

The Assembly met at 13:30.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRESENTING PETITIONS

Mr. Gantefoer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise this afternoon on behalf of citizens of Moose Jaw and district who are concerned about the lack of dialysis services in their region. The prayer reads as follows:

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

Signatures this afternoon on this petition, Mr. Speaker, are all from the city of Moose Jaw, and I'm pleased to present on their behalf.

Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I have a petition today with citizens concerned about the deplorable state of Highway No. 20. And the prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to repair Highway 20 from Nokomis to Strasbourg in order to address safety concerns and to facilitate economic growth in rural Saskatchewan.

And the signatures, Mr. Speaker, are from the communities of Watrous, Strasbourg, Earl Grey, and Nokomis.

I so present.

Ms. Eagles: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present a petition on behalf of citizens of southeast Saskatchewan who are very concerned about the crop insurance premium increases. And the prayer reads as follows:

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

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

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

I so present. Thank you.

Mr. McMorris: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition to present regarding the water levels on the Qu'Appelle Valley and the absolute, dreadful consequences if something isn't changed. But the petition 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 First Nations people and the federal government to bring a prompt end to the dispute so that the water level on the Qu'Appelle River system can return to normal and end the economic harm and uncertainty this dispute has caused.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

Mr. Speaker, this petition is signed by people not just around the Qu'Appelle Valley, but also Regina and Cupar.

I so present.

Mr. Wall: — Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise again on behalf of residents of the Southwest who are proposing to the government in this petition a constructive alternative to the CT (computerized tomography) plans that the government announced in the budget. And the prayer of their petition reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the provincial government to reconsider its plan to allocate the used CT scanner to Swift Current instead of providing a new CT scanner for the Southwest.

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

Mr. Speaker, all of the petitioners today are from Swift Current, save one from Waldeck.

I so present.

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again I rise with a petition from citizens throughout Saskatchewan who are very concerned about 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 Gravelbourg, Assiniboia, St. Walburg, and Thomson Lake.

I so present.

Mr. Dearborn: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today in the Assembly to present a petition on behalf of citizens of west central Saskatchewan concerned with the alarming rate of rural school closures. And the prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to take the necessary steps to retain schools in rural communities such as Denzil and supply adequate education for rural families of our province.

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

Mr. Speaker, this petition is signed by the good folks from Denzil, Saskatchewan.

I so present.

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition from citizens concerned about the fairness of Crown lease. The prayer reads:

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

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

Signed by the citizens of Biggar and district.

I so present.

Mr. Lorenz: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, presenting a petition on the ever-deteriorating highways . . . Highway 14. And your 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 the necessary steps to reconstruct and repair the highway in order to address safety concerns and to facilitate economic growth in rural Saskatchewan.

As is duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

The petition is signed by the people of Wilkie and district.

I so present.

Mr. Hart: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to be able to present a petition on behalf of citizens concerned with this government's inaction in dealing with the Qu'Appelle lakes issue. 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 First Nations people and the federal government to bring a prompt end to the dispute so that the water level in the Qu'Appelle River system can return to normal and end the economic harm and uncertainty this dispute has caused.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

Signatures to this petition, Mr. Speaker, come from the communities of Southey, Cupar, Lipton, and Edenwold.

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 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 all from the village of Shell Lake.

I so present.

READING AND RECEIVING PETITIONS

Deputy Clerk: — According to order the following petitions have been reviewed and are hereby read and received as addendums to previously tabled petitions being sessional paper nos. 12, 13, 36, 41, 114, 119, 120, 124, 140, and 141.

NOTICES OF MOTIONS AND QUESTIONS

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I give notice that I shall on day no. 65 ask the government the following question:

To the Environment minister: is the minister looking into biotechnology alternatives in the oil field that are environmentally friendly?

And I have a number of other related questions.

I so present.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Ms. Eagles: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, to you and through you to all members of this honoured Assembly, I would like to introduce 17 grade 4 students from Westview School in Estevan. They are seated in the east gallery, Mr. Speaker, and they are accompanied by their teachers, Mrs. Barnstable and Mrs. McCutcheon.

And I would just like to welcome them here this afternoon. I look forward to our visit in a while. And I hope they have an enjoyable time in Regina and a safe trip when they return home.

And I ask all members to join me in welcoming them here today. Thank you.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Junor: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to the rest of the House, 27 grade 7 and 8 students from the Saskatoon Christian School in the west gallery.

They are accompanied by their teachers, Mrs. Janzen, Mrs. Siever, and I hope this is somewhat correct, Mrs. Nienhuis. And I'm looking forward to meeting them at 2:30 for a photo and a

visit, and I'll see you then.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of the legislature, 20 grade 4 students from Marion McVeety School that are seated in the west gallery. They're accompanied by their teacher, Ms. Acton, and a number of parents.

They've just spent some time getting me ready for question period, so I think I've had enough questions for today. I'll advise the opposition to go and ask questions from somebody else.

But let's all give a big hand for these people and welcome them to the legislature.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Melville Hole-In-One Golf Tournament

Hon. Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to inform members about a very exciting event that took place on Saturday, June 14. The very first annual Melville Charity Hole-In-One Par Three Golf Tournament was held at the Melville golf course and was proclaimed by all participants to be a huge success, even though the hole-in-one was elusive.

Although the committee would have been pleased with 100 entries in this first tournament, the slate was filled with 144 golfers and a fair number on a waiting list.

As a direct result of this tournament the designated charities, St. Peter's Hospital Foundation and St. Paul's Home Foundation, will be the recipients of \$7,000 each. You might say, Mr. Speaker, that the tournament committee, to put a new slant on an old expression, robbed to pay both Peter and Paul.

Mr. Speaker, golf tournaments offer participants the opportunity to renew old acquaintances, make new friends. This one was no exception as I not only bumped into a whole bunch of good friends, but I also met Melville's newest physician, Dr. Wessel Kriel, whom we welcome to Melville.

The event received support from nearly 100 sponsors from Melville and Yorkton, including 36 major contributions. It was simply overwhelming.

Mr. Speaker, such events provide communities with funding for critically needed funding. I want to congratulate the organizing committee: Jerry Jones, Brian Hicke, Gord Brown, Jim Schmidt, Jack Hargreaves, Lorne Warnes, Gary Houston, Merv Appell, Ed Pereyma, Cory Stoll, Len Wassill, and Merv Ozirny. These people worked very, very hard in order for the event to be successful. As well, the numerous volunteers who sat to make sure that if there was a hole-in-one, they could verify it. Congratulations to everyone for this successful event.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Whitewood Regional 4-H Show and Sale

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, this past Saturday the Whitewood regional 4-H show and sale was held in Whitewood at the Whitewood Auction Service. Mr. Speaker, 4-H club members gathered from 4-H clubs in Kennedy, Kipling, Wawota, Fairmead, and Moosomin.

Mr. Speaker, throughout the day 4-H members participated in a number of activities and events including judging and showmanship competitions as well as showing their 4-H steers. At the end of the day, the grand champion steer went to Ashley Vargo of the Kipling 4-H Beef Club and the reserve champion steer went to Tyler Smyth of the Kennedy 4-H Beef Club.

Following the show, Mr. Speaker, the annual sale took place. Despite concerns surrounding BSE (bovine spongiform encephalopathy) the 4-H members realized an average of \$1.47 a pound for their animals.

Mr. Speaker, events like this wouldn't take place if there weren't many hard-working individuals who volunteer many hours of their time in order for young boys and girls and teenagers to participate in 4-H events. And we all know how well the 4-H program has been accepted throughout the province of Saskatchewan.

So at this time, Mr. Speaker, I want to compliment all of the 4-H beef clubs, the volunteers, their leaders, and each and every one of the members for their achievements through the past year.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Multimedia Team Wins Awards

Ms. Hamilton: — You know, Mr. Speaker, getting an education these days is a lot different from what you and I experienced. I remember reading in my textbooks about Champlain, Brébeuf, Wolfe, Montcalm, memorizing dates and explorers and never quite fully understanding just what it was they did or what they experienced while doing it. I knew Canadian history but I didn't quite sense it.

The times they are a-changing, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to tell the Assembly that a pilot project funded by Saskatchewan Learning and SCN (Saskatchewan Communications Network) has developed an interactive Web site for the grade 4 social studies curriculum which will bring to life Saskatchewan's differing cultural heritages, traditions, lifestyles, histories, and geography from 1600 to the present day — modern communications technology to address and dramatize the past.

And, Mr. Speaker, the creation of this Web site has earned two awards for the Regina team of multimedia entrepreneurs who created it. Joyce Sotski of Adria Interactive, Bill Armstrong of Armstrong Communications, and Susan Risk of Live Wire Video Productions have combined their talents and in the process they've received two significant awards. The Association for Media and Technology Education presented to the team its Award of Excellence in the school system

interactive category. And the Canadian Education Association gave them its Achievement Award for combining qualities of originality, curriculum relevance, and high artistic and technical standards.

I know we all congratulate them and the good news is that they're working on more projects for more students in our province of Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(13:45)

Special Anniversaries in Cypress Hills Constituency

Mr. Elhard: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Two more communities and a municipality in the constituency of Cypress Hills are celebrating special milestones this summer and I want to take this opportunity to recognize them in the legislature.

This month the village of Hazlet is celebrating its 75th anniversary, and the RM (rural municipality) of Pittville its 90th anniversary. Both these special events will be observed during the Hazlet homecoming festivities on the weekend of June 27 through 29.

The village of Abbey will celebrate its 90th anniversary the weekend of July 18, 19, and 20 and is inviting all members of the community, past and present, to come out and celebrate this auspicious occasion.

