys*; and further to that, how much Saskatchewan taxpayers' dollars has been allocated for this production?

I so present.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you. I give notice I shall on day no. 63 ask the government the following question:

To the Minister of Highways: did the minister purchase the speed limit sign that they donated to a charity recently from the Department of Highways; if so, how much did he pay for the sign; can any citizen of the province buy a similar sign?

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Mr. Dearborn: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To you and through you it's my pleasure to introduce the Eston grade 12 class. The Eston grade 12 tourism, hospitality and entrepreneurship class are visiting here today seated in your gallery. The class is travelling a good portion of our province having a look at some of the province's tourism facilities — the spa and tunnels in Moose Jaw, museums and our legislative buildings here in Regina, a bed and breakfast in Kandahar, Batoche, and a bike tour in Saskatoon.

Members of the class are the teacher, Mr. Brad Hartsook, Jeff Wells, Casey Stevenson, Dee Beckstrand, Darnell Japp, and Jenna Tunall. The two other members of the class are Alex Llewellyn of New Zealand and Louise Smith of Australia here on an exchange program. And the class is accompanied by their teacher, Marea Olafson and fathers, Allan Japp and Dale Tunall.

And on behalf of the Assembly, I welcome you here today. I look forward to meeting with you in the near future or shortly after session, and I hope that you enjoy today's proceedings. And I'd ask all members to welcome the folks from Eston.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In the west gallery today we are joined by a large number of students and teachers from the Saskatoon French School. I am privileged that the Saskatoon French School is in the constituency of Riversdale, but I know that the students come from across the city of Saskatoon.

And so I want to say on behalf of all of the Saskatoon MLAs (Member of the Legislative Assembly) and all MLAs in this legislature, a word of welcome to the 42 grade 5 and 6 students from the Saskatoon French School and all their teachers and parents who may be with us here today. We hope they enjoy their visit at the legislature and I look forward to meeting with them a little later this morning.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Melenchuk: — Well thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too would join with the Premier in welcoming the Saskatoon French School.

And I understand that a good family friend, Kendra Chernoff, is with the group today. Kendra, could you give us a wave? Kendra? Give us a wave. I just wanted to say that Kendra is the daughter of Roy and Shannon Chernoff, and Roy's a classmate of mine from med school.

Kendra is a very accomplished swimmer. She has set two provincial records this year in Saskatchewan and she's rated number two in the world in the butterfly 100-metre and 50-metre in her age category, so . . .

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Melenchuk: — So I'd also like to welcome Kelly Patrick, who is a parent chaperone with the group today and well known as a social activist in her support for a skateboard park in Saskatoon.

But just a few words of French — hopefully I can get this right — with regard to Kendra:

Félicitations, Kendra, et les meilleurs souhaits à toi et tes amis de l'école. Et bienvenue de l'Assemblée ce matin. Merci.

(Translation: Congratulations, Kendra, and best wishes to you and your school friends. And welcome to the Assembly this morning. Thank you.)

And I'd ask all members to welcome them today.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Huskies Football Team Inducted into Sports Hall of Fame

Mr. Addley: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I believe I am correct in saying that every member of the Saskatoon . . .

The Speaker: — Order, please. Order. Order. I'm having difficulty hearing the member and he's actually only about 15 feet from me. So I'd ask members to . . . The member for Sutherland, let's start again.

Mr. Addley: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I believe I am correct in saying that every member of the Saskatoon caucus has a close association with the University of Saskatchewan. And in fact many other members have more than a nodding acquaintance with our excellent first university.

On behalf of all U of S (University of Saskatchewan) alumni and friends, I'm very pleased to announce to the Assembly that this Saturday, tomorrow, the 1990 University of Saskatchewan Huskies football team will be inducted into the Saskatchewan Sports Hall of Fame.

This was the team, Mr. Speaker, that in 1989 went to the Vanier Cup for the first time in Huskie history, only to be turned back by a team from the wicked East. But the next year, more experienced and toughened by that disappointment, the Huskies coach under coach Brian . . . the Huskies team under coach Brian Towriss defeated St. Mary's University by a score of 24 to 21. As former Saskatoon sportscaster Lloyd Saunders used to say, it was a cliff burner.

Not only did this team go to the Cup twice and win once, it set the stage for a very successful decade in the 1990s during which subsequent Huskie teams went to the Cup four more times, winning twice; in other words, they created a dynasty — a dynasty which we can say influenced the new University of Regina Rams football team, who have already been to the Cup once.

Mr. Speaker, this was an excellent team of 76 Saskatchewan players out of 77 members — well deserving of their induction into the Sports Hall of Fame.

I ask all hon. members to join me in congratulating them. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

(10:15)

Scholastic Achievements of Kindersley Resident

Mr. Dearborn: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure today to applaud the achievements of Darin White of Kindersley. Darin is leaving the University of Saskatchewan with some of the most prestigious awards a faculty can offer.

After five years of study, 22-year-old Darin received the Governor General's Silver Medal, awarded for the highest academic standing of all graduates receiving undergraduate degrees; the Earl of Bessborough Prize in Science, awarded to the highest academic standings among science majors in arts and science; and the Haslam Medal for the most distinguished graduates in arts and science.

Darin is leaving the university with a Bachelor of Science Honors degree, with high honours in physiology. He attained 96 per cent or higher in 30 of his 36 classes. At the spring convocation held on May 29, associate dean of sciences, Dick Neal, described Darin as the most gifted student in the physiological department in the dean's memory.

Darin will attend McGill University in Montreal this fall to take a combined medical doctorate, Ph.D. (Doctor of Philosophy) program. Please join me in congratulating this outstanding young man on his accomplishments and wishing him future success in his studies.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Oil and Gas Land Sales

Ms. Atkinson: — Last Friday my colleague from Regina Dewdney reported for the 13th consecutive month jobs in Saskatchewan have increased. Today is Friday the 13th and, contrary to superstition, I have more good news for Saskatchewan.

The June oil and gas land sales have just been completed and interest in Saskatchewan's resources keep climbing. The sales in June were more than triple the figure a year ago. Mr. Speaker, we speak of the Saskatchewan advantage in the oil and gas industry. Here are the numbers that given credence to that motto.

June land sales generated \$33.9 million bringing this year's total so far to 86 million in revenue for our province, well ahead of the \$24.4 million of a year ago. This sale broke April's record of exploratory land sales with 115 exploration licenses going for 26.9 million. Another 190 lease parcels sold for an additional 7 million. Bidding activity was high in all areas of the province — more good news.

The sales this year represent a continuing confidence in Saskatchewan by the oil and gas sector. These strong numbers reflect a healthy industry in a province with a future that's wide open.

Last Friday we talked about jobs. This Friday we are happy to call attention to the industry that is a major generator of those jobs.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Young Spirits Campaign

Mr. McCall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday, along with the Minister of Health, I was pleased to visit at the community school, Wascana école communautaire, in the fine constituency of Regina Elphinstone.

We joined principal Lucie Anderson, teacher Barbara Jones, and her grade 5 and 6 students for a ceremony celebrating their participation in the Young Spirits: Proud to be Tobacco Free school campaign.

These 20 Wascana School students, Mr. Speaker, were proud to represent more than 400 grade 5 to 9 students from across the province who initiated and carried out their own projects to promote a tobacco-free society. The projects were varied and imaginative, as we would expect from Saskatchewan kids.

The Wascana students, for instance, made thank you certificates for neighbourhood smoke-free Tim Hortons. They walked to the restaurant to present them to the manager, Imelda Gonzalez, and I'm happy to say that Ms. Gonzalez was able to join us for the ceremony.

Other students made posters, videos, or colouring books. They kept journals and lobbied local officials for smoke control bylaws — worthy projects all.

Mr. Speaker, the Young Spirits campaign is a partnership between Saskatchewan Health, the federal government, the Missinipi Broadcasting Corporation — which is producing and airing radio ads in English, Dene, and Cree — and each student who undertakes a project receives a portable radio.

More importantly, these students will, we trust, learn to remain tobacco-free for life, a goal worthy of the work and imagination put forward by all 400 of these students. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Saskatchewan Party Nomination

Mr. Weekes: — Mr. Speaker, the end of the political road is near for the member from Prince Albert Northcote. Little did the member realize that when he started the entire SPUDCO (Saskatchewan Potato Utility Development Company) embarrassment six years ago, he had begun the process of ending his own political career.

The journey reached another leg last night as the Saskatchewan Party candidate was nominated for that constituency. Mr.

Speaker, 150 people packed the building last night as three excellent candidates ran for the nomination.

The crowd enjoyed plenty of SPUDCO jokes and SPUDCO stories about how the minister wasted almost \$30 million on this fiasco and basically was not forward with the taxpayers about how he tried to cover it up.

There was a lot of laughter last night, Mr. Speaker, from the large, enthusiastic crowd but there was also a lot of anger — anger at the NDP (New Democratic Party) government for the SPUDCO fiasco; anger at the Premier for not even giving the SPUDCO minister the boot from the cabinet for his truth expansions.

And, Mr. Speaker, the most serious anger was vented at the current member . . .

The Speaker: — Order. Order, please. Order. While the members are allowed a lot of freedom on debate, one of the things that we must not — we must require of ourselves as members is to — impugn bad motives on the part of members. I hear the member there impugning rather unworthy motives to the member from Prince Albert Northcote and I would ask him at this time to withdraw the statements and apologize to the House because it demeans the House when statements of that — Order. Order. Order! — when statements of that type are made.

Order. Order. Order. Order. Order. Order.

Now would the member for Redberry Lake please rise in his place, apologize to the House, and withdraw the statement.

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I withdraw and apologize.

The Speaker: — The member may proceed with his remarks.

Mr. Weekes: — There was also a lot of anger at the NDP government for the SPUDCO fiasco — anger at the Premier for not even giving the SPUDCO minister the boot from cabinet for his less than openness in the matter. And, Mr. Speaker, the most serious anger was vented at the current member.

Mr. Speaker, as it was noted last night, the people of Saskatchewan deserve better than what is currently being offered by the former SPUDCO minister and the, Mr. Speaker, the people of Prince Albert especially deserve better representation.

The winning candidate and the next Saskatchewan Party MLA for Prince Albert Northcote is Prince Albert lawyer, Mr. Peter Abrametz.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Point2 Internet Systems

Mr. Iwanchuk: — Mr. Speaker, a few years ago a Saskatoon company, Point2 Internet Systems, created software for on-line

heavy equipment auctions that quickly dominated the market. That led to a deal with heavy equipment giant Caterpillar incorporated to supply them with Internet software and to look after that company's global trading system.