And some rural communities in southwest Saskatchewan are struggling to maintain their identity and in spite of a declining or static population base are making great efforts to preserve their sense of community. The spirit and pride of our rural residents remains the driving force that allows our many small communities to retain their history and culture and enables them to preserve this important aspect of rural life for future generations.

Mr. Speaker, I would ask that all members of the Legislative Assembly join with me to offer congratulations to the communities of Abbey and Hazlet and the rural municipality of Pittville on their special anniversaries, and wish them continued success for the future.

Congratulations also to all the committee members for their initiative in planning these large-scale celebrations. Hosting festivities of this magnitude takes many dedicated volunteers and a lot of hours to ensure the success of these celebrations.

So please join with me in wishing each of the celebrants a very successful event. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Giant Tiger Store Opens in Regina

Mr. Trew: — Thank you. Mr. Speaker, North West Company out of Winnipeg, Manitoba has exclusive rights to Giant Tiger stores in Manitoba and the West.

Edward Kennedy, their chief executive officer and president,

was in Saskatchewan, more appropriately in the north end of Regina, to open the very first Giant Tiger store in Saskatchewan, in my constituency in the north end of Regina.

This all-Canadian store offers quality family fashion at discount prices. They have clothing, housewares, groceries, giftware, and more. Mr. Speaker, you step into the bright new store and there is genuinely wow factor, there's great appeal; it's a wonderful looking store. This Giant Tiger store is potentially the first of many to come to Saskatchewan.

North West Company is showing its confidence in Saskatchewan, and it has hired very close to 100 people. These 100 jobs, Mr. Speaker, are most welcome and they help our job growth stay red hot in Saskatchewan.

For the North West Company, Giant Tigers, and close to 100 now-working people, the future of Saskatchewan is indeed wide open.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Delisle Resident Honoured

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Edna Goodwin of Delisle, who is well known for her dedication to seeing a job through to its finish, was recently honoured for her 75 years membership in the Marian Rebekah Lodge. Her initial membership was held with the Lucky Lake chapter where she joined in 1927.

She and her husband farmed in Qu'Appelle Valley. They sold the farm in 1946 and moved to Delisle where they bought the drug store and operated until 1971. With the lodge never far from her thoughts, Edna helped organize a Rebekah Lodge for Delisle in 1951.

She has received all her Jewels: Veteran's Jewel for having served 25 years; Past Noble Grand; Past President and District Deputy Jewel, head advisory to five lodges. To obtain the District Deputy Jewel one must be a Past Noble Grand. At the time she held the position in Perdue, Humboldt, Colonsay, and two Saskatchewan lodges were under her jurisdiction.

The Rebekah Lodge was originally organized as a benefit lodge to help the sick and the poor. To this day they make their contributions to many worthy organizations both on a local and national level.

"I've always strived to do my best and hope that somewhere along the way I did some good," commented Mrs. Goodwin.

If you speak to anyone who knows her, she did. In addition to her lodge responsibilities she spent time involved with Homemakers, United Church Women, and spent 35 years on the United Church Board.

She was also involved with the group that organized the building of the Delisle centennial auditorium. Many jobs have been well done and seen through until the finish by this dedicated lady.

Please join me in congratulating Edna Goodwin, honouring her 75-year membership in the Marian Rebekah Lodge.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Native Prairie Appreciation Week

Mr. McCall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. June 15 to the 21 has been proclaimed Native Prairie Appreciation Week in Saskatchewan.

Saskatchewan is the only province with a week dedicated to raising appreciation, awareness of native prairie ecosystems and the importance of maintaining their ecological integrity. Mr. Speaker, only about 17 per cent of the province's native prairie still exists. In fact grasslands around the world are considered to be the most endangered ecosystems on the planet.

Here in Saskatchewan our ranching community deserves particular credit for managing their use of grasslands so that biodiversity and habitat for species at risk is maintained. This is important not only to the thousands of native plant and animal species that depend on native prairie but also to Saskatchewan people who benefit from conserving native prairie whether it be used for agriculture, recreation, hunting, birding, or ecotourism.

Mr. Speaker, this morning as part of the Native Prairie Appreciation Week, the Prairie Conservation Action Plan was launched. This is a five-year plan involving a diverse partnership, chaired by the Saskatchewan Stock Growers Association, committed to promoting stewardship and working together to conserve native prairie ecosystems. I want to take this opportunity to commend that partnership and all those individuals and organizations working to ensure that native prairie is both valued and sustained.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Why is the member for Regina Northeast on his feet?

Mr. Harper: — To ask leave to introduce a guest.

Leave granted.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Mr. Harper: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the House, a constituent of mine who is joining us on the floor here, Ms. Terri Sleeva.

Terri is known far and wide as being a very hard worker on behalf of the causes of people with a disability, and anyone who's ever met Terri will know that she's a very, very determined person.

And joining her today is Gordon Slackoff, her cousin from Victoria, BC (British Columbia), and Gordon is in the province visiting friends and family. And I had the opportunity of having a conversation with Gordon a little earlier on today, and he

shared with me what he sees as a very beautiful province and a very clean city of Regina and a very clean province.

And I want to ask all the members to offer them both a very warm welcome to the Assembly here today.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — And why is the member for Saskatoon Nutana on her feet?

Ms. Atkinson: — With leave to introduce a guest.

Leave granted.

Ms. Atkinson: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I want to join with my colleague in welcoming Terri Sleeva to the Legislative Assembly. I came to know Ms. Sleeva when I was Minister of Health when she was very active in promoting the rights of people living with multiple sclerosis. And I have to tell you, Mr. Speaker, that I think the minister . . . the former minister of Health and the associate minister of Health, we remember Terri with a lot of fondness now.

Terri did . . . she was quite prepared to rip the skin off of you if she felt you needed to do something. She's a tremendous advocate and she looks absolutely fabulous. And I want to welcome her to the legislature. Obviously she is still advocating and doing her work on behalf of people living with multiple sclerosis.

So welcome, Terri.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ORAL QUESTIONS

Support for Beef Industry

Ms. Harpauer: — Mr. Speaker, just moments ago the Prime Minister announced that there will be a federal compensation package for BSE cost shared 60/40 by the federal and provincial governments.

Mr. Speaker, does the Minister of Agriculture have any details of the federal compensation package and does our provincial government plan to provide 40 per cent of its cost share?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Serby: — The answer to both of those questions, Mr. Speaker, is yes, is yes. We're going to provide assistance to the compensation package at the level that has now been agreed on, which is the 60/40. And in fact we are in the process yet today, negotiating the package.

We had a conference call this morning, 6 o'clock Saskatchewan time, with all of the ministers across the country, including Mr. Vanclief. We had another conference call at noon today with the Western ministers and their officials. And we're scheduled to have another conference call at 3 o'clock this afternoon with the Minister of Agriculture and all of the ministers of Agriculture from across this country in attempting to put

together the final details of what the national compensation package should look like or will look like.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The members on this side of the House are extremely pleased to see that our province will be contributing their 40 per cent.

I would like to ask the minister if he knows what sectors of the industry will be included in the package and how soon the producers can expect a compensation payment.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Speaker, our interest would have been to see a different formula than the 60/40. Although we're happy that we're getting close to an agreement, we're not of the view that the 60/40 is what the compensation package should be in terms of cost share, given that this is clearly a trade issue. And on trade issues the provincial governments rarely participate.

But in this case provincial governments are not going to stand in the way of getting money to producers. And it will be funds that will flow initially to the feedlot industry, people who are feeding livestock in Canada today. That's what the package has concentrated itself towards.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Harpauer: — Mr. Speaker, the \$400 million package right away will help address the immediate problem, but if the borders remain closed the total cost to the cattle industry will be in far excess of the \$400 million. A recent report pegged that cost to be around \$2.5 billion but really no one knows for sure.

If the borders remain closed for four months, Mr. Speaker, can the minister tell us, is this the only compensation that will be coming from the federal government or are they prepared to consider further compensation if the borders remain closed for a longer period of time?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Serby: — I want to just highlight the comment that was made by Premier Klein which I had the privilege of hearing at the Western Premiers' Conference or meetings a couple of days back of last week. Mr. Klein said this, that if in fact the borders remain closed fully till the end of August of this year, we won't have a beef industry in this country that we'll recognize. We won't have one.

So when the member opposite asks what kind of ancillary compensation will be provided to all of the other industries in Canada, we need to start first by providing where the hurt is largest. And the hurt is largest to the industry that feeds.

If we can get the US (United States) government to open its border so that some of the live animals can move into the US and some of the carcasses can move into the US and across the country domestically, we'll see the beef industry begin to recapture its ability again to survive in this country.

If we aren't able to achieve that, if the federal government nationally is not able to achieve an orderly opening within the next several weeks, we will have an issue in this country that's far greater, Mr. Speaker, that's far larger than the \$2.5 billion that the member talks about today. It will be issues that will be insurmountable in many fronts which treasuries will never cover, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Harpauer: — Mr. Speaker, there seems to be a lot of conflicting messages on where we're getting or where we're at with getting the US border opened.

Yesterday the minister told the House that all the scientific reports were complete and had been forwarded by Lyle Vanclief to the officials in Washington. However, officials with the CFIA (Canadian Food Inspection Agency) are saying that that's not true, and in fact the report from the international inspectors is not expected until sometime next week.

Mr. Speaker, what exactly has Lyle Vanclief sent to the officials in Washington and what indication does the minister have that the border may be opened sometime soon?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Speaker, what I said yesterday to the media, I said to the Leader of the Opposition who asked me the question yesterday and will repeat again for the House again today, last week the scientific community was in Canada, reviewed the scientific evidence, and provided a report to our Canadian government that says generically that we have a sound and a safe and a food inspection agency that has done an outstanding piece of work in a short space of time.

(14:00)

That evidence the federal government have included in a letter that went on Thursday to the national government of the US indicating to them that we should as Canadians now, the Canadian government, begin to have the detailed discussion about what it will take to open the borders. That letter, Mr. Speaker, went on Thursday as a fax letter to the US government.

Minister Vanclief said to us that they'll pursue the national government, through his department, will pursue today or tomorrow the detailed discussions with the federal government about what it will take to open the border. Those discussions will begin by the national government, beginning in the next day or two.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Automobile Insurance

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, auto insurance are skyrocketing all across Canada. I think the average increase this last year was 20 per cent in provinces without a publicly owned auto insurance agency.

In Saskatchewan the Auto Fund is focused on providing

mandatory auto insurance, vehicle registration, driver's licence, and personal auto injury coverage. And, Mr. Speaker, while we might have some suggestions on the PIPP (personal injury protection plan)/tort debate, we think that the Auto Fund is working well in keeping insurance rates down in Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — Now, Mr. Speaker . . . Thank you. That's . . . Well, Mr. Speaker, there's still another Saskatchewan Party policy that the NDP (New Democratic Party) accepts, Mr. Speaker. We're happy to see it. We're happy to see it.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — Now, Mr. Speaker, this is what we've been saying all along. When the government sticks to its knitting, when it focuses on the province of Saskatchewan, good things happen.

Later this day the Saskatchewan Party will be moving a motion, Mr. Speaker, that says, that encourages the Government of Saskatchewan today and in the future to maintain the publicly owned and operated Auto Fund in the interest of avoiding uncontrolled rising auto insurance rates seen in other jurisdictions.

To the minister, Mr. Speaker: will the minister support that common sense resolution?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Order.

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Speaker, let me say to the member opposite on behalf of the government that in fact we will be participating in the debate. We will be as well amending the motion so that it reflects what's in the best interests of the people of Saskatchewan. And the amendment would read:

That this Assembly instructs the Government of Saskatchewan, today and in the future, to maintain the publicly owned and operated Auto Fund administered by SGI, in the interest of avoiding uncontrolled rising auto insurance rates as seen in other jurisdictions.

Mr. Speaker, what we're saying on this side of the House is that we support a publicly funded, or a publicly owned, compulsory auto insurance fund that has been in the best interests of the province, and we do not support wholesale privatization as members of that side of the House would, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're happy again that the government is on side again with the Saskatchewan Party on what is good public policy for the province of Saskatchewan. We have another question though, and if the minister responsible for SPUDCO (Saskatchewan Potato Utility Development Company) wants to answer the questions, well that's great.

It's a concern about the expenses at the Auto Fund, Mr. Speaker, because what we have to do in this province . . .

The Speaker: — Order, please. I would like to be able to hear all these remarks. They're quite well worth hearing, members, and I invite all members to listen to the remarks.

Mr. Wall: — They holler when they don't agree with us. They holler when they agree with us, Mr. Speaker. What they need to be listening to is the hollering of Saskatchewan people to get out of the way and let the Sask Party govern this province, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — Mr. Speaker, of concern here is the expenses at the Auto Fund. In the most recent annual report we see that expenses — excluding, excluding claim costs, excluding claim costs — has gone up \$5.7 million; 2.9 million of those expenses, Mr. Speaker, according to the annual report, are in salaries and administration and advertising.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the question to the government is this, the minister responsible for SGI (Saskatchewan Government Insurance) or the minister of SPUDCO: who will commit to the people of the province that this government is going to do everything it can do to reverse this trend and keep expenses down at the Auto Fund?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I said earlier, that we will be supporting compulsory auto insurance, and I want to tell you why we won't get out of the way for the Saskatchewan Party, Mr. Speaker. It's because of their party policy.

No. CC0002, and I quote:

A Saskatchewan Party government will allow private insurance companies to sell vehicle insurance, above the basic licensing fee.

Mr. Speaker, that's why we're not going to get out of the way for those folks, and the people of Saskatchewan don't trust them for that very reason. In here today they try and portray themselves as the protectors of publicly owned insurance company, SGI (Saskatchewan Government Insurance), when their party policy is 180 degrees out of phase with what they're saying in this House today, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — Well, Mr. Speaker, there is no party in the history of the province, there is no party in the history of the province that is as good at ignoring its own policy resolutions than the New Democratic Party, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — We're being very clear here today with this resolution. The government's on side. We should agree to agree and carry on. Because, Mr. Speaker, what we're worried about

on this side of the House with respect to the Auto Fund, what we're worried about is this government's track record in messing up the Crown corporations. We remember the 28 . . .

The Speaker: — Order, members. Order, members. A little order, members. More order.

Mr. Wall: — . . . Mr. Speaker, because we remember that minister losing 28 million taxpayers' dollars and then not telling the truth. We remember Minds Eye productions, Mr. Speaker, over 5 million lost; 14 million in a dot-com in Georgia; \$2 million lost on Clickabid, an on-line auction company; 9 million lost on Ag Dealer — we remember all of those.

So will that minister, the minister responsible for SPUDCO, stand in his place and assure the House that he won't mess up the Auto Fund like he did the SPUDCO deal, Mr. Speaker?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Speaker, I have a question myself. I want . . . A couple of them, as a matter of fact. I want to know, I want to know and will be watching very carefully this afternoon if they're going to support the amendment to that motion that this government is going to put forward. I want to know if they're going to support it because what it's going to do is ensure that SGI remains in a position to be able to deliver good service to the people, and affordable service.

And I want to know as well who's telling the truth — the people who formulated the Saskatchewan Party policy or the member from Swift Current.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Budgetary Projections

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, over the noon hour federal Finance minister, John Manley, held a news conference at which he admitted that economic growth in Canada this year will be at least one percentage point less than forecast in his budget due to two things, Mr. Speaker: SARS (severe acute respiratory syndrome) and the mad cow scare. Fortunately our province has not been affected by SARS, but we have been hit with the economic fallout from the BSE crisis.

Mr. Speaker, the NDP's provincial budget was based on an unrealistic growth projection of 6.8 per cent. The federal Finance minister is now downgrading his economic growth projection.

Has the provincial federal Finance minister reduced his growth projection since the March budget?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Melenchuk: — Mr. Speaker, certainly BSE will have an impact on the province of Saskatchewan. We have not been able to determine what that impact might be with regard to our real GDP (gross domestic product).

But I must point out to the members opposite that since the

budget of March 28, we have had two private forecasters who have updated their recent statistics. And the Laurentian Group is now predicting 6 per cent growth for Saskatchewan this year, and we're also seeing Global Insight predicts 5.5 per cent. And we are quite confident we'll meet our targets in the province of Saskatchewan because this economy is growing in this province in all sectors.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, economic forecasters have looked at Saskatchewan when this Finance minister released this budget and said that 6.8 per cent was unrealistic. They were looking at 3.1, 3.2 per cent — just like the other Canadian provinces.

And as a result of the downturn in the economic factors in this country, Mr. Speaker, those financial institutions have now changed, and have looked at the country, and said we're going to drop by at least 1 per cent because of a tremendous economic slowdown.

In fact Mr. Manley has indicated that he will introduce a mini-budget by the end of June. He has also admitted that economic growth would drop by at least one percentage point.

Mr. Speaker, will the NDP Finance minister provide a similar economic update by the end of June and will he adjust his 6.8 per cent economic growth factor to a more realistic figure?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Melenchuk: — Mr. Speaker, certainly this question has been asked by the member opposite in estimates, and the answer's exactly the same. We look at last year, and we look at the forecast for Canada and their growth in the 2 to 3 per cent range, and we look at Newfoundland that grew a whopping 13 per cent. We have indicated to the member opposite that the sector dynamics for Saskatchewan are based on the formula that is derived from our Department of Finance officials, and we stand by that because our officials have been the best at predicting the growth in this province for the last 20 years out of any group.

And, Mr. Speaker, we're not going to panic at this point in time if the federal government needs to adjust its numbers. We're not going to adjust our numbers. We stand by our numbers because the economy in this province is growing, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Saskatchewan Indian Gaming Authority

Ms. Bakken: — Mr. Speaker, my question is for the minister of Liquor and Gaming. In 2000 the NDP hired the accounting firm of Ernst & Young to look into the misspending of millions of taxpayers' dollars by Dutch Lerat, the former CEO (chief executive officer) of SIGA (Saskatchewan Indian Gaming Authority).

It was the taxpayers' money that Dutch Lerat was spending and it was the taxpayers' money that was used to pay for the Ernst & Young report on the SIGA scandal.

Mr. Speaker, will the minister come clean with the taxpayers of Saskatchewan and release the Ernst & Young report today?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Osika: — Mr. Speaker, I believe I indicated to that member last evening that legally we're not allowed to release that report. I have a letter here from Ernst & Young, the third party involved, Mr. Speaker.

I also pointed out that the Provincial Auditor, obviously our Provincial Auditor that that member does not trust or have any confidence in, reported that he had totally reviewed . . . And the member from Humboldt is laughing. Obviously they don't trust the auditor because the auditor went through that Ernst & Young report and indicated that his report, based on what he found, was accurate. He was satisfied with it, Mr. Speaker.

And if that member does not believe that we have a document . . . I would like to send this over to that hon. member, Mr. Speaker, to indicate that this document is not to be released by the third party that's involved. There is a legal process under the freedom of information Act, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Bakken: — The NDP continually either blames someone else or hide behind someone else. Today they're hiding behind the freedom of information Act.

Mr. Speaker, SIGA commissioned . . . SLGA (Saskatchewan Liquor and Gaming Authority) commissioned Ernst & Young to conduct a special audit in July 2000 because of the misuse of public funds by SIGA, yet this audit has never been made public.