Now Point2 has successfully launched Internet software for the real estate sector. The software known as Point2 Agent was launched in January and already has over 7,000 real estate agents using it in North America and a number of other places around the globe. The company is expecting the number to more than double by July.

The software is easy to use, allows real estate agents to maintain high-quality, customer-friendly Web sites at low cost.

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

Mr. Iwanchuk: — Mr. Speaker, since 2001, Point2 has grown from 25 to 60 employees. When asked about the success of their company a spokesperson said:

The reason we are doing so well here is we have a huge talent pool with some of the best programmers in North America right here in Saskatoon.

Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate Point2 Systems management and staff on their past successes and wish them well in their current and future endeavours. It's companies like them that keep this province's future wide open.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Unity Filmmaker Wins Golden Sheaf Award

Mr. Lorenz: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, Unity filmmaker wins national award. Jessie Wallace, a former Unity resident, is making a name for herself in the Canadian film industry and she now has the hardware to prove it.

Ms. Wallace won the Golden Sheaf Award at the Yorkton Short Film and Video Festival, May 21, for the best experimental film for *15 Minute Death*, a film she wrote, produced, and directed.

Mr. Speaker, Ms. Wallace used different shooting and editing techniques to give the film a different look. Wallace hopes to hit the festival circuit with the film and hopes more accolades are coming.

Mr. Speaker, the creative Wallace has an endless number of ideas for projects. She is also currently working as a producer on two feature-length dramas and a feature-length documentary on CBC (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation) in the spring for 2004.

Mr. Speaker, join me in congratulating Jessie Wallace in her workings with the film industry and her recognition in winning of the Golden Sheaf Award, and wishing Ms. Wallace every success in her future.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ORAL QUESTIONS

Support for Beef Industry

Mr. McMorris: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Minister of Labour. Over the past four weeks the BSE (bovine spongiform encephalopathy) has devastated the Canadian beef industry across this country.

There have been many workers in the beef industry and related spinoff sectors who have been temporarily laid off or have lost their jobs permanently. Yet despite repeated calls for the federal government to waive the waiting period for applicants to the Unemployment Insurance program, they have refused to act.

Mr. Speaker, the federal Minister of Human Resources Development will be in Regina this afternoon. Has the minister and the Premier got in touch with the minister and will they be meeting with this federal minister later on today?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Higgins: — Well thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As the members know, we have been working on this since the first letter was sent May 23, when the one case of BSE was discovered in Alberta.

I guess I would take a little exception to the member opposite when he says the outbreak of BSE has devastated the industry. It's really the closing of the American border which has devastated this industry and the continued insistence . . .

But, Mr. Speaker, when we look at the effects of this on the economies of Western Canada, and also on the workforce in Western Canada, Mr. Speaker, we made what we felt was a reasonable request that the minister responsible for HRDC (Human Resources Development Canada) would consider waiving the two-week wait period for entitlement to EI (Employment Insurance).

Mr. Speaker, we have carried that discussion on a number of levels with myself sending letters and having discussions with the minister, also with the Premier sending a couple of letters to the minister . . . to the Prime Minister. And, Mr. Speaker, we were informed yesterday by the media that Ms. Stewart would be in Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McMorris: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my question was simple and to the point. Will she be meeting with the minister today?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Higgins: — Mr. Speaker, I was informed yesterday late in the day that Minister Stewart would be here in Saskatchewan doing a bit of a promotional tour. I have not been in contact with her. I was not notified by the federal minister that she would be here in Saskatchewan. But, Mr. Speaker, I plan on attending her conference this afternoon in Regina.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McMorris: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's absolutely unbelievable how ineffective this NDP government has been when it . . .

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

Mr. McMorris: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again, it's unbelievable how ineffective this NDP government is when it comes to dealing with the federal government. It doesn't matter whether it's a drought disaster that we called for over the last couple of years because of farm land being devastated with lack of rain, to the BSE issue and how the federal government seems to just have a double standard across this country. But what is even more appalling is that the federal minister will be in our province, in the capital city, and that minister cannot even have a meeting with her. It's unbelievable, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, it's great that she's going to be in the audience during a news conference but that does very little when sitting across the table, as compared to sitting across the table negotiating Unemployment Insurance for our people in Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, will the minister demand a meeting with Jane Stewart while she's in Regina? Could you ask her for five minutes of her time to discuss the issue?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — I want to speak on behalf of government. And I'll tell you what's unbelievable and unconscionable, that we . . .

(10:30)

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

I would at this time like to make a blanket statement, that the conduct of the members is really quite inappropriate in terms of what should be going on in the House. And I would ask members, instead of pointing fingers and hollering at one another, to wait their turns, wait their turns, be patient.

Order. Order. Order. And I do have patience and I can wait this out.

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Now, Mr. Speaker, I'm going to tell you what's unbelievable and unconscionable; that we have a federal minister of the Crown coming to Saskatchewan today and this government, this Minister of Labour, learns about it — learns about it — through media sources, through media contacts. Mr. Speaker, I'll tell you what's unbelievable, is a federal government that will so treat with disdain and contempt the Government of Saskatchewan to set a precedent in the nation.

Now I want to ask the Labour critic who's been on his feet this morning, will he please demonstrate how he's made contact with the Minister of Human Resources Development Canada? Will he please tell us about the meeting that he has set up today? Will he please show us the letters that he has sent to the Prime Minister? Will he tell us what he has done, other than — other than — from his seat in this House and on platforms

across the province, speak to the destruction of labour law in Saskatchewan? That's what he does.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Highway Conditions

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well I can assure the Premier that our Labour critic will be glad to meet with the federal department at . . .

The Speaker: — Order. Order. Order. The member for Wood River may start over.

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll repeat it again. The Labour critic would be pleased to meet with the federal minister as soon as the Premier gets the courage to call the election, and we are government. Then he would be glad to meet with the minister from Ottawa.

Mr. Speaker, despite all of the NDP's bragging, many highways in Saskatchewan are still in terrible shape. The Minister of Highways recently received an e-mail regarding Highway 334 near Kayville, and it says:

(On April 11) . . . about 200 meters north of the Kayville access, we hit an **unmarked** hole with extremely large chunks protruding from the highway . . . I found several . . . gashes marking the points where the protruding pavement chunks had attempted to rip apart the bottom surfaces . . . Saturday afternoon, I found oil leakage under my vehicle coming from a damaged transmission pan.

Mr. Speaker, Highway 334 is falling apart. When is the NDP going to fix this highway?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Wartman: — Mr. Speaker, we recognize that there are highways that are in difficult shape. We have spoken to the people in these areas where the highways are in difficult shape. We have area transportation planning committees that are helping us set priorities in those areas. They live and work in the areas. They know what the priorities are. We work with them to determine which highways will be fixed when.

In terms of maintenance, our crews are out there. They have been working steadily in a very difficult year to bring our highways up to a safe standard. The member opposite should know that. If he drives in his constituency, he'll know that the crews are out there working.

And, Mr. Speaker, in terms of any claims that people have, if there is any damage because of those roads, I have said in this House, and the members opposite know, that people can submit those claims. And if they are legitimately caused by highways, they will receive a remittance.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Mr. Speaker, I'd like to advise the minister that I do travel the rural highways in this province and I do know how terrible they are and I could list a number of

them.

But, Mr. Speaker, the letter goes on to ask:

Why . . . were (there) **NO** markers, signs, flares, or other warnings (on this road) . . . Some of these holes varied from one foot around by six inches deep, up to the extreme of a hole that was at least EIGHT feet around and ten to 12 inches deep. These holes had . . . broken pavement chunks that created damage to my car and threatened the safety of my FAMILY!

Mr. Speaker, why isn't this highway fixed? Why weren't these dangerous potholes marked? And will this driver be reimbursed for the damage to his car?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Wartman: — Mr. Speaker, I already answered the member's last question in his series and I will now respond to his comments.

We look around this province and we see the amount of work that is going on, the amount of work that has gone on in these last three years — \$900 million put into Saskatchewan highways.

And I want to talk about the constituencies down there. Wood River constituency, the last four years, \$21.2 million. That's nothing to sneeze at. Mr. Speaker, Cypress Hills constituency, last four years, \$58.8 million. Swift Current constituency, \$6.1 million. Twinning all along that front, Mr. Speaker. Thunder Creek constituency, \$13.2 million. Weyburn-Big Muddy, \$19 million.

Mr. Speaker, this government is responding to the need. We are . . .

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Order, order.

Ms. Eagles: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And, Mr. Speaker, we will be doing a check to see if those numbers are more accurate than the last ones put out by that . . .

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Eagles: — Mr. Speaker, the RM (rural municipality) of Estevan has also written the Minister of Highways regarding the terrible shape of Highway 47 south of Estevan. They say, and I quote:

This highway is a heavily travelled highway which is used by local residents as well as our US neighbors. I might add that for our neighbors to the south, it is their first impression of our province. This highway is in a terrible state and becoming worse daily. It not only is hard on vehicles, it is a safety hazard which deserves your immediate attention.

Mr. Speaker, to the minister: when is the NDP going to fix Highway 47 south of Estevan?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Wartman: — Mr. Speaker, Highway 47 is scheduled for regular maintenance and upkeep. Highway 47 is also a bit of a dilemma in that it is partly a mining road, Mr. Speaker, and the mining is changing in that area. That road may in fact be moved, Mr. Speaker, and you don't want to invest heavily in a road that is not going to be there in the near future.

So we are maintaining the road so that it's safe and we will continue to do that until the decisions are made. We will not invest money that will just be thrown away.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Eagles: — Mr. Speaker, what are these people supposed to do — drive in the ditch?

Mr. Speaker, this letter from the RM of Estevan also includes an invitation to the Minister of Highways to travel to Estevan . . .

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

Ms. Eagles: — Mr. Speaker, they can laugh but it's probably safer in the ditch.

This letter is from the RM of Estevan and also includes an invitation to the Minister of Highways to travel to Estevan and accompany the RM council on a tour of this deplorable highway. They say, and I quote:

Once you are able to see the road and confirm our contentions that the road is harmful to personal safety . . . we are sure you will agree to our demand to have this road repaired immediately.

Mr. Speaker, has the minister responded to this invitation? When is he going to Estevan to see the terrible condition of Highway 47?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Wartman: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I have been to Estevan and I have travelled on Highway 47. I do know the condition that Highway 47 is in. And I will repeat — routine maintenance is going on on Highway 47 South. There will be hand patching, there will be blading done, and Mr. Speaker, our department is on the job doing a good job wherever they are and they are out there working on Highway 47 as well. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a copy of a letter to the Minister of Highways and it's from the manager of the Tugaska Co-op. And it's about the terrible shape of Highway 42 from Keeler to Eyebrow. He says, and I quote:

In 2000, the department converted to gravel 12 km of failed

(highway) areas (failed areas) on Highway 42. This conversion has now failed with many unsafe and dangerous areas appearing.