The Justice department says government officials knew about Dutch Lerat's misspending. The vice-chief of the FSIN (Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations) says government officials not only knew about the misspending but they actually gave approval of it. The minister claims otherwise.

If the Ernst & Young report truly shows . . .

The Speaker: — Order, please. Order, please. Order, please. I'm just finding it very difficult to be able to hear the words being spoken, and I'd ask members to make allowances so that I could hear it.

Ms. Bakken: — Mr. Speaker, if the Ernst & Young audit truly shows that no government officials were aware of Dutch Lerat's misspending, will the minister prove it by releasing the Ernst & Young report today?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(14:15)

Hon. Mr. Osika: — I guess I've forgotten — I need to speak slower, Mr. Speaker. Legally we are not allowed to release that report. That's the first time I've ever heard anybody say that we're hiding behind the Provincial Auditor, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Bakken: — Mr. Speaker, if this minister wants to clear up the issues around SIGA, we ask him to release the Ernst & Young report. Mr. Speaker, either way the government and the minister of Saskatchewan Liquor and Gaming were negligent around the SIGA issue.

They either knew and chose to do nothing, or if they did know, then the government and the minister were incompetent because the government is the regulator and is responsible to ensure appropriate use of public funds.

Will the minister release the Ernst & Young report once and for all, and show the people of Saskatchewan what really happened? What is the minister hiding? Who is he protecting? Will he release the report today?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Osika: — Mr. Speaker, the member I believe has the letter. I'm not sure if it needs more interpretation. I would hope that someone could understand what the third party that carried out the audit indicated in that letter, supplied it to our Provincial Auditor, Mr. Speaker, who thoroughly reviewed it.

Now obviously there's a need to . . . for some further explanation, interpretation of the letter. I've read it, I've had a lot of other people read it, and it's plain and simple. Legally, under the freedom of information Act, we're not allowed to release that report.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Bakken: — The freedom of information is not allowed if it is to protect a third party. It is not to protect the NDP. It's not so the NDP can hide behind what they do not want the people of Saskatchewan . . .

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Bakken: — It is time that this government came clean with the taxpayers of Saskatchewan whose money was misused, whose money they used to put forward the Ernst & Young report. It is time for this minister to release this report. Will he table it today?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Osika: — Well there's no question, Mr. Speaker, that the members opposite are without doubt wallowing in the shallow end of the question pool. We have discussed this over and over, Mr. Speaker.

And there were also some comments made that I would caution the member not to make outside of this Assembly, in that last dissertation — the accusations and allegations that get pretty serious, Mr. Speaker.

There were issues with SIGA. They were discovered through audit processes. I have to remind them once again, we have strengthened the regulatory compliances. The \$1.36 million, including the monies owed to the Associated Entities Fund and

community development corporation, was recovered. We've worked with SIGA to improve its financial situation. They virtually doubled their profits, Mr. Speaker.

I find it difficult to believe, again, the refusal by that member, if she doesn't understand the way I'm answering her questions, to come and sit with officials — we'll record it; we'll document it. Obviously she doesn't understand in this House.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Bakken: — Mr. Speaker, the whole problem that has gone on with SIGA, Indian Gaming, started with this government because they have abdicated their authority and not regulated liquor and gaming which they are supposed to do, which is their responsibility.

Mr. Speaker, the question on the minds of the taxpayers these days is, what is the NDP trying to hide? Whose interest is the NDP protecting? It is certainly not the interests of the taxpayers of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, the Provincial Auditor indicated that SIGA misspent 2 million taxpayers' dollars. The Provincial Auditor also indicated that Dutch Lerat spent 800,000 of that. The RCMP (Royal Canadian Mounted Police) investigation went on for two years and concluded that the government and SIGA officials approved of this misspending.

Mr. Speaker, who in the NDP government knew about Dutch Lerat's misspending? Who in the NDP government approved this misspending? And why is the NDP now hiding behind the freedom of information Act? The taxpayers have a right to know. Will the minister stop hiding behind the freedom of information Act and release the Ernst & Young report?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Osika: — Mr. Speaker, I sincerely and truly regret that that member has no respect for our legal processes. And I'm proud to recycle the answers to the questions that have been asked of me, Mr. Speaker.

In 2000 when it was determined that there was a problem, it was this government that initiated audits — forensic audits — police investigations, called in the Provincial Auditor. The Provincial Auditor is quite satisfied with all the reports. I don't understand. Obviously no respect for the Provincial Auditor or any trust and confidence in that legislative officer.

Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to stand here; we have nothing to hide. And if they do not believe that legal processes should be respected, then I feel sorry for those people.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Why is the member for Regina Qu'Appelle Valley on his feet?

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

The Speaker: — Order.

Leave granted.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Hon. Mr. Wartman: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker, I would like to introduce to you and through you to the rest of this Assembly, four young men who are sitting in the west gallery.

Nathan Markwart is one of these young men. Nathan might give a wave to identify himself, is here with Youth Parliament sponsored by our constituency. Nathan and I also are members of Heritage United Church. With Nathan are Trevor Holloway, Reed Miller, and Dean Weninger. And these men all attend Michael A. Riffel collegiate.

So welcome them please to the Assembly.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Why is the member for Saskatoon Northwest on his feet?

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

Leave granted.

Hon. Mr. Melenchuk: — Mr. Speaker, in your gallery I notice that Richard Phillips has just come in. Richard would be well known to this building, having served as chief of staff to the former Liberal caucus and as well in my office.

And he now works with the Food Grains Bank in Manitoba. And he has had some interesting times, having travelled to places like Afghanistan and Africa for his job with the Food Grains Bank.

Also I would point out to Richard Phillips that we have just increased the limit on our highway to 110 so he'll be closer now when he's on the roads in Saskatchewan.

But I would ask all member to welcome Richard Phillips here today.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

TABLING OF REPORTS

The Speaker: — Before orders of the day, members, it is my duty to lay on the table the annual report for the year 2002-2003 of the Saskatchewan Information and Privacy Commissioner.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

WRITTEN QUESTIONS

Mr. Yates: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm extremely pleased today to stand on behalf of the government and table responses to written questions no. 731 through 743 inclusive.

The Speaker: — Responses for questions 731 through to 743 inclusive have been submitted.

SEVENTY-FIVE MINUTE DEBATE

Public Ownership of the Saskatchewan Auto Fund

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is a very interesting 75-minute debate because finally, finally, we have an issue that the NDP are paying attention to. And I'm going to, at this point, just outline what that motion is, Mr. Speaker, and then we'll go into the details of why it's so critical at this particular point.

That this Assembly encourage the Government of Saskatchewan, today and in the future, to maintain the publicly owned and operated Auto Fund in the interest of avoiding uncontrolled rising auto insurance rates seen in other jurisdictions.

Mr. Speaker, it becomes very important that we deal with this issue today. And the reason it becomes so important is when we look at the history that this NDP government has given us in a lot of other areas around the province, we are afraid, Mr. Speaker, we are afraid, Mr. Speaker, that they're going to take this same issue, this same issue, and do to it . . . to a lot of the other good programs that we have around this province.

And I'm going to want to take some time, Mr. Speaker, to outline what those other programs are that this government has decimated, destroyed, and made a disgrace. And when we look at that particular record, we worry, Mr. Speaker. We worry, Mr. Speaker, that this government's going to do exactly the same thing to the Auto Fund that they've done to many other areas.

First of all, Mr. Speaker, we need to outline what's been happening across Canada, and taking an article from today's Saskatoon *StarPhoenix* and it says:

Automobile insurance premiums increased an average of 19.6 per cent in 2003 from . . . 2001 . . .

And then it lists what happens in a few specific provinces — New Brunswick experienced the biggest premium hikes at 27.5 per cent increase; Newfoundland is seeing a 25.2 per cent increase; Prince Edward, 13.9; Ontario, 20.1; Alberta 15.4.

Mr. Speaker, we worry what these NDP are going to do in Saskatchewan. And here's why we worry, Mr. Speaker — here's why we worry. We've seen over the years what happens when you have a good concept that's good for the people of Saskatchewan and you give it into the hands of this group of socialists and we see how they totally destroy it.

Let me take one for example, Mr. Speaker — health care. Health care. The NDP will take pride in saying this is the birthplace of health care. It probably is, Mr. Speaker. But in the hands of these NDP, what has happened? We have the longest waiting lists in Canada — the longest waiting lists in Canada. No other province but NDP Saskatchewan has had waiting lists that are as long.

That's why we start to worry, Mr. Speaker, and that's why we need to be vigilant. That's why the Sask Party has to be vigilant. We have to keep the province and the NDP on their toes, because before we know it they will do to the Auto Fund,

Mr. Speaker, they will do to the Auto Fund exactly what they've done to health care — the longest waiting lists. Everyone out there watching knows that's the case, there is no doubt about that. And it's been under the watch of the NDP, under the watch of the NDP that those lists have become as long as they are.

Let me give another example from health care, Mr. Speaker. What is one of the reasons that we have those long waiting lists? Why do we have those long waiting lists? It's because we don't have enough workers in our health care system. Isn't that strange, Mr. Speaker, that under an NDP government we wouldn't have enough workers, that people who could stay working in Saskatchewan choose to leave an NDP Saskatchewan and work in other provinces and in the states of the US rather than work here. That's because the NDP have made this province such an undesirable place to live.

It can be turned around, Mr. Speaker, and the Sask Party is going to turn it around. We have the plan to turn it around. We have the plan to grow this province and we're going to do that, Mr. Speaker. We're going to do that.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Heppner: — We look at small communities. We look at small communities. Nowheres across Canada have small communities been as decimated as in Saskatchewan. Now what's going to happen if we leave the Auto Fund in the same hands? There is no reason, there is no reason, Mr. Speaker, to think that absolutely anything else is going to happen but what we've seen across this province.

I brought two points, Mr. Speaker, from under health care. All you have to do is look around rural Saskatchewan and see how those people are fighting to keep their communities alive, their towns and villages alive, and we know exactly what's going to be happening with the Auto Fund, Mr. Speaker. They're going to destroy that in exactly the same way. Anything that's good for the people of this province, this NDP government has the ability to destroy.

It wasn't long ago, Mr. Speaker, when they actually had an agreement, an agreement with the people of Saskatchewan, an agreement that the people of Saskatchewan said was a good plan. They liked it. They liked it. It was signed by the NDP government. It was called GRIP (gross revenue insurance program).

(14:30)

These people tore it up. They tore up that plan; they tore up that agreement. And worse than that, Mr. Speaker, many farmers by now have sort of financially managed to get over that big financial kick that they were given by the NDP, but the scary part is, is that the NDP, Mr. Speaker, broke their word. They broke their word. There was a signed contract with those farmers and they tore up, they tore up that contract.

Why should anyone in this province have any more faith in these NDP that they might not tear up the Auto Fund? There is no reason to suspect they wouldn't do it. They did it; they did it. And I have one of the Regina NDP MLAs right now chirping

from his seat as to could that ever happen? It did happen, Mr. Speaker; it happened with thousands of farmers. They ripped it up. Why would they not do it with this one? We can't trust them. It's their word that's at stake and they've shown the kind of people that they are, Mr. Speaker. Crop insurance is a fine example of that.

We have no idea what else they're going to dream up with regards to the Auto Fund, Mr. Speaker. Let's just look at one of the things that they've done with some of their plans for the future; what they've done with the plans for the future.

They took and they said in education, we're going to plan for 30,000 fewer students in this province. Plan for less, plan for less. And the people of this province better look at the same thing when we're dealing with the Auto Fund. They better realize that this NDP government is going to be planning for less, Mr. Speaker. They can expect worse coverage; they can expect a more expensive coverage. And who knows, Mr. Speaker, they may decide to take the whole Auto Fund and scrap it. They've done this in a lot of other areas, Mr. Speaker, a lot of other areas.

Let's just look at what happened with electricity. People say, well surely here we have in Saskatchewan, we have this particular plan by the NDP that everyone has to buy their power from, you know, the government. Not true, not true. Saskatoon, Swift Current, and some major private organizations can buy their power wherever they want.

These are the people that want to go ahead and force everything down their throats except when it comes to Regina, and this is a bit of a sidebar, Mr. Speaker, but I do have to mention this. When, Mr. Speaker, the contracts were made with the towns and the cities about that electrical thing, the cities that chose, Mr. Speaker, the cities that chose to give up their rights to handle their own electricity — Saskatoon and Swift Current chose to keep it; Regina chose to give theirs up, to sell it to the city of Regina — so now when the city or the government gives some of that money to the city, they call that revenue sharing, Mr. Speaker. Revenue sharing. First you buy it from it, and then when you make your payment you say that's revenue sharing. That's why it becomes so frightening to even contemplate what this NDP government may do with the Auto Fund, with the Auto Fund.

I listed, Mr. Speaker, some of the provinces and some of the increase in rates that are there, and we worry. We worry, Mr. Speaker, what the NDP is going to do here in Saskatchewan. They mishandle most everything that deals with the ordinary people. Good example — same newspaper, Mr. Speaker, same newspaper — today's *The StarPhoenix*, "Gov't pension shortfall surfaces."

Now who would you think the NDP should take care of would be the ordinary people, but they don't. Their Auto Fund is at risk, their GRIP was at risk, their pensions, Mr. Speaker, are at risk because the NDP, the NDP government, has not done their due responsibility for the people of this province.

You can't trust them, Mr. Speaker. You can't trust them to take the very pensions, the people who have served this province for decades, and then find out that there may be shortfalls. Shortfall

surfaces, Mr. Speaker. Saskatoon *StarPhoenix* today. This isn't an old copy with some old history, Mr. Speaker. It isn't that at all. That problem with workers' pensions is serious.

We haven't in Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, over the years, not had very many edges. The Auto Fund has been an edge that we've had because our Auto Fund rates have been low. They've been better than most other provinces. After we've had the debate about taxes with Alberta, with property tax in British Columbia, and we've gone through all of those all the way across Canada and we find out that as this province we tend to not stack up that well, we've always been able to pull out our Auto Fund. We've always been able to pull out our Auto Fund and say, at the end of the day, here's where Saskatchewan is in the lead. Here's where it's in the lead.

Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, I've had to list things from health care to power to pensions to education to GRIP; in all of those areas, one after another, the NDP has failed the ordinary person in Saskatchewan. It becomes important then, Mr. Speaker, when we look at that history that we realize that this Assembly needs to encourage the Government of Saskatchewan today and in the future to maintain that publicly owned and operated Auto Fund. We're not dealing with the other Crowns here, Mr. Speaker. We're dealing with the Auto Fund specifically, pure and simple.

That Auto Fund is a good plan, Mr. Speaker. And a little later on we'll go into some of the details of it and some of the very specific financial aspects of it and that will explain some of the need to maintain the Auto Fund in greater detail, Mr. Speaker.

Okay, dealing with a few other issues why we have to watch this NDP government. If we're not careful, if we're not careful, who knows where else they're going to go? Look what they've done with some of the other good plans in Saskatchewan.

Telephones. Instead of staying with telephones and giving us the service that they've done in Saskatchewan and done well and done for reasonable rates, where do they decide they're going to make money to sort of subsidize our rates? They're going to go all around the world — around Canada, around United States, Australia. No limit. No limit.

And then they say they're going to come back and keep our phone rates down. Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, that has backfired very seriously. It has backfired in spades on this NDP government and unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, unfortunately it has backfired on every single citizen of this province, every single citizen of this province. Because our telephone rates, instead of being lower because of the investment in Alberta and Australia and any other place they could dream up, we've had to subsidize the losses over there, Mr. Speaker. We've had to subsidize those losses. That's frightening.

We talked a little earlier on how they broke their contract, broke their word. Now we find out that when they try to go outside of Saskatchewan to make investments to go ahead and keep some of our programs as economical as possible, they fail. It's because when you turn a capital loose . . . a capitalist loose on something to make some money, they can do it. You turn a socialist loose on something, they're going to lose money as they've done time after time after time. Probably the only ones

they've won is one that a previous capitalist organization probably set up. On their own, they can't do it. They haven't done it.

And we worry, Mr. Speaker. We worry that they're going to take the Auto Fund and decide they're going to bring it to Australia or New Zealand or Louisiana. If they're going to take our telephones to those places, why wouldn't they suddenly go to Louisiana and say guess what, we have an Auto Fund plan for you. And if they do it over there, Mr. Speaker, the same thing's going to happen that's happened across the whole world. When these people invest Saskatchewan money, they lose.

Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, the member from Moose Jaw chuckles at my term, the whole world. That's exactly what it's been. Australia is about as far away as you can get, and they're losing money over there, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to read the motion at this particular time:

That this Assembly encourages the Government of Saskatchewan, today and in the future, to maintain the publicly owned and operated Auto Fund in the interest of avoiding uncontrolled rising auto insurance rates seen in other jurisdictions.

I so present, Mr. Speaker, seconded by the member from Swift Current.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to enter this debate and it's an honour, Mr. Speaker, to second the motion that was spoken to so eloquently by my colleague, the member for Rosthern, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — I know, I know of very precious few people in this Assembly that can put a finer point on a debate than the member for Rosthern and we all appreciate it on this side of the House.

Now, Mr. Speaker, we had a few questions on this very issue in question period, and it was very interesting to hear the response and who responded. Clearly these were questions about SGI . . . well actually about the Auto Fund because the Auto Fund is not a part of SGI.

Mr. Speaker, as the annual report suggests, Mr. Speaker, the NDP annual report suggests the fund is operated on a break-even basis over time. The fund is not a Crown Investments Corporation subsidiary. SGI acts as the administrator of the fund, Mr. Speaker. That's what the Auto Fund is.

And it goes on to say, Mr. Speaker, that the fund operates on a break-even basis over time and neither receives money nor pays annual dividends to the provincial government. This is a stand-alone program, compulsory program of the government.

And so we ask questions. In light of the fact that this is a burning issue across the country, we ask questions to the minister responsible. But the minister responsible doesn't answer.

Instead, believe it or not, the Government House Leader answers the questions. The House Leader, Mr. Speaker, the same minister that was responsible for the biggest scandal in the last 50 years in this province in terms of squandering taxpayers' money and not telling the truth about it, Mr. Speaker — and not telling the truth about it, by his own admission, for six long years.

Well then the House Leader stands up and he reads a resolution of the Saskatchewan Party. And I don't know if I heard him read the whole resolution or the right resolution but here it is, Mr. Speaker. Here's the resolution of the Saskatchewan Party, a Saskatchewan . . . on this issue:

A Saskatchewan Party government will allow private insurance companies to sell vehicle insurance . . .

And I think he stopped there. But it goes on; the rest of the resolution says:

. . . above the basic licensing fee.

Mr. Speaker, above the basic licensing fee, which as the annual report points out is the compulsory program for the Auto Fund. Imagine that, Mr. Speaker, imagine the minister responsible for SPUDCO not dealing the whole truth in the Legislative Assembly. But that's what happened just a few moments ago.

The fact of the matter remains this, Mr. Speaker. Our motion and the resolution of our party are completely in tune with each other and, and they're in tune with the spirit of the amendment that we hear is coming from the government side. Sorry, Mr. Speaker, they're not the opposition yet — not yet — but they soon will be after the election.