Mr. Speaker, I happen to know this area of highway because I travel it often when I am going to and from my constituency.

Mr. Speaker, the conversion to gravel three years ago was supposed to be a temporary measure. The gravel is still there, the dust and the holes. The highway is falling apart. The government has not kept its word. The NDP has not kept its word. When is this government going to fix Highway 42?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Wartman: — Mr. Speaker, the members opposite brag often about being from rural Saskatchewan and really knowing rural Saskatchewan. If they do, then they should understand that when you've got a very moist year like this, it wreaks havoc on our highways. There is a lot more damage; it happens a lot easier.

Now, Mr. Speaker . . .

The Speaker: — Order. Order.

Hon. Mr. Wartman: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'm not going to get into all the issues around hydrolyzing the roads, and dry roads from drought years, and what happens in the moist years.

But what I will say, Mr. Speaker, is that that piece on Highway 42 — which I travel a number of times each year as well — that piece on Highway 42 that was reverted to gravel is a very low spot, gets mushy quite easily. We have been putting more gravel into that spot to make it safe, and that spot is on the schedule, Mr. Speaker. It's on the schedule and it is part of the PGRP, the Prairie Grain Roads Program, and the work will be completed. It will be brought up to a standard that is much better than it's been by 2005.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The minister had two dry years to fix up that highway but he didn't do it, and now it's a little wetter and he's got a big problem and people's lives are at risk and he doesn't care. He's going to wait till 2005 to fix that highway. Who knows how many lives will be lost, how many vehicles will be destroyed, because of the negligence of the NDP government and their failure to respond to the needs of the people of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, from this letter I quote:

We are located beside the largest man made lake and two of the best golf courses in the province. The potential for tourism is unlimited. This potential will never . . . be realized if a safe transportation route is not established.

Mr. Speaker, this highway is not only dangerous, it's damaging tourism in the area. Mr. Speaker, why has the NDP broken its

commitment to fix this highway? Why is it taking so long to fix Highway 42?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Wartman: — That's an interesting area over there because it's not just around tourism, it's also about building a potato industry. And we have some key roads in that area. We have some very key roads in that area that are used for the building of that industry and we have been investing heavily in them. We have been doing that with the express guidance of the area transportation planning committees who live in the area.

The member opposite lives off to the side of that area, the Leader of the Opposition. He should know better. He should know that those people living in the area have priorities. We have tremendous backing for our highway programs. Those people in the area have set priorities. We've been working with them and building on those priorities. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If the Minister of Highways would have spent the \$28 million that the member from P.A. (Prince Albert) Northcote squandered on SPUDCO, not only would we have a state-of-the-art highway there, but we'd have a stronger potato industry as well.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hermanson: — Mr. Speaker, the manager of the Tugaske Co-op makes an offer. He says:

To help you experience . . . (the) hardship (of driving on this highway), the Tugaske Co-op is willing to give any MLA or Provincial Political Leader a FREE tank of gas. The only stipulation is that you must use Highway 42 (using the) section from Keeler to . . . (Tugaske, Mr. Speaker) to come . . . and get it.

Mr. Speaker, today the member for Arm River and myself are going to drive up to the Tugaske Co-op and take the manager up on his offer. We'll be driving down Highway 42 and I'm just simply asking the Minister of Highways, would he come along and see what his negligence has done to that highway?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(10:45)

Hon. Mr. Wartman: — I have no trouble believing that members opposite would try and take a free ride on the owner of the Tugaske Co-op. Mr. Speaker, I have been down that road at my own expense many times and I will be down that road again at my own expense. And my officials have been down that road, Mr. Speaker, and we know what needs to happen there. We are maintaining, we are building . . .

The Speaker: — Order, please.

Hon. Mr. Wartman: — Mr. Speaker, I really think the members opposite need to take a little bit broader look at the highways program in Saskatchewan. Mr. Speaker, we are

spending almost \$300 million this year, 300 last.

Mr. Speaker, we have been upgrading the highways in this province; we have been reducing the number of TMS (thin membrane surface) roads by upgrading them to a paved standard. They don't have much to complain about. We know the roads are not perfect but we're getting there. We're making progress at a good rate.

Ethanol Industry

Mr. Stewart: — Mr. Speaker, last October the NDP set up a circus tent at Belle Plaine and announced a deal with an American real estate company called Broe industries to build an ethanol plant. It was quite a show, Mr. Speaker — school kids bused out, hot dogs on the barbecue, students' artwork hung around the tent. The Premier even managed to climb on to a backhoe and dig a little dirt. Unfortunately in the eight months since then, the only digging on that site are gopher holes.

Mr. Speaker, why did the NDP create a media circus in Belle Plaine last October to announce an ethanol deal that clearly did not exist?

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well the Sask Party opposite also likes digging dirt.

Mr. Speaker, I want to say that I've said many times in my place that we would not be into construction until we had the deal, the best deal possible, for the people of Saskatchewan.

And, Mr. Speaker, you know, out of the Lloydminster *Booster* of May 7, 2003, Mr. Speaker, the member from Lloydminster agrees with us. It says here, and I quote, Mr. Speaker:

. . . Lloydminster MLA Milt Wakefield isn't entirely critical of both parties (CIC and Broe) for taking their time in the deal.

He says:

" . . . when you're talking about a project this big, there has got to be adequate and thorough . . . preparation done so that we don't mess up. To attract ethanol in the province and make Saskatchewan the production leader, I still think is a great objective."

Mr. Speaker, you know what? There's one member on that side that understands that ethanol is good for Saskatchewan and that we should take our time, Mr. Speaker. Congratulations to that member.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Stewart: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The NDP, the NDP set up a circus tent and fired up the barbecue at Belle Plaine last October to announce an ethanol deal with Broe industries that senior NDP officials now admit never existed.

Then last December, the minister responsible for SPUDCO cover-up announced that the ethanol deal was right on schedule for a construction start in April. But according, but according to CIC vice-president, Zach Douglas, the NDP didn't get a deal

signed with Broe industries until February. Frank Hart, CIC president, also admitted the NDP didn't even start negotiations with senior banks until late April and that construction would not begin until late June at the very earliest.

Mr. Speaker, why would the minister tell the media in December that the Belle Plaine ethanol project was right on schedule for an April construction start when he was fully aware there was no deal with Broe or the banks?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Well, Mr. Speaker, for that member to say that negotiations with the lending institutions didn't begin until April, Mr. Speaker, is just not factually correct. Mr. Speaker, there were negotiations, Mr. Speaker, with the banks beginning way back in January and before the beginning of the year, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, as I have said many times, and unless those members opposite from the Sask Party want us to start construction before we have the deal that we said we wanted which would be the best deal for the people of Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker — Mr. Speaker, if that's what they want, Mr. Speaker, then they should come out and say it — but until we have the best deal possible for the people of Saskatchewan, we are not about to begin construction, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

STATEMENT BY THE SPEAKER

Ruling on a Point of Order

The Speaker: — Members, before orders of the day I would ask for your attention and I would like to respond, or bring down a ruling at this time on an issue that was raised yesterday.

Yesterday the issue was raised by the Deputy Government House Leader and responded to as well by the member for Rosthern regarding unparliamentary language by the member for Saltcoats.

I have reviewed the verbatim record of the exchange yesterday and find that, although the words themselves do not always fall into the strict category of unacceptable language, the words taken in the complete context leave an unmistakable impression that members on the other side are of doubtful veracity.

I want to . . . Order. Order, please. Order, please. I want to take a few moments of the members' time to indicate to them — to all members — some of the guidelines that I use in making judgments of this type because things are not always very clearly black and white.

First of all, a Speaker must rely on the basic concept of democracy, that is freedom of speech, which is probably the most important thing to preserve in a legislature and to allow passionate debate where concept, ideas, words, and statements can be challenged.

There are limits to how far members should be allowed or

members themselves impose upon themselves on free speech, and that is anything that could be considered libellous or may impute bad motives such as illegalities or immorality, or being unethical, as well as personal attacks on the members themselves because the debate should be taking place on the issues.

There are several precedents in *Hansard* that a Speaker can refer to. On page 145 I bring to members' attention, the word fabricate which . . . fabricate has at times been used, stated as unparliamentary. On page 149 the words distorting, distort, and mislead, fabricate and fabrication have also been called and declared as being used in an unparliamentary sense.

And last of all, I use in interpreting what I consider to be the member's own intention, that is to uphold the honourable tradition of this House and a respect for the institution.

It clearly has a bad effect on the House and the dignity of this institution is lowered when words are put, crafted in a fashion which impute bad motives. And it also tends to escalate negative emotions as opposed to bringing out the positive in what members have to say.

Now members, when I looked specifically at the statements on page 1621 of *Hansard*, I would like first of all to bring to the attention that the two first statements on the right-hand column by the member for Saltcoats, which give good examples of how questions can be asked.

Then, members, further on when I go to page 1622, one of the statements is:

. . . city members in Regina — fabricate the numbers and distort the facts . . .

Now in this . . . Order, please. In this case, what has happened is the member has made a rather specific allegation and it also — coupled with what is, with the context of some of what has been said before — implies bad intentions. And I feel in this case where the member . . . where the use of the word fabricate can be used in a positive sense and a creative sense in many ways, in here it is used in a negative sense and non-positive and I would ask members to avoid that.

Going back to page 1621, the member for Melville uses the phrase:

. . . there appears to be more distortion coming from the . . .

From, implying the opposite side.

Now in this case as well, although it is much more general than the second case, again it is a borderline situation. And I do want to caution members on that.

Therefore, members, what I first would like to do, based on what I've just said, is to draw caution and ask the member for Melville not to use that type of statement again. With respect to the member for Saltcoats whose statement was perhaps more direct and more personal, I would ask the member for Saltcoats to withdraw the statement at this time.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, at this time I would withdraw that statement. You must remember, Mr. Speaker, that it was so loud in here . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order, order. I would just accept the member's withdrawal. I'm fully aware of how loud it was.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

WRITTEN QUESTIONS

Mr. Yates: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am extremely pleased today to stand on behalf of the government and table responses to written questions nos. 722 through 725 inclusive.

The Speaker: — Responses to 722, '23, '24, and 725 have been submitted.

GOVERNMENT MOTIONS

Implementation of the Third Report of the Special Committee on Rules and Procedures

Hon. Mr. Thomson: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is with pleasure today that I rise to move the motion that has been on the order paper for some time, concerning the implementation of the Third Report of the Special Committee on Rules and Procedures.

I think that it is an important step forward for this Assembly as we move to have a more efficient, a more democratic, a more inclusive, and I would say a more effective legislature, that we move forward with these implementations. It's of course of interest to all of us who come to this legislature to work through a number of issues from question period, presenting of petitions, the legislative work that we have to do, the examination of estimates.

It's interesting that so much of the important work that we do goes without the attention of the media, of others; that there is so much focus in this Assembly on that half hour, that 25-minute question period. That, Mr. Speaker, is not what I believe is our finest moments in this Assembly. That is not what draws us into politics. It's that ability to legislate; it's the ability to make substantive change that I believe attracts each of us, irregardless of party — regardless of party — to come to this Assembly and to work on behalf of the people who have elected us.

The changes that we have been contemplating over the last several years in the special committee I think take an approach which is one of best practices from a number of commonwealth jurisdictions. We've had the opportunity to take a look at how Australian states function. We've had an opportunity to look at federal systems like New Zealand. We've had an ability to look at how our sister provinces utilize their system.

What we have pulled from each of these is the best of practices that we believe can be incorporated here, and we've made some additional enhancements. Enhancements that will improve the way that private members' day is dealt with, enhancements that will improve the ability for individual members to take more of

a leadership role in committees, an ability for us to invite in citizens to have a better dialogue with each of us as legislators.

I think that these changes are important. I think that they will help us move forward to a more progressive, more modern legislature, as we enter this 21st century, and indeed as we enter Saskatchewan's second century. Mr. Speaker, I won't take a great deal of time today to highlight again the detailed changes, the members are familiar with them.

(11:00)

There has been of course some debate as to when we should implement these rules. It was certainly the wish of the NDP government, the NDP caucus, that we proceed with these immediately so they could have been in place for this legislative session. Through discussions with other members in this Assembly, we had decided and agreed to defer that. Personally, I wish we had had these in place. I think that this would have been an opportune time for us to do this. We have a large number of members with a good experience on both sides of this House who I think could have helped us bring this into place. That was not the view. It was our approach instead to be more conciliatory, to work with the opposition — not to jam them on this and force it in at this time.

Nevertheless, Mr. Speaker, it is our view that the time has come for us to bring these changes into place and we believe that they should be brought into effect at the start of the next session of the Legislative Assembly. I understand that there is some debate among members in this House who would argue that perhaps this should be delayed and not come into effect until the first day after the next election. While that would have the impact and have the effect of allowing members who would be appointed as committee Chairs to be put on payroll for their duties, while it would allow the committees to start on special investigations and those kind of matters, it doesn't deal with what I believe are two of the central issues that need . . . that really brought about the reasons for these changes.

The first of those was to allow citizens to have more direct say and more direct participation with legislators in the legislative function that we have. That was a primary reason for us making this change — to change the way Committee of the Whole functions, to change the way the estimates function, to allow greater citizen contact with each of us as we review these matters.

The second change that that delay would cause, if we waited until after the next election, is it presupposes that there would not be another session before the next election. Given the types of issues that we're dealing with today, Mr. Speaker, I think that is presumptuous. We may well need to come back this fall. We may well need to come back next spring. No one can tell when the election is going to be because the legislative mandate is not up for at least another year.

I think we want to make sure that if the legislature does reconvene that we will in fact be in a position to implement this new process. I say that not to be critical of members opposite. I do believe that we have reached a unanimous agreement in terms of the nature, the substance of the changes that need to become . . . come into effect. It's just our view that we should

move forward with these now. We've been patient and we have waited for this legislative session despite the fact it was our interest to bring it in, despite the fact the NDP caucus has been working on this since 1999. And I believe that the time for waiting is done.

So as such, Mr. Speaker, I move seconded by the Deputy Government House Leader, the member from Moose Jaw North:

That the practices and rules recommended by the Third Report of the Special Committee on Rules and Procedures, as were adopted by the Legislative Assembly on April 3, 2003, be implemented and brought into force effective the first sitting day of the next session of the Legislative Assembly.

Hon. Mr. Hagel: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to briefly enter into debate and in support of the motion moved by the hon. minister for public corrections and safety.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to make some similar points and add to the comments made by the minister in support of this motion and put into context its place in the relevance of democratic reform.

As we look across not only the country, Mr. Speaker, we will see, for example, within the legislatures across Canada different kinds of expressions as to ways committees are used, question period is scheduled, and so on. And we are oftentimes thought to believe when we look only to our own borders that the practice of democracy is everywhere what it exists here and, clearly, that's not true.

And even more so when we look beyond the borders of Canada, we will recognize that the practice of democracy has forms that are significantly, in many ways dramatically different from the way that we practice democracy here in Canada; here in Saskatchewan we practice the conduct of our legislatures. And just a case in point we'll see dramatically different ways of even conducting elections, Mr. Speaker.

Are any of those less legitimate than ours here in Saskatchewan? The answer is, no. And why is that? Because, Mr. Speaker, it is a characteristic of democracy well practiced that it represents the sense of engagement and a sense of relevance for the people of that jurisdiction.

And it would seem to me then that as we look at improving the operations of our legislature, that the standard that we should ought to use is the degree to which our practice better engages and provides that sense of meaningful relevance by the people of Saskatchewan in doing what we do here.

And it would seem to me, Mr. Speaker, and I think it has been universally adopted by this House, that the rules that have come from the Rules Committee after several years — actually it's not just a few months, but several years — of considered deliberation by members of all parties and on both sides of the House, that we have defined some directions for moving forward to make the operations more meaningful to the people of Saskatchewan, mainly in three ways, Mr. Speaker, that strike

me as being an improvement.

First of all — and I think perhaps I put this number one because I think it is number one; it's the most relevant — is that it will provide, the new rules will provide for an increased level of public input on the legislative agendas being considered by this legislature, Mr. Speaker. What the rules will enable the people of Saskatchewan to do is to have input in the committee consideration of legislation and ensure that when we then come to the third reading of legislation, that it is with the benefit not only of the consultations that are typically done of government — because it is always clearly part of the practice of government in bringing legislation that those who have vested interest are consulted with — but it also enables those who have a vested interest in legislation to come in the public forum, not only to a committee of the legislature but, Mr. Speaker, as part of this amendment as well to our rules, over the public air, televised over the public air, to demonstrate their support or their concerns related to proposed legislation.

And it would seem to me then that that is the single most outstanding characteristic of the changes is that the . . . it moves from a process, once legislation is introduced in this House, instead of it making solely the purview of this House to have input then from that point forward in terms of expressing it, to enable the people of Saskatchewan to do that. And I think we all think that that makes sense.

I also want to point out, Mr. Speaker, that because of the rule changes, it will enable work to be done intersessionally and so it will not limit the public input or the consultations or deliberations related to legislation to the period of time from the moment that the House is called into session until there is adjournment at the end. So it enables that work to be done 12 months a year instead of what has been the Saskatchewan practice, some four or five months of the year.

So first of all, Mr. Speaker, greater public input.

Secondly, what it does is provide a greater opportunity for the input of private members, and private members on both sides of the House, in the development and the scrutiny — but both — scrutiny which is permitted now but an increased opportunity for input for the development of policy in the public agenda, some of which may be legislation related, some of which may not. It may be more budgetary related leading to ultimate decisions and conclusions by this Assembly.

And I think it would be the view of the people of Saskatchewan that they would like to see their member who is sent to represent them, not only specifically from the constituency but also for interests of Saskatchewan, to have a greater opportunity for influence of the public agenda as is decided in this House. And so the committee structures and the new freedoms of ability to scrutinize and to explore policy agenda will enable a greater role for the private members on both sides of the House, Mr. Speaker. And I think that is a step forward and is seen by the people of Saskatchewan as better connecting them to their legislative process.

And thirdly, Mr. Speaker, what will come about as a result of these changes is an increased coverage, television coverage of the deliberations in committee including, Mr. Speaker,

television coverage of what is currently taking place, not televised, in what is now known as the Crown Corporations Committee and the Public Accounts Committee. I believe, Mr. Speaker, that will be included and also then the potential for people to see scrutiny of deliberations, including intersessionally.

So what there . . . It enables for people of Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, to see their legislators at work in the development stage at times. And it surely is a principle of connection between the public and this Chamber that the signal is sent so that . . . People don't have to watch. Sometimes we quite recognize the ratings aren't all that high, but sometimes they are as well. Some of the . . . One of the hon. members opposite just finds that hard to believe, that sometimes they're not all that high. But we have to admit that.

But the thing that we would all want, we would all want as a matter of principle, Mr. Speaker, is that in a free and democratic society, that ultimately in this system in which we have replaced is a very decent structure for making choices about the laws that affect people's lives.

We have chosen in our nation and in our province a tradition where we have, we have replaced the traditional battle with the bullet, with a battle for the ballot. I mean, over the course of history, Mr. Speaker, the large majority of governments have been selected not by democratic process, but by military might over the course of history. And surely in a democracy, what you would want is that when ultimately people exercise their most important franchise, the ability to cast a ballot, that they would do that with the full information of the issues and the positions of those who are engaged in that and the political parties that make up the Legislative Assembly.

And so therefore, extending the opportunity — people can choose to turn it on or turn it off — but the opportunity to scrutinize, themselves, not through the reports of the media, but themselves, to scrutinize the workings of the members, I think also enhances the connection of the people of Saskatchewan to the Legislative Assembly.

So I summarize, Mr. Speaker: the greater opportunity for direct input in committee deliberations; secondly, the enhanced role for private members; and thirdly, the increased coverage of committee deliberations that are available to the people of Saskatchewan. I think, Mr. Speaker, these are sound principles that help to connect the process of democracy to the people of Saskatchewan, and the time to go is now.

As the hon. minister has said, their deliberations have taken place over some three or four years. It was not my privilege to be a part of the committee for all of that period of time but I think it's been good work that's been done.

The time to proceed is soon. And although there had been some consideration to in fact implement right in the session that we are in now, having ruled out the practicality of that, clearly the next time that this legislature is called into session is the most appropriate time for us to begin to get on with this, making a greater connection between the people of Saskatchewan and the legislative process.

And, Mr. Speaker, it's for that reason that I support the motion that's before the House.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to stand and rise finally to address this particular issue. We have been waiting for a long time to come to the point where the new rules would have an opportunity to be implemented in this legislature, Mr. Speaker.