So the point of our party resolution and the point of our questions and the private members' debate we're having today is completely in line with the spirit with which the government is going to be proposing in terms of their amendment. Because he didn't . . . I don't think he read the whole resolution or maybe the wrong resolution but here it is, Mr. Speaker.

But we do have some serious concerns, as the member for Rosthern has pointed out. And the reason we bring this motion forward is our concerns are based on the track record of this government in managing their affairs. Now I . . . Managing the Crown corporations on one hand. And remembering this isn't a Crown, Mr. Speaker — it's a program by admission of the annual report — but the track record and how they've managed the Crowns gives us pause to be a little bit concerned, Mr. Speaker, about what they will do with respect with the Auto Fund.

In fact you don't have to go very far in the annual report to see the thin edge of the wedge, Mr. Speaker, when you detail . . . when you look at the detail of the kinds of investments the governments have directed the Auto Fund to take.

Well, Mr. Speaker, for the most part . . . And the member for Kindersley asks a good question, he asks, well what kind of investments? Well, Mr. Speaker, much of them seem very conventional — obviously treasury bills, shares, pool funds, and real estate. And, Mr. Speaker, those are certainly reasonable.

And quite rightly the annual report also points out that the Auto Fund took a little bit of a hit in terms of its investment like every other insurance agency, or in this case — it's not a company — but in this case they took a hit on their investments as did all other insurance companies or organizations across North America, except, Mr. Speaker, for ICBC (Insurance Corporation of British Columbia) actually, which is a system in British Columbia. They posted a surplus last year I believe.

And that system by the way, Mr. Speaker, operates under the premier option, the premier option which of course, Mr. Speaker, the Saskatchewan Party has modified slightly and would like to move to here in the province of Saskatchewan.

That's the only one that I'm aware of, and there may be others, but I'm aware of that significant surplus posted by ICBC, another government-owned auto insurance agency but they operate under a tort system, not a no-fault system, Mr. Speaker.

(14:45)

But we go on to find out what other investments is the government directing or approving the Auto Fund to make. Well here we go. We mention the normal ones, the ones we agree with: treasury bills, pooled fund shares, real estate. But here, Mr. Speaker, it says the fund owns 7 per cent in SGI CANADA Insurance Services Ltd., or SCISL as it's known. Now what's that, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Speaker, that is still yet another of the NDP schemes to invest taxpayers' resources outside of the province and, Mr. Speaker, more to the point, it is the source of huge losses to the taxpayers. We know we've lost millions of dollars in SCISL's investments in Coachman this last year, Mr. Speaker. That's what we've lost.

So that's what we're worried about. We're not worried about the investments the Auto Fund makes and every other auto insurance and insurance company is making. What we're worried about though, Mr. Speaker, is the Auto Fund being directed to make investments in the hare-brained schemes of the NDP, Mr. Speaker. That's what we're concerned about.

And so we bring this debate to light, and we hope members opposite will agree. We have to do whatever we can in this province to strengthen, to strengthen this program. And let's understand exactly what it is — it's a program, Mr. Speaker.

Every other commercial Crown is mandated by the government to return a dividend, certainly the major Crowns are. That's not the case here. This is basically, to oversimplify it, this is a revolving fund, Mr. Speaker, that is to break even. And it has worked well in the province of Saskatchewan.

But it doesn't change the fact that Saskatchewan people, that motorists in the province of Saskatchewan should be very, very concerned as long as their publicly owned auto insurance fund,

Mr. Speaker, is being managed by the people that brought you the Retx.com investment in Georgia that lost \$20 million; SPUDCO, the people that brought you SPUDCO; the people that brought you the bingo scandal; Mr. Speaker, the people that brought you a failed bid to try to sell people's health care information that lost over \$1 million; the people that tried to set up a company to compete with eBay of all things and lost a million nine at that, Mr. Speaker.

That's what the Saskatchewan Party is concerned about. We need to have a strong Auto Fund, publicly owned auto insurance program in the province of Saskatchewan. But more to the point, Mr. Speaker, we need to make sure that it is managed by a competent government, the kind of government that will be brought to this province by the Saskatchewan Party, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — That's the point of this debate. That's the point of this debate. Mr. Speaker, you just look around the province, you just look around the province and you realize, Mr. Speaker, what people are concerned about when it comes to the management abilities of the NDP and why we need a motion like this.

Mr. Speaker, what we are demonstrating today on this side of the House is what we've been saying all along. When it comes to government in the province of Saskatchewan, we need to take a non-ideological look at things, Mr. Speaker. We need to commit to do what is right for the province of Saskatchewan and to do what it takes to grow the province, to maintain advantages like low auto insurance.

Mr. Speaker, we know that at least the officials — and from time to time the Minister of CIC (Crown Investments Corporation of Saskatchewan) — agrees. Last year, the minister said he wasn't ideologically opposed to selling off assets. We're finding out in Crown Corporations Committee that officials are looking hard at various privatization schemes, and CIC III (Crown Investments Corporation of Saskatchewan Industrial Interests Inc.), including one-off sales of assets. But also, they look very closely at mutualizing the assets of CIC III and privatizing units in that, Mr. Speaker.

So the officials understand the importance of taking a non-ideological view of this and doing what's right for the province, but the government doesn't. The NDP cabinet ministers and the caucus will have none of it because it's not in the *Manifesto*. It doesn't matter what grows the province or what's good for the province. They check with their ideology. They check with their textbook and if it's not there, they don't do it, Mr. Speaker.

So we know that the House Leader should have finished the sentence on the party's resolution, Mr. Speaker. We know that. We know that the party speaks to allowing private insurance above basic insurance, which is what we have now. And what we also know is that people of the province have a hard time trusting the NDP to manage something as important as auto insurance.

And so, Mr. Speaker, with that, I can tell you that we on this

side of the House are looking forward to hearing from others in this debate and are also looking forward to sending a strong signal to the people of the province that under the coming Saskatchewan Party government, there is a strong and solid commitment to good public auto insurance in the province of Saskatchewan. And I'm pleased to second the motion of the member from Rosthern.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Atkinson: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I've listened very carefully to what the two members from the Saskatchewan Party have had to say on this motion and I want to make this observation about the Saskatchewan Government Insurance Auto Fund. For many of us living in Saskatchewan, our current system of public auto insurance is the only system we've ever known. For tens of thousands of us, we have no memory of the private auto insurance system that predates SGI.

And, Mr. Speaker, I'd make this note. In 1995, SGI celebrated its 50th anniversary when the Tommy Douglas government of the day, under the impetus of C.M. Fines, brought in Saskatchewan Government Insurance. And if the members would care to read the history, we knew at the time that over \$50 million in auto insurance funds from this province were going outside of the province and only \$19 million was being spent inside the province.

Now those citizens over there have no memory of this because they are so ideologically bound that we've even heard some of their members refer to Tommy Douglas, who is a folk hero for thousands of people in this province, they've referred to him as Tommy the commie.

Now, Mr. Speaker, SGI, SGI was built on a foundation of public policy and commercial Crown objectives. SGI's Auto Fund's mandate is to provide the following: compulsory, universal, accessible, affordable, non-discriminatory auto insurance to all Saskatchewan citizens.

Now we have heard the Saskatchewan Party — and I want the public to know this, for those people who are listening — we have heard the Saskatchewan Party say that they would introduce competition into the auto insurance area. Are the words, full competition, any way of saying privatization, Mr. Speaker?

And why do I say they introduce full competition? Well, Mr. Speaker, we have the very words of the member from Rosthern dated May 27, 2002, *Hansard*, where he says:

Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan people don't have a choice when it comes to vehicle insurance; they have to deal with SGI.

As well, Mr. Speaker — and this is very important for citizens listening to this debate today — it says, the Saskatchewan Party says, resolution CC0002:

A Saskatchewan Party government will allow private insurance companies to sell vehicle insurance, above the basic licensing fee.

Now let me, let me explain to the public the difficulty with this. With full competition, Mr. Speaker, there is an appeal for many in the . . . on the idea of full competition. But implementation won't be all that easy.

For full competition to take place, one of a number of things have to occur. Private companies will be governed by the same legislation and regulations that apply to SGI. Two, SGI will be relieved of its statutory obligations and become just another insurance company competing with others. Three, SGI will be placed in a competitive marketplace while continuing to be governed by legislation and regulation; and such a scenario, Mr. Speaker, will not produce a level playing field.

The first scenario is unlikely under any kind of Saskatchewan Party regime because they are bent on reducing regulations. The second scenario is possible, but if SGI is just another insurance company what, if any, public policy matters would remain. And the third scenario is very possible — SGI competing while being bound by legislation and regulation — and it would not be long, Mr. Speaker, until it would be driven into a financial mess.

Private companies focus their efforts on the best-risk clients while avoiding the poor risks. So what we have is SGI with its statutory and regulatory obligations having to provide insurance to people — not the best-risk people, but the lower risk people. The best-risk people would be picked up by the private insurance companies and it wouldn't be long before SGI had the high-cost insurers and in a financially troubled situation.

Now, Mr. Speaker . . .

An Hon. Member: — You've got to read the whole resolution, Pat.

Ms. Atkinson: — I certainly did read the whole resolution; I'll read it into the record again. And what the member says, a Saskatchewan Party government will allow private insurance companies to sell vehicle insurance above the basic licensing fee. But what I'm doing is putting . . . cutting apart their argument because full competition will mean the end to SGI.

Now, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker, what's important to know is that SGI indicates that two-thirds of their 1,600 or so employees do Auto Fund business. And the increased cost for 2002 over 2001 result from changes to PIPP and the improved benefits.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I just want to make a comment about this party, the opposition party's history when it comes to SGI, and it is a matter of public record. And the member from Swift Current worked for the Devine government during this period.