This has been a long process to arrive at this point, a long and sometimes strenuous ordeal, Mr. Speaker, and this is another step along the road. It will be an excellent day for the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan when we reach the point that we're actually having the new rules in place; when the first day in session that we have those new rules in place, I think, is something for the people and the legislators of Saskatchewan to look forward to, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I think we need to take a little look at the history of this entire development. I heard the member from Regina South comment that the NDP caucus has been working on this from 1999. Well, Mr. Speaker, I think it would be proper and accurate to say that both caucuses have been working on this since 1999. In fact, Mr. Speaker, I recollect talking to the then House leader, Mr. Lingenfelter, in the session that we had in the fall of 1999 to actually set up the committee, Mr. Speaker. And so the accurate statement I believe would be that both caucuses have been working on this since 1999, Mr. Speaker.

(11:15)

And at that time it was agreed that there would be two themes to our initial steps on the rule changes, and that those two themes would be community structure and private members' day, Mr. Speaker. And that other rule changes that were necessary would be dealt with subject to the changes that were taking place on committee and on private members' day, that other changes would be looked at later.

And, Mr. Speaker, those rules were looked at dealing with private members' days, with committee work, throughout the winter and year of 2000, Mr. Speaker, with a report culminating for presentation to the Assembly in the year 2001, Mr. Speaker.

From that point on, there was a little refining to do, cleaning up the words, getting it written up, Mr. Speaker, in a form that was usable for the legislature so that the rules were actually written in the forms that we're normally used to in this House, put in . . . so that they could be inserted into our rule book. And, Mr. Speaker, that was done in the year 2000 and throughout the year 2001.

The rules were actually in place, Mr. Speaker, and available to us had we desired to implement them for the 2002 session. However, Mr. Speaker, that didn't happen.

The member from Regina South says that the opposition at this time was reluctant in this session to bring those rules forward and implement them during this session, and he's right. We were reluctant because we could have had those rules in place in 2002, Mr. Speaker.

And what the whole rule structure part of is dealing with, as the member from Moose Jaw spoke, about public input, about the public being able to see what the legislators were doing and to participate in that. To accomplish that we need to put in place what the member from Moose Jaw Wakamow was talking about, the television system, the voice — Moose Jaw North, sorry; I was moving him a constituency over, Mr. Speaker — the ability to record for *Hansard*, for the people of Saskatchewan, and to broadcast through television.

Mr. Speaker, from the time that the rules were . . . the second report of the committee was presented, the opportunity was there to put in place those facilities that were needed to provide provision for the broadcasting of the proceedings, both of the legislature and of the committees, Mr. Speaker. But unfortunately that didn't happen. The government members on the Board of Internal Economy did not agree to provide the funding necessary to carry that out.

In 2003, Mr. Speaker, the government members came into the House and wanted to implement the new rule changes a couple of weeks into the system, into the current session. But again, Mr. Speaker, the proper procedures were not in place. The proper facilities were not in place to accomplish what these new rules were designed to do. So that's the reason, Mr. Speaker, why the opposition was reluctant to have these rules come into play midway through this session. The procedures and the facilities had not been put in place yet by the government to accomplish those changes.

Mr. Speaker, the Board of Internal Economy has now approved the monies to put in place the proper broadcasting facilities, the proper recording facilities, and the proper facilities to allow public participation in the committee hearings. And so, Mr. Speaker, those things will be worked on once session is out of here, throughout the summer, and will be available to us at a reasonable point in time in the near future, Mr. Speaker.

And, Mr. Speaker, as the member from Regina South said, there is no guarantee as to when the next election will be. What the member's motion calls for is that these rules come into place at the beginning of the next session. And indeed, Mr. Speaker, that is a good time to start — if there is no election.

One of the provisions that's in place in these rules, Mr. Speaker, allows for this new committee structure to begin its work — whether it's this election, the next provincial election, or the provincial election after that — for these committees to start their work as soon as the writ period is over, Mr. Speaker.

The House Services Committee has been given the authority, Mr. Speaker, to convene and appoint members of the other standing committees, which in turn can then commence their work, whatever that may be. That may be reviewing legislation. That may be reviewing regulations. That may be reviewing the appropriate Crowns and other government agencies that have been assigned to that standing committee, Mr. Speaker.

So the rules of the new procedures envision having in place, Mr. Speaker, after a writ period, provincial writ period, the abilities of the new committees to commence their work. And I believe that would be appropriate for the new rules to start, Mr. Speaker, either at the beginning of the next session, the first

day, or, Mr. Speaker, at the end of the next provincial writ period as the rules envision happening, Mr. Speaker.

This is not a change to what the new rules see; this is actually the implementation of the new rules, Mr. Speaker, that these things will happen at every time after a provincial election, after the writ period for that provincial election, that the new rules allow the committee structure to be implemented, put in place, and commence to carry on their duties.

So when the member from Regina Albert South says that he does not agree with that kind of an implementation, that it should only happen at the beginning of the next session, which may or may not be after an election, Mr. Speaker, I disagree with that.

The rules that are in place, the new rules that we have all accepted in this legislature foresee those rules being implemented after any provincial election, even though they may have been in place prior to that provincial election as well; that those committees have the ability to start their work after a provincial election.

And so, Mr. Speaker, I would like to move an amendment to the motion. And that amendment would read:

By adding the following words after the words, "next session of the Legislative Assembly":

And I quote:

or immediately after the next provincial election writ period, whichever occurs first.

I so move, Mr. Speaker, seconded by the member from Indian Head-Milestone.

Mr. McMorris: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just a few minutes here to comment on the motion, or the amendment put forward by the house . . . the Opposition House Leader regarding implementation.

I don't think there is much use going on about the rule changes. I think we've been through that and we've talked about the rule changes and the need for rule changes and the opening it up to the public. I guess the last little piece of business is really when they are implemented.

And certainly there has been lots of work, both sides, back and forth, and lots of agreement. There has certainly been, as I've sat through the committee hearings and committee meetings regarding the rule changes, there have been lots of agreement and there has been a little bit of give and take on both sides.

But I do . . . would say that this amendment does make a lot of sense. That the committee structure could be implemented immediately after the next writ period which may be, quick frankly, six, seven months before the next legislative session. And there is no reason why those committees, because of the new rule changes, could not be doing their work leading up to the next legislative session.

And I think that's the whole point of these rule changes is to

allow more time for some of this work to be done, to allow more accessibility to the public to watch the legislators do their work, and that's exactly what this amendment — be it a friendly amendment — talks about is allowing the committee structure to be implemented prior to the next legislative session but post-writ period.

And in the motion moved by the government members it doesn't allow for that. It allows for only the structure being started whence the legislative session starts. And I think that was one of the hesitations, quite frankly, when before this session that we are in right now started was the fact that they wanted to push it in and we wanted to try and get all this operating as we are sitting in the House here. And I think it would be just so much more functional. I think it would be seamless if we started after the next writ period, prior to the next legislative session. Personally I think the amendment makes a lot of sense. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Amendment negated on division.

Motion agreed to *nemine contradicente*.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

SECOND READINGS

Bill No. 43 — The Forest Resources Management Amendment Act, 2003

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, after my . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order.

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I get two applause for the price of one, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, after my comments I'll be moving second reading of The Forest Resources Management Amendment Act, 2003. These amendments, Mr. Speaker, are intended to assist Saskatchewan in negotiating a timely resolution with the softwood lumber trade dispute with the United States.

As all of us in this House should be aware, Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan's forest industry plays a crucial and critical role in the economic well-being of our province. The production of softwood lumber is a large piece of that industry, each year producing almost 415 million board feet valued at nearly \$150 million. Most of that is exported, Mr. Speaker, with the majority of the exports bound for markets in the US (United States).

(11:30)

Saskatchewan lumber producers are certainly feeling the effects of the US tariffs. Here in Saskatchewan where we have one of the most modern and most efficient forestry industries in the country, we've seen temporary mill shutdowns and layoffs — some mills slowing down their production, Mr. Speaker.

What our industry needs and what we're all seeking is a timely and lasting resolution to this situation. We continue to work

with the provinces and the federal government to pursue all of our options including negotiations and legal redress under NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement). And this, Mr. Speaker, we will continue to do.

However, history has shown us that simply winning legal challenges — which Canada has consistently done on this issue — does not result in a lasting solution, Mr. Speaker.

In the next few weeks we may have an opportunity to come to a made-in-Saskatchewan agreement with the US by submitting a changed circumstance application based on our previous discussions with the Americans.

Mr. Speaker, these amendments now before us will improve Saskatchewan's position by providing our forestry industry with the flexibility to adapt to changing markets. This is accomplished without compromising in any way our fundamental principles of sustainable forest management and public ownership of the Crown forest resources.

Under these amendments, Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan forest companies would be allowed to sell their harvesting rights to another forestry company provided there are no concerns about the new licensee's ability to sustainably manage the forest or to meet licence obligations. The amendments would also allow companies to respond to poor market conditions by harvesting less than their allowable level without fear of permanently losing these harvesting rights.

These changes, Mr. Speaker, will enhance Saskatchewan's position with respect to negotiating access to US markets for our lumber industry.

The people of Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, are entitled to be assured of receiving a fair return for the harvest of Crown timber. Towards this, these amendments also provide for the setting of harvesting fees that cover the province's cost of forest management plus a reasonable rate of return. Provincial cost to be incorporated and a minimum stumpage charge will be verified by an independent third party, ensuring transparency.

These amendments will allow the option of competitive sales for new forest management agreements for surplus timber left unharvested by licensees and for a portion of the saw logs harvested by each licensee.

Mr. Speaker, this allows us to determine the maximum price that harvesters are willing to pay for the Crown forest resources. As well, these amendments provide for the development of a timber pricing system that is more market based and such a system will provide a more complete, current, and transparent comparison of the market value of lumber and what it costs to produce.

Mr. Speaker, these amendments in no way diminish our ability to be responsible stewards of our Crown forest resource. They in no way diminish our ability to ensure that Crown forest lands are sustainably managed.

What the amendments before us will do is give us the flexibility to negotiate effectively with the Americans and work towards a speedy resolution to the softwood lumber dispute.

These amendments will not take effect until cabinet is sure that all the elements of a sound agreement are in place. The details of the system that set dues as well as the details of timber sales under special circumstances will be set out through regulation when talks with the Americans have progressed to that point.

Mr. Speaker, the Saskatchewan forest industry has been consulted and is in support of this approach. Our lumber industry is being hurt not only by the punishing duties imposed by the Americans, but by the rising Canadian dollar and the low lumber prices.

The Council of Saskatchewan Forest Industries has written a letter expressing its support for the government taking all reasonable steps to resolve the tariff issue quickly, Mr. Speaker. They support these proposed amendments in particular and will continue working very closely with our industry as the details of around the changed circumstance application are being worked out.

Mr. Speaker, the amendments I've talked about today will enable the government to negotiate effectively with the Americans to regain our lumber industry's access to their most important market. These amendments also ensure that the government continues to have the ability to protect and to manage the province's important forest resources for the benefit of all Saskatchewan people.

Mr. Speaker. I now move the second reading of The Forest Resources Management Amendment Act, 2003.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, this particular Bill has, I believe, the opportunity to make significant changes in the forest industry as it's changing the way in which government receives its monies, its royalties, from the forest industry.

The minister is talking about dues. Is that different, Mr. Speaker, from stumpage? Is that a change from stumpage to dues, is that in addition to the stumpage fees that have been in place, Mr. Speaker, is one of the questions that I think needs to be answered. And the minister didn't provide that in his commentary.

Mr. Speaker, one of the issues I believe that is significant in this particular piece of legislation is that it's moving us away from a more or less homogeneous forest operation across the country and it looks like we're going to be heading towards a very piecemeal operation, something different, some different agreements and arrangements with our customers outside of the country on how charges are made to the industry for their resources — Mr. Speaker, the resources that they're harvesting — on how government receives its money.

We're going to end up with a patchwork quilt. And if we're not very, very careful, Mr. Speaker, we could very well end up in a situation where the provinces are competing against each other to see who can give their resources away. The minister is talking about trying to maximize the return by seeing how much the forest industry, the operators in the forest industry are prepared to pay in dues. Well what is going to likely happen,

Mr. Speaker, is that in negotiations with the Americans, each different province, it's going to be a contest to see — for the Americans — to see who they can drive down the furthest in price by increasing the fees to the forest industry in each province.

So that the forest industry in each province pays a higher and higher fee so that it makes the American high-cost lumber more competitive with our Canadian supply, and so to freeze them out of the market. And, Mr. Speaker, I think that we will end up in a position of trying to compete with the other softwood producers across this country to see who can get their prices up the highest based on their negotiations with the Americans, which at the end of the day will diminish the amount of lumber that we will be supplying. And that's what their whole object is about, Mr. Speaker, is diminishing the amount of lumber that we ship out of this country.

And I think we need to be very, very careful in those negotiations. Mr. Speaker, we're probably better off negotiating from a national point of view. And I don't necessarily mean the national government because they certainly do not understand any of the issues that happen outside of virtually the capital of Ottawa, Mr. Speaker. So I think we need to be very, very careful when we get into a situation of trying to negotiate piecemeal on an issue that's affecting all of us nationally, Mr. Speaker, that we don't simply get picked off one at a time to our own disadvantage, Mr. Speaker.

I think that there needs to be some serious discussion with the industry itself to determine whether or not this particular piece of legislation serves the best interest of the industry, Mr. Speaker, as well as serving the best interests of the province, because a weakened forest industry, Mr. Speaker, does not help us grow Saskatchewan. That is where we need to be concentrating and how does our resources in the forest areas maximize our potential, Mr. Speaker, not diminish our potential.

And I have great fear that any rules we put in place that allows for us to be picked off one at a time diminishes our opportunities, does not enhance them, Mr. Speaker. Therefore I would move . . . To give us a chance to consult with the industry, I would move that we adjourn debate.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Debate adjourned.

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

Bill No. 23 — The Cities Amendment Act, 2003

Clause 1

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

Hon. Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to introduce to you and the committee members here today, to my left, Mr. Keith Comstock, who is the policy manager for Government Relations. Also with me here today is Ken Kolb, who is a senior analyst; Rod Nasewich, who is also a senior

analyst; and Noela Bamford, who is a senior analyst. And as well we have with us Mr. Doug Morcom, who is a director of grants administration with Government Relations.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Chair, and welcome to your officials, Mr. Minister. Considering our past record the last couple of days I know we'll be very careful in our choice of words today, Mr. Minister.

Mr. Minister, I guess with The Cities Act, the amendments to The Cities Act, maybe the first question I have is, being that The Cities Act was only brought in a year ago could you maybe go . . . give us some explanation of why this number — it's fairly extensive — amendments to a Bill that was just brought in. Could you maybe give us an overall explanation of why we needed this many changes this quick?

Hon. Mr. Osika: — Mr. Chairman, I'll be happy to, and I'll be careful of my choice of words. The amendments to The Cities Act primarily addresses requests from the cities for some further clarification and refinement, or to restore certain wording and provisions from The Urban Municipality Act, 1984 that were not continued in The Cities Act. So it's cleaning . . . doing some cleanup work.

As is almost always a case with a new Act, as city administrations set about implementing new provisions of the Act, various issues, questions, and gaps have arisen. And government has proposed amendments to solve these problems and in the process enhance the implementation of the new Act.

(11:45)

So Government Relations officials have undertaken extensive consultations with the cities to identify the provisions that needed amending and to develop suitable wording. So Government Relations is working with the cities to develop an ongoing process for dealing with future amendments which may in fact be found necessary. Thank you.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Just a few more questions on the Bill. I believe the cities are very happy with what is happening here. I don't think they have a problem with that.

Just some, maybe some explanations, Mr. Minister, the first one to do with the change in the phase-in period. I believe we're going to four years, which to me seems to make sense. We're going to fit more with our reassessment times. The only question I may have is there communities out there that are actually in the process of the six-year phase-in and how will this affect them?

Hon. Mr. Osika: — Briefly, Mr. Chairman, there are none at this point.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Okay, thank you, Mr. Minister. Another question I have, and I'm a little bit more familiar with this one, the sales verification form that SAMA (Saskatchewan Assessment Management Agency) is trying to put together and work on, could you maybe give us, elaborate a little bit on just what the purpose this is supposed to serve and just how that is going to work?

Hon. Mr. Osika: — Mr. Chairman, the sales verification form is principally for database and valuation purposes and will aid in determining which sales should be used for the calculation of market adjustment factors. The data will help keep the assessment system up to date, fair, and equitable since accurate information on arm's-length sales of property is in fact an essential requirement for property tax assessment.

So the assessing authorities require the sales verification form as soon as possible in order to obtain data that may be essential for the use of new assessment methods, such as sales comparisons and income based approaches. So some of these approaches require several years of stable data in order to be properly utilized and this will assist them in being able to do that.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. I guess where I might have some concern with this depending on how SAMA functions with these values, that they find out very quickly after a sale has been made. But possibly in the smaller communities, even in RMs for that matter where there's not many sales happening, and I know we saw that in the . . . I think it was the '95 reassessment where a lot of problems were caused in a community where one house, say, for an example, would sell possibly at a very exorbitant price.

And I can see this happening with even a quarter of land out there. If one neighbour really wanted to get his hands on a quarter of land, sometimes they will pay an atrocious price — let's put it that way — what may be more sometimes closer to double the actual real value.

And I guess my concern would be . . . And I know in my own hometown of Saltcoats and I know there was others that the officials will remember had problems with things like this, is where if a house is valued very high and yet the sales verification comes in saying this house sold for \$120,000 and yet realistically that house if it was worth 70,000 on the market would be probably far closer to the real actual value.

So I'm kind of wondering how SAMA intends to deal with this. And I would hope they would take into consideration that if there is a number of these sale verifications and the trend is there, I don't think we have a problem. But I think where there's very few or maybe only one that they're going to go by, I would hope that we would take that into consideration.

Could you respond to that, Mr. Minister?

Hon. Mr. Osika: — Mr. Chairman, the hon. member raises a valid point on this issue and concern. And I am told that we can be assured that SAMA will take into consideration those types of situations, where if there is insufficient valid data then it will be determined in another fashion.

So there will be the effort to ensure a fair assessment based on the information that's obtained and on the overall basis of what's been happening in a particular community.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Glad to hear that because I think we could have problems for a number of years if we took one value and stuck to that and then said that this is actually what sold, we can't help it, that's what we're going by.

And I think sometimes we need a little common sense with some of this stuff. It goes a long way.

Next question, Mr. Minister. Maybe with respect to the simplified appeals process, could you just give us an overall view of why this was asked for? Or was it asked for? And what you're actually doing here?

Hon. Mr. Osika: — Mr. Chairman, for the member, we're not making those changes in this Act. It's for the purpose of the other Acts that we will be discussing. It's not within The Cities Act. We relate it to the other Acts that we've been amending, to allow them.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Okay. Thank you, Mr. Minister. I believe at this time all parties concerned here seem to be satisfied with the changes that are in these amendments. So that's all the questions we have, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: — Thank you, members. There seems to . . . there's quite a few clauses to this Bill. Is leave granted to deal with it by page? Would that be agreed?

Leave granted.

Clause 1 agreed to.

Clauses 2 to 74 inclusive agreed to.

The committee agreed to report the Bill.

Bill No. 40 — The Rural Municipality Amendment Act, 2003

The Chair: — I see that the minister does not have any new officials, so unless he wants to make a brief statement, we'll proceed.

Clause 1

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Minister, I want to thank you for the heads-up on the amendment to this Bill. Would you possibly just give us an overall view of the concerns that SARM (Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities) had? I believe I understand them, but give us the overall view of the concerns SARM had and how you've dealt with them in the amendment.

Hon. Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to thank the member. During our most recent consultations with SARM on the proposed changes, there was a concern that was raised about a possible misinterpretation that could be made as a result of how the amendment was written . . . or amendments were written.

The House amendment is being used to clarify the intent of the provisions in the Bill and to hence avoid any interpretation. I should also add that SARM is in favour, as the member may be aware, and was consulted on the particular wording of that particular amendment.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Some of the questions I have on this Bill actually I think have been

answered, that we talked about previously, with the sales verification form. I think that also applies to rural land, the phase-in period and things like that.

And I think at this point interested parties again seem to be satisfied now that that House amendment has been brought in. So I think that satisfies our questioning on this Bill, Mr. Chair. Thank you, Mr. Minister.

Clause 1 agreed to.

Clauses 2 to 6 inclusive agreed to.