And let me say this, let me say this about privatization. There was one other government in this province that tried to privatize SGI and that was the Grant Devine Tories. And it was halted in April 1989 when the NDP caucus boycotted this legislature for 17 days. And after that the privatization plan developed by Grant Devine was to go by order in council through the cabinet to basically circumvent this legislature, Mr. Speaker.

And it was the employees, OPEIU (Office and Professional Employees International Union), that took the government of

the day, the Devine government, to court and the Court of Appeal denied the government, the Grant Devine government, and upheld their view that any kind of changes, any kind of privatization to SGI would have to be brought into this Legislative Assembly. And that ended the Devine government's determination to privatize SGI.

Now let me also say this, Mr. Speaker, let me say this. The Auto Fund . . . We had the member over there talking about SCISL and what is SCISL? Well I'll tell you what SCISL is. SCISL was the NDP government . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . SCISL, I'll tell you what SCISL is. It was the NDP government's response to the Devine era's privatization of SGI.

And we knew, we knew we had to explore other routes than privatization in order to expand the general insurance business in our province. And it was an important goal that we spread our corporation's geographical base of risk, Mr. Speaker — and people in the insurance industry will understand this — and what we created was SCISL which was owned by SGI CANADA, 30 per cent by the Auto Fund, and 40 per cent by Crown Investments Corporation. Now, Mr. Speaker, SCISL is helping to ensure SGI, the parent company, continues its strength and its stability.

Now, Mr. Speaker, we're going to introduce an amendment. And I challenge, I challenge those members over there to agree to this, member, and let this come before the Assembly because that will really tell us where the Sask Party stands on the Auto Fund. That will really tell us, because they're trying to woo us with nonsense.

And, Mr. Speaker, the amendment goes like this; it's moved by myself, seconded by the member for Regina Victoria. What we want to do is replace the word encourages with instructs; insert compulsory before publicly owned; and add after the Auto Fund the following, administered by SGI. The amended motion would then read:

That this Assembly instructs the Government of Saskatchewan, today and in the future, to maintain the compulsory, publicly owned and operated Auto Fund administered by SGI in the interest of avoiding uncontrolled rising auto insurance rates seen in other jurisdictions.

I so move.

(15:00)

The Speaker: — Before we proceed with the debate . . . Order, please. Before we proceed to the debate, I would like to advise the member for Saskatoon Nutana that we have a protocol not to use these words in the Assembly — Reds, Brownshirts, Communists, or Fascists — or to quote anybody that may have used those words.

Mr. Van Mulligen: — Well, Mr. Speaker, thank you very . . .

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

Mr. Van Mulligen: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr.

Speaker, when I look back in the years that I've spent in public service and I try to analyze the various things that I've learned as an elected member of the legislature and prior to that in city council, one of the things that I have learned and I have observed over time, that the public tends to have confidence in leadership that sets a very clear direction and then maintains that direction.

If you like, Mr. Speaker — I've had this metaphor used before — that is to say if the public are like passengers on a ship, they have confidence in a captain that they observe to be steering a clear course; gets them through the rocky shores, through the bad weather, and into the smooth sailing, Mr. Speaker. They will have confidence in a captain they perceive to be maintaining that direction. But they will lose confidence in a leadership that is forever changing its directions to suit any wind or any wind that might come along, Mr. Speaker. That's my sense of what the public observes in their leadership and what they're looking for when it comes to leadership.

So I find this motion and this debate, if you like, somewhat bizarre, and if you like, at least very telling about the Saskatchewan Party opposition. This is a group, Mr. Speaker, that our viewers will know have stood in this legislature on many occasions this year, last year, and have spoken with an almost ideological fervour, ideological fervour about how for 60 years in Saskatchewan the people of Saskatchewan have got it wrong; that people in Saskatchewan have supported CCF (Co-operative Commonwealth Federation) and NDP governments who, according to the opposition, one of their major, major shortcomings has been to, if you like, embrace public enterprise such as publicly owned automobile insurance.

They take the position that we have fundamentally erred in doing that because it somehow has prevented an explosion of private investment in Saskatchewan that would so change the face of Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, that it would be a much better Saskatchewan than it is now. I don't believe that, but that is essentially the point that they are trying to leave the public of Saskatchewan. That is the point that they are making; that is what they believe, Mr. Speaker.

Some of them have gone so far as to denigrate the leadership over the past — a leadership that is much respected by the people of Saskatchewan — to the point that one of their members, quote, referred to a former premier as "Tommy the commie." Well, Mr. Speaker . . .

The Speaker: — Order, please. Order, please. Order, please. Order. Order, please. Order, please. I would ask the member to, at this time before he proceeds any further, just to withdraw that statement, the derogatory statement, quotation, that he made with respect to Tommy Douglas.

Mr. Van Mulligen: — Mr. Speaker, I withdraw my reference to that quote in *Hansard*. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: — The member may proceed. Order, order. The member may proceed.

Mr. Van Mulligen: — Nevertheless, Mr. Speaker, I know that those people who have been watching and observing the Legislative Assembly over time will know with a great deal of

certainty that that has been the direction that has been espoused by their leadership. That has been the direction that has been espoused by the member for Swift Current.

They will have heard a few weeks ago the member for Rosthern, the very same member who moved this motion, talk incessantly about 60 years of socialism, 60 years of public enterprise, 60 years of getting it wrong — oh, if we only could have done things differently, what a much better province we would be. I don't agree with that point of view, Mr. Speaker, but that has been very clearly the point of view that they have expressed.

So they have said we needed to have gone in a completely, fundamentally different direction. That's what they have said. That's their direction — agree or disagree — but at least it is a direction, Mr. Speaker. It might offer some comfort to people on that ship or the people of the province that here is somebody who knows where they're going, they have a clear direction.

But now, Mr. Speaker — now, Mr. Speaker — contrary to everything they've said, everything they've said about having a clear direction, now they've seen the Lord. Which Lord? In particular a Bernard Lord, Mr. Speaker. They have seen what has happened in the case of the New Brunswick election when the people of that province became fed up, fed up with skyrocketing automobile insurance rates, that they delivered a very strong message to the Progressive Conservative government — their soul brothers — Progressive Conservative government of Bernard Lord and nearly defeated that government in a recent election, Mr. Speaker.

They have seen, they have seen what this is doing in the neighbouring province of Alberta where people are fed up — fed up — with skyrocketing automobile insurance rates, causing the Government of Alberta to put together a commission to review automobile plans in other provinces to see if there's maybe a better way to deliver automobile insurance rates.

Now, Mr. Speaker, now, notwithstanding the comments about 60 years of direction, now they want to change direction, Mr. Speaker. Now all of sudden they want to embrace public enterprise, notwithstanding their comments about how for 60 years the present government has got it wrong.

Well the only thing that I can say to the people of Saskatchewan on that point, Mr. Speaker, is don't believe them. Don't believe them. Don't believe them any more than the people of British Columbia believed Gordon Campbell who was prepared to offer anything and everything to get elected. Don't believe them. They won't follow through, Mr. Speaker.

But, Mr. Speaker, it doesn't take a rocket surgeon to understand why it is, why it is, Mr. Speaker, why this issue is being raised at this point in time. We all know, Mr. Speaker, that there's a by-election going on in Saskatchewan. This by-election is taking place in the constituency of Carrot River Valley and I suspect, Mr. Speaker, if the information we are getting is correct, that they are also receiving this message very clearly from the people in that constituency — don't mess with public auto insurance; it's keeping our rates down; don't you dare mess with it.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Van Mulligen: — They feel the heat and you know what, Mr. Speaker, they can't stand the heat. And they are prepared to reverse everything they've said about 60 years of public enterprise; all of a sudden now they'll embrace public enterprise, Mr. Speaker.

Well, Mr. Speaker, one question I have. It took political realities in other provinces for them to realize the benefits of a publicly owned and operated Auto Fund, Mr. Speaker. All I can say, it's just so typical of them. They never have a good word to say about Saskatchewan until they're pressed into a corner and they have to say something positive in order to curry political favour, Mr. Speaker. That's the reality.

Ah, Mr. Speaker, I could go on. But this particular motion is intended to set the public minds at rest, at ease, because it is a complete reversal of their party's policy as espoused in their party platform.

That is the truth, Mr. Speaker. They say, quote:

(They) . . . will allow private insurance companies to sell vehicle insurance, above the basic licensing fee.

Or basic registration if you like, Mr. Speaker. Well the basic registration is only a very small portion of what it is that people pay for the licence in this province.

They in a sense would gut, their party policy would gut public automobile insurance in this province. They are seeking to reverse the public policy. How they can do that, how a group of men and women in this Assembly can all of a sudden reverse their party's policy is not entirely clear, Mr. Speaker, but that is what they're trying to do because they are just absolutely frightened — frightened of the consequences of the course that they have set in their party, in this legislature, a course that sees them on the way to selling off public automobile insurance.

Now they're reversing directly, Mr. Speaker. If you like they're doing damage control, Mr. Speaker. They're overriding party policy, as it was with the Grant Schmidt situation, desperate . . . Anything, anything, promise anything to the people of Saskatchewan just to get them through this by-election, get them through the election so they can unveil their true platform, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, this motion is more illustrative of, not of what it says, but what it doesn't say. It doesn't talk about SaskTel; it doesn't talk about the fact that the cheapest telephone rates in all of North America are right here in Saskatchewan. And the public wants to know what is wrong with that. What is wrong with that? Why won't you come out clearly and say, we won't mess with that? Why don't you do that in this motion, Mr. Speaker?