Clause 7

Hon. Mr. Osika: — Mr. Chairman, I move the following amendment to this Bill:

“Section 189 amended

7 The following subsection is added after subsection 189(3):

“(4) If a rural municipality does not pass a bylaw pursuant to section 188.1, the rural municipality may adopt a policy respecting the issuance of permits pursuant to this section that, among other matters, takes into consideration:

(a) facilitating the movement of vehicles, goods, and other commodities between the rural municipality and adjacent rural municipalities, urban municipalities, cities and northern municipalities; and

(b) if an adjacent rural municipality has designated routes in a bylaw passed pursuant to section 188.1, harmonizing the routes in the rural municipality with those designated routes in a manner that facilitates the movement of vehicles, goods, and other commodities between the rural municipality and adjacent rural municipalities, urban municipalities, cities and northern municipalities’ ”.

I so move.

The Chair: — Will the members take the amendment as read? Okay. Thank you, members.

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 7 as amended agreed to.

Clauses 8 to 24 inclusive agreed to.

The committee agreed to report the Bill as amended.

Bill No. 41 — The Urban Municipality Amendment Act, 2003

Clause 1

The Chair: — And I see that the minister does not have any new officials.

(12:00)

Mr. Lorenz: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. If the minister can . . . Prior to us going into the particulars of Bill 41, can the minister speak a little bit about the background of the Bill, the interested parties that were involved in requesting this amendment to the urban municipal Act, some of the reasoning of the amendments? We understand that some of it pertains to The Cities Act which is understandable why that need was there. But there's other changes in . . . you know, it's pertaining to the urban Act as well in that regard.

So if the minister can speak to that to some degree to give us a bit of a background of where the Bill is coming from and why some of these other changes are needed at this time.

Hon. Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and to the member, yes, I'd be happy to. The 2003 amendments have two primary functions. The first group of changes will provide greater flexibility for the urban municipalities to deal with governance and election issues related to council sizes, establishing ward boundaries and ward systems, election schemes, and the naming of new or restructured municipalities.

With the passage of The Cities Act, government is afforded the opportunity to update and adapt these provisions to meet the current and future needs of towns, villages, and resort villages.

In addition, over the past number of months the department has been working with the resort villages in Katepwa Lake region that have developed a plan to consolidate. The amendments will facilitate that process and could enable other locally driven consolidation efforts in the future.

So, and the second . . . That was the first set of amendments. The second group of amendments relate to property assessment and include provisions for a simplified appeal process as introduced last spring in The Cities Act.

And in addition, amendments will shorten the maximum period over which changes to property taxes resulting from a revaluation may be phased in from six years to four years. This will then match the four-year reassessment cycle.

Other amendments will ensure that notification of property sales by owners and vendors is provided in accordance with the sales verification form being developed by the Saskatchewan Assessment Management Agency.

Mr. Lorenz: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Also, Mr. Minister, we're seeing that this Bill is repealing some unproclaimed provisions that we've had in previous years Bills. Can the minister give us, I guess, an indication, or give us I guess the amount of previous Bills that have proclamations that were never made, that are still sitting there, and why are we starting to repeal some of those unproclaimed Bills, and how that is going to affect the urban Act in a sense of I guess its new structure that we're looking to develop within that Act as well, with the flexibility and the usability of the Act for the municipalities?

Hon. Mr. Osika: — Mr. Chairman, to the hon. member, the unproclaimed amendments relate to a number of matters such as

the definition of person, and prescribed dates, and other matters related to assessment and taxation, such as the sales verification form.

Now they were not proclaimed as a result of lack of stakeholder consensus or because on further review were considered unnecessary. In some cases amendments were enacted in subsequent years that better addressed the issue at hand or that achieved stakeholder consensus, such as those regarding the sales verification form that are contained in this year's amendment packages.

So those that were not proclaimed would not have any affect.

Mr. Lorenz: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. I guess then what we're hearing is that parts of the Bills or the amendments that were issued and were not proclaimed are areas that are not of need at this time; that the changes that you are making to The Cities Act, per se, and to the amendments that you're proposing at this time through Bill 41, those Bills that are unproclaimed are Bills that right now don't have value in the sense of giving us a better Act to function under, giving us the flexibility that maybe some of those sections were going to give us, that we're making those changes in a different form?

Hon. Mr. Osika: — Mr. Chairman, the member is correct in his assessment, that those amendments are either redundant or serve no useful purpose.

And again I just want to re-emphasize and assure the member that before any changes are made there is extensive consultation in order to ensure that the dialogue with our stakeholders is such that they are changes to Bills that will benefit, will . . . And again, as we're moving towards allowing local governments more autonomy to handle their own governance matters.

Mr. Lorenz: — Okay. Thank you, Mr. Minister. Just wanting to go into Bill 41, the new section 6, and it's 6(6) I guess that I would like to refer to:

A council may, by bylaw, provide . . . (the) elections of . . .
(a) members of (the) council of . . . (an) urban municipality
are to be held in accordance with:

And you speak, within this Bill, you speak as (a) that it pertains to The Local Government Election Act and then you go to section (b) where it speaks to The Rural Municipality Act.

Is the understanding here that the urban municipalities have the choice now to use either one of those Acts and pass bylaw in the sense of the ability of how they're going to run their election, the amount of council they're going to have election . . . on the election? As well, is there a choice now that you're giving the municipalities between those two Acts?

Hon. Mr. Osika: — Mr. Chairman, once again the member's assessment is correct. It's allowed them that opportunity, and one of the reasons being is to allow for consideration of restructuring.

Mr. Lorenz: — Okay. Thank you, Mr. Minister. Then is the . . . The question then is, is it all municipalities, urban

municipalities, or are you restricting that to only a sector of the municipalities as per se the resort villages or villages or towns? Or are all municipalities under the urban Act able to have the choice of choosing between these two different forms?

Hon. Mr. Osika: — Mr. Chairman, it would be all. And once again, primarily so it opens the door and allows consideration by those communities to restructure and move in that direction if they so wish.

Mr. Lorenz: — Okay. Thank you, Mr. Minister. Now the differences between those two Acts is that the urban Act, running their elections now through their local government election Act, is a three-year term. And if you go through the rural Act, it's a two-year term. They have elections every year and it's a rotating system that they go through.

Now you're going to have urban municipalities that you're going to have some municipalities that are going to be on a three-year term and you're going to have some municipalities who are going to be on a two-year term. So there won't be any consistency in the sense of the terms of your office that you're going to be holding for the mayor or for council.

Does the minister see that that's going to cause any kind of a concern? Or is there going to be any problems in the sense of representation that you have?

Once they make this choice to either follow under one Act or the other Act, are they required to stay under that decision that they've made and that bylaw that they've passed? You can always repeal bylaws; we understand that. But what is the sense of, I guess having some consistency within the urban structure that you have the differences now in the terms that these councils can be sitting as?

Hon. Mr. Osika: — Mr. Chairman, to the member, from the way it's described there may very well be inconsistencies; however, the important thing is that it is still the decision of the local councils, the local government, to determine which they might choose. So it allows them that autonomy.

And despite the fact that, as the member mentions, it may create inconsistencies it is still a local decision. It has to be, has to go through at least one general election. And it's up to those local governments to enact the bylaws and rescind them or change them however they see fit. But it allows them more flexibility and autonomy to, as I mentioned, restructure — as earlier I mentioned the resort village of Katepwa Beach.

So it's to accommodate what the local governments feel would best serve their individual purposes.

Mr. Lorenz: — Once again thank you, Mr. Minister. I guess then we need to ask, you know in the sense of how much time you spent with SUMA (Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association) and the executive of SUMA speaking to this, you know this fact that there's going to be that amount of flexibility built into this amendment?

Discussion that I've had with the executive — or part of the executive, not all of the executive — is that their understanding was that this was only going to pertain to Katepwa and maybe

that pilot project that's going to happen there with the amalgamation of Katepwa; that this wasn't going to be a provision given to all the municipalities within the urban Act as well, towns, villages, as well as resort villages. This was just a provision made for that particular situation.

And I guess the question is, has the minister had enough discussion with SUMA that they are under the full understanding that this is going to give them that type of flexibility for the municipalities to be functioning under?

Hon. Mr. Osika: — Mr. Chairman, to the member, I'm told that the SUMA board chooses not to meet with officials but prefer to have their staff determine what proposed legislation is being implemented. And there was acceptance to the type of legislation being proposed by our officials in the amendments to this Act. So they chose to be receptive to that.

And if in fact Katepwa Beach . . . the situation there very definitely this applies to. But with the intent perhaps of others that may wish to come forward, it allows them to do so. So there is consultation and it is not — I want to assure the member — it's not an imposition by Government Relations of any type of legislation that might hinder and/or be offensive to the administration of any our stakeholders.

Mr. Lorenz: — Okay, thank you, Mr. Minister. I think, you know, with that explanation we maybe need to spend some more time with SUMA to get an understanding or feeling from them because the last discussion I've had with some of their executive, this wasn't their understanding that this was a provision given to all municipalities that are under the jurisdiction of the urban Act.

So I think we need to have some further discussion with them to get their understanding and appreciation of what is going to happen here, because I think some of the discussion we've had was that, just for an example, if we have some of the SUMA executive that were sitting there on a two-year term, that could be lost within the three-year term of the other municipalities that are sitting there as well. So you're having elections within election terms as well, so you need to do some restructuring even with the function of the executive of SUMA, which is the body that represents the municipalities within the province.

(12:15)

So I think again their understanding was that this was for Katepwa and the situation of Katepwa, which they were fully supportive of, but if it goes beyond that we need to spend some more time and give them I think a fuller understanding of what this implication may be. And the flexibility is accepted and I think it's appreciated, but I think the ramifications, what may come out of this, is something that we need to take a closer look at to kind of see where we may go with this as well.

Just wanting to move on to the areas of wards and an establishment of wards. Can the minister give us an explanation and a bit of background on how that process is put together? When there is a municipality that is wanting to establish wards, you know, how that ward commission is appointed and developed and what I guess the responsibility of that ward commission and authority of that ward commission is? Can you

give us a bit of a background or an overview of that whole process?

Hon. Mr. Osika: — Mr. Chairman, the intent of the amendment is to provide wards commissions with greater ability to consider, study, and recommend a variety of ward scenarios to address local circumstances or to facilitate unique restructuring proposals. Once again we keep going back to the restructuring that require the flexibility in representative arrangements to accommodate communities and their diverse interests.

Mr. Lorenz: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Then when the wards are established within those municipalities, and I guess Katepwa is a good example of when the municipalities are coming together through amalgamation and they're wanting to establish wards, how are those ward boundaries established and representation established? Is it through again the commission? Does the commission go out there and do that structuring themselves? Are the municipalities involved in determining what the boundaries may be and the representation may be? What is the process there?

Hon. Mr. Osika: — There is a wards commission, Mr. Chairman, that's appointed by the municipality, and they're required to hold these public hearings.