Well, Mr. Speaker, the public are sending them a very clear message: don't mess with the Crowns, don't mess with public enterprise; your direction is wrong.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McMorris: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it's a privilege to join into the debate on our motion and the amendment put forward by the government members when we're dealing with SGI and the Auto Fund. And it's important that we realize what the Auto Fund is — it's not a Crown corporation, it's a program administered by SGI.

You hear the last speaker from Regina Victoria saying, don't mess with the Crowns, and he gets all red in the face. It's really quite interesting to see how that just really gets under his skin.

But I think there's a couple of things that we first must look at. Mr. Speaker, we have talked about, in our platform . . . and they brought it up a couple of times. They brought up our party policy a couple of times and they chose to interpret it the way they want to. It has nothing to do with the truth. They choose to interpret it the way they think they see fit.

And, you know, it's just continual. Every time we get into a point where the government feels pressured, you watch. Over the last couple of years and for years prior to that, but I would bet any money in the years forward when we get close and they're starting to feel pressure, they start fearmongering like you wouldn't believe, Mr. Speaker. It's fearmonger, fearmonger, fearmonger because, you know, Mr. Speaker, they're scared to debate the issue.

So what they'll do is they'll go around and they'll fearmonger. They'll tell untruths throughout the province to try and get people on their side. And we heard it already today. Here's one of the first examples that they have brought forward today and they talk about our party policy and what our party policy says, and they've read it a couple of times. They choose not to comprehend the words, I guess, because they fearmonger from the time they read it on forward.

It says the Saskatchewan Party government will allow private insurance companies to sell vehicle insurance above the basic licensing fee.

Let's interpret that for the member from Saskatoon Nutana. She can't quite understand . . .

The Speaker: — Order, please. Order, please. Would the little side debate between the two members here, the member for Canora-Pelly, the member for Saskatoon Nutana, would you kind of . . . I would ask the members to allow the member for Indian Head-Milestone to complete his remarks.

Mr. McMorris: — Let's be clear on what this policy stands for so that they don't fearmonger and tell half-truths or no truths throughout the province. Because as soon as they get pressed on an issue, they start fearmongering and fearmongering and misinterpreting what the basic party policy says.

It says that people selling insurance above the basic licensing fee is okay — exactly what is done right now in the province. Are they saying that from now on we should have no Wawanesa, we should have no Co-operators selling automobile in this province? Is that what they're saying? Is that what they're saying? Because that is what is happening in the

province right now and that is exactly what our party policy says.

It says exactly what our party's policy says but they feel that that is . . . They can't fight on that one because we're agreeing with the way it is right now. We're agreeing with private insurers selling insurance over top of the basic licensing fee. But because that's, you know, a kind of a tough situation for them, they start fearmongering and taking half-truths and reinterpreting the words, Mr. Speaker.

So first of all I think we need to look at the whole aspect of insurance and look at our province and look at other provinces around us. The member from Victoria got all worked up in saying how it's skyrocketing in other provinces, and we would agree.

(15:15)

But it's interesting how he'll draw the analogy, how they draw the analogy that if we have SGI, and SGI is a Crown corporation and the Auto Fund program operated under SGI, that we should have all the Crown corporations — in fact expand the Crown corporations — that we can't touch or even look at the Crown corporations. The way they're doing business in the year 2003 and the way they've done business in the year 1980 and the way they did business in 1960 cannot be changed. It cannot be looked at and it could not be changed.

They are so ideologically bound that Crown corporations . . . the Crown corporations, that the way they see them and interpret them are the only structures that can operate in this province; that there is no other alternative, even though their government presently is looking at restructuring some of the Crown corporations and the way they do business.

We hear it all the time in Crown Corporations Committee that they're not quite so in love with the Crown corporations the way they are because they're looking at changing some of the structures on them. Just exactly what we're saying. We're not ideologically bound like this NDP government is, that the way the Crown corporation is in the year 2003 is the way the Crown corporation is going to be for the next 20 and 30 years, Mr. Speaker. We look at it at a more pragmatic viewpoint.

And we look at the Auto Fund and we say the Auto Fund is an area that is working quite well because for once the government isn't asking the Auto Fund to pay a whole bunch money back into the General Revenue Fund. They're not distorting the performance of the Crown corporation by asking it to put a bunch of money into the General Revenue Fund, like it might be with SaskTel or SaskPower or SaskEnergy, where they have to pay so much back into the General Revenue Fund regardless of how much they make.

The Auto Fund is isolated from that. The Auto Fund is a stand-alone that doesn't have to pay dividends into the GRF (General Revenue Fund). And perhaps that's why it's working well.

They want to muddy the waters and talk about other issues, but if you look at the Auto Fund itself and how it's structured, it seems to be working very, very well. They want to take the

argument and the debate off of that issue because they realize that, oh my heavens, the Saskatchewan Party is agreeing with us; we must change our direction somehow and try and muddy the waters.

That's not what it is. If you look at our motion and you read our motion, and then you read the amendment, there is so very little difference. But of course they cannot follow along with our motion. They'd hate to agree with the Sask Party.

They talk about compulsory. We're talking about the very same thing — owned and operated. We have no problem with compulsory. That's the way the Auto Fund is run right now. We have no problem with that. Have we ever stood up on this . . . on any venue and said, oh we don't want compulsory insurance? No, we haven't.

The amendment is very, very similar to what our motion is. But unfortunately they can't support a Sask Party motion; that just wouldn't look right. They'd have to, they'd have to amendment . . . have to put it into their own words because that is so much, so much more palatable for them.

But it's interesting, Mr. Speaker. As soon as we start getting close and we . . . soon as we start finding some common ground, they say, oh there can't be. Because that's not the . . . They like to paint the Saskatchewan Party as evil and about to destroy all the Crown corporations, when they see that we're really a lot more pragmatic and we operate on what is good for the province as opposed to some of the areas that may need to be changed.

But when we talk to . . . when we talk of SGI and we talk of a lot of the Crown corporations, they will always stand up and say, oh they're so against the Crown corporations; they want to make the Crown corporations look bad. Quite frankly, when the Crown corporations do business in the province and stick to their business in the province, they do a great job. They do a wonderful job, and SGI is no exception. It's when they start investing all over the province or all over the country and into United States that they start running into trouble.

I think it was a former minister of Finance that talked in her book about the wheelers and dealers in the NDP caucus. That's when they get into trouble. When you talk about a wheeler and dealer with 26 or \$28 million that he had to spend on potatoes, somebody else's money — it's always a lot easier to spend somebody else's money — and what are the consequences?

Well you know I think we'll see what the consequences are if the Premier — the fellow sitting in the Premier's seat, never elected as Premier — the fellow sitting in the Premier's seat screws up his courage and calls a general election because that's when we'll see what the ramifications are of a wheeler-dealer spending 26 or \$28 million of taxpayers' money on potatoes and absolutely lost it. That's when we'll find out the ramifications of an NDP government that want to be in the filmmaking business, that want to . . . don't mind how much money they lose. They want to be wheelers and dealers. They want to be wheelers and dealers not with their own money, but with taxpayers' money, Mr. Speaker.

That's when, if we ever get to an election, if the Premier ever

screws up the courage to call an election, that's when that government and those members will be judged. And they'll be judged on their record, which is a brutal record when it comes to being wheelers and dealers. When you start talking about bringing it back to the motion and the amendment it's . . . we are on common ground here. I know the NDP can hardly stand it so they start fearmongering about a party policy because we are standing on common ground. We agree that the Auto Fund does a wonderful job for our drivers in the province, and it just feels so uncomfortable for them that they start misinterpreting, telling half-truths, or no truths about our party policy, a party policy that is only stating what happens in the province right now, Mr. Speaker.

So, Mr. Speaker, I'll be supporting the motion and unfortunately, or fortunately enough I guess, if the NDP want to put it in their words, and I will be supporting that as well.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Well of course you know, Mr. Speaker, the problem we have here is that we have the opposition getting up and they say oh, we're the best friends of government insurance — we're the best friends of government insurance.

But the problem with that, Mr. Speaker, is that everything that those members say in this House is recorded in a document which is called *Hansard*. And what we have seen up until recently . . . And I remember the members opposite questioning my colleague, the minister in charge of SGI for the last two years, and all we have seen from them is criticism of SGI.

We had the member from Rosthern up on his feet saying that SGI shouldn't even be able to investigate fraud; it had too much power. We had the members over there saying SGI and the Auto Fund had . . . we're investing all the money wrong. And nothing was good about SGI. Why? Because SGI is run by the Government of Saskatchewan and according to those members there, the government cannot run anything.

Now today they come into this legislature and they say I mean, get this, it's ridiculous. They say, we, the right-wing, extreme Saskatchewan Party are the friends of government insurance.

And the member from Rosthern says you can't trust, you can't trust the NDP with SGI. Well I've got news for the member from Rosthern. SGI was brought in by the New Democratic Party in the 1940s, Mr. Speaker, over the opposition of people like that.

And suddenly those people come into this legislature and they say that we need to elect them to protect people so that SGI will be kept, something they've always opposed.

Now what is changed, Mr. Speaker, what is changed? I'll tell you what has changed, Mr. Speaker, and I'll tell the public who's listening to this what has changed. They saw their right-wing cousin, Bernard Lord, the Premier of New Brunswick beat up and almost go down to defeat because of what private auto insurance, which they've always supported, is like.

And the people, the people, Mr. Speaker, have seen — even in

papers like *The Globe and Mail* — they have seen articles that say government insurance is better than private insurance; it is better for the people, it is better for the consumer, it is cheaper. And you know what, Mr. Speaker? The people know it. The people know it.

And so what they are doing, Mr. Speaker — and the public will see through this — they're saying we see a parade