Mr. Lorenz: — But that board commission, is that comprised of municipal people or is it department people that make up that commission? And how is that commission, I guess, driven in the sense of the purpose of developing these wards?

Hon. Mr. Osika: — Mr. Chairman, it cannot be councillors but it's up to the municipality to have people on that wards commission. But they can't be councillors.

Mr. Lorenz: — Okay. I guess, you know, wanting to . . . finishing it off. We've got this, I guess, this situation wanting to go back to SUMA to confer with SUMA in the sense of those . . . the ability within structuring the election. And I think we don't want to leave that undone. I think we need to have the opportunity to still go back and talk to SUMA to get their feeling and understanding of, you know, that they're comfortable with having that ability to have a three-year term and a two-year term all at the same, within the same structure of their municipalities.

And I think we need to have some consultation with SUMA to get a good feel for that if they're prepared to support the direction of the Bill as well. So I think at this time we'd like to defer further discussion to another opportunity.

The Chair: — Thank you, Members. This is a fairly lengthy Bill. Is leave granted to deal with it by page?

Mr. Lorenz: — Mr. Minister, just wanting to go back to that, I guess, that structure of the wards process again. Is the understanding then that the municipality can identify the people that they want to sit on that ward commission and they're the ones that can make the decision on the boundaries and the representation?

Hon. Mr. Osika: — Yes, it's always been that way and there's

no change.

Mr. Lorenz: — Okay. And again, thank you, Mr. Minister. Talking to the Katepwa people, there is a misunderstanding there because they're feeling that somebody is directing them on the way that whole process is going to be put together, who the commission is going to be, who . . . you know, there needs to be a clarification with them. So we'll need to deal with that another day.

But if that is the process, then we're fine with allowing them to establish the commission and identify the boundaries so they have representation according to their likes of where the boundaries are going to be and where the wards are going to be as well.

Hon. Mr. Osika: — They have complete control of that and they don't necessarily have to go into wards if they choose not to. But they have the control of that entire process.

Mr. Lorenz: — Okay, thank you, Mr. Minister. I guess just only going into an area that talks about that the minister has the ability to structure the corporations of villages, resort villages, and towns, and it's done according to population. Once you reach the population of 100 people plus, you can . . . you make that, I guess, decision of moving that community or that municipality from a resort village into a village and then also into a town at 500 — I think is the breaking point — or maybe the numbers aren't quite correct there as well.

But the question that I've got is we have some municipalities out there, some communities, that are still called towns but they only have the population base of a village. What are we doing with that whole sense of purpose of still identifying them as towns but the population there is only as a village?

We're going to go into discussion about changing the formula for revenue sharing and revenue sharing is going to talk about the towns and villages and resort villages, and there's base grants that we talk about, there's . . . The formula needs to be worked through here on a sense of how we're going to support these municipalities.

What's the minister's I guess thoughts, and what direction is he going to be taking in the sense of having these municipalities sitting in the categories they may not fit, according to population?

Hon. Mr. Osika: — Mr. Chairman, very briefly. Yes, the revenue-sharing formula is under review and so I can't tell you specifically what it might turn out to be. But I want to assure the member, Mr. Chair, that it will be equitable, and as has been in the past, it would . . . it did involve a per capita considerations regardless of the title of a community. So that will be taken into consideration.

Mr. Lorenz: — Okay. Well thank you, Mr. Minister. And I think that's one area that we need to pay some special attention to. The per capita formula is, I think, only the part of the formula that was used because of the original . . . Or the money that's there for revenue sharing came from a formula that used just a multitude of different ways of calculating it.

The last insertions of revenue sharing were always calculated on — the last, I guess, couple of years — were calculated on the distribution on a per capita basis. But the prior money that was put together was put together with a combination of assessment and a capita and as well as there was a bit of a base grant involved in there as well. So I think we need to down the road take into consideration of how this formula is going to come together.

If it's only going to be on a per capita basis, then it really doesn't matter if you call them a town or a village. But if we're going to use some other ways of identifying that we're going to distribute this money, we need to recognize that these municipalities kind of fit into the category that they are going to be applying for these dollars for as well.

Hon. Mr. Osika: — The member makes a very good point, Mr. Chairman, but we've not, as I say, the review of the revenue sharing, the pools — both the big pool and the other local pools — that's not been decided as yet. And we're in consultation with SUMA and we will be with the other stakeholders to make sure that however, whatever formula we strike, will be fair and equitable to the people that should have access to those revenues.

Mr. Lorenz: — Okay, Mr. Chair, to the minister, thank you. Those are all the questions that I've got here for this afternoon. So thank you to you and your officials.

The Chair: — Members . . . Does the minister want to make a statement?

Members, this Bill is fairly lengthy. Is leave granted to deal with it by parts?

Leave granted.

Clause 1 agreed to.

Clauses 2 to 49 inclusive agreed to.

The committee agreed to report the Bill.

Bill No. 24 — The Northern Municipalities Amendment Act, 2003

Clause 1

The Chair: — And I see the minister does not have any new officials.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Minister, I believe in this Bill, it's very short and I think it's very similar to many of the changes in the previous Bills. Could you maybe just comment if all the changes here fit in with the city or the urban and the rural, and if there's anything specific to the North that's in this Bill that isn't in the other Bills.

Hon. Mr. Osika: — Mr. Chairman, to the hon. member, there's no discrepancies, no other changes. It's basically the same.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. I believe then we've had our questions answered that we would have on this Bill, so

at this time we'll let it go.

Clause 1 agreed to.

Clauses 2 to 15 inclusive agreed to.

The committee agreed to report the Bill.

Bill No. 39 — The Municipal Revenue Sharing Amendment Act, 2003

Clause 1

The Chair: — I see that the minister does not have new officials, just rearranging them. So we can proceed.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. And, Mr. Minister, I think we've been over this through, either through question period or estimate discussions many times before so you know where I'm coming from on this.

(12:30)

I guess some of the concerns I have are not so much with the Bill but what has been happening around the revenue sharing for municipalities, as yesterday, Mr. Minister, we talked about Regina and so on, about what has been put out there for the funding for the city of Regina, and I think that's become fairly well known.

I noticed, Mr. Minister, too — and not so much specifically with this Bill — but NDP MLAs were saying that, in one of their brochures, that funding for municipalities is up 54 per cent. And I guess where we have a problem with that, which pertains to revenue sharing and somewhat to this Bill, is that picking and choosing the year when this starts — this 54 per cent — yes, if you start at what point.

I just might like to remind, Mr. Minister, that let's go back and pick and choose 1991-92 where urban revenue sharing at that point was \$62.2 million. And the last numbers I can get according to public accounts was 2001, so we know last year you put more money in — I believe a half a million dollars for urban — and almost the same amount this year again. But if we go to 2000-2001, the urban revenue-sharing amount was about \$26.9 million.

So if we're picking and choosing numbers here, and members of the government side are saying that funding is up 54 per cent, I might want to remind them and the public that they're talking to, that municipal funding has dropped dramatically in the last 10, 11, 12 years. So I think maybe if we're going to be honest and fair with the public — and actually fair to the municipalities that are affected by what we're talking about today — that we should tell the whole picture and not pick and choose one certain part.

Probably I would be in deep trouble if I held this Bill up, Mr. Minister, because the municipalities involved definitely want their money and we certainly aren't going to hold this up.

So, Mr. Chair, I think our questions have been answered. If the minister would care to comment on that, fine. Otherwise I don't

believe we have any more questions on this Bill at this time.

Hon. Mr. Osika: — If I may just, Mr. Chair, and I do appreciate what the member is saying in referring back to the 1990-91, and at that point there was a call on everyone for some serious belt tightening. But I would like to point out that the actual . . . actually the pool, the revenue-sharing pool, at this point is currently at 57 per cent of its peak amount. So with another \$10 million next year, from what we're talking about previously up until now, the increase — the pool — will be at 65 per cent of its peak.

So it's moving in the right direction and there are other monies that are transferred, as we discussed to . . . under a variety of other titles, and the revenue-sharing portion plus additional monies that are transferred from the province to try and assist municipalities in meeting the needs of their communities.

And it's, as I mentioned, it's been appreciated that those communities are asking for additional funding, not unlike the province finds itself in some difficulty with the federal government in some of its transfer payments, and the reluctance to share some of the revenues that it takes from our province and does not return in some form or another.

However I know that we'll continue to work together in ensuring that we can come up with funding that's required not only by the province but by municipalities and by our urban centres, because by making those communities strong we make the province strong and we'll continue to work together and strive to ensure that we can indeed accomplish on behalf of our citizens and the people that we serve, provide them the type of service that they certainly deserve in this province.

With that comment, Mr. Chairman, if I may, I want to sincerely thank the members of the opposition for their review, the revision, the questions they've asked on the various Bills that we've discussed here; the implementation of legislation that we together view as being helpful to our communities, to all the citizens of the province of Saskatchewan. And it's by collaborating and by having consultations with stakeholders and discussing it with members of the opposition that we're able to arrive at good legislation that will in fact be good for all the people in this province.

So I want to thank the members of the opposition. I want to sincerely thank all the officials that work so very, very hard on behalf of the people of the province and on behalf of our stakeholders to ensure that we meet their needs as well. So thank you once again, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: — Why is the member from Moosomin on his feet?

Mr. Toth: — With leave to introduce guests, Mr. Chair.

Leave granted.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, I notice that we have a number of students and teachers and chaperones from Rocanville area have joined us this afternoon. We have 28 grade 4 students who've made the trip in, and I trust they've

had a good journey in today. I know they are looking forward to this day away from school, but actually still an educational process as they've come to the Legislative Assembly and to observe the proceedings on the floor.

And I look forward to visiting with the students a little later in the afternoon and I'll explain a little bit more about the proceedings at that time. But certainly, would the members join me in welcoming the teachers, chaperones, and students from Rocanville.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

Bill No. 39 — The Municipal Revenue Sharing Amendment Act, 2003 (continued)

Clause 1

The Chair: — Thank you, members.

Clause 1 agreed to.

Clauses 2 to 8 inclusive agreed to.

The committee agreed to report the Bill.

THIRD READINGS

Bill No. 23 — The Cities Amendment Act, 2003

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

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

Bill No. 40 — The Rural Municipality Amendment Act, 2003

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

Motion agreed to.

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

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

Bill No. 41 — The Urban Municipality Amendment Act, 2003

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

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

**Bill No. 24 — The Northern Municipalities
Amendment Act, 2003**

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

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

**Bill No. 39 — The Municipal Revenue Sharing
Amendment Act, 2003**

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

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

The Assembly adjourned at 12:43.

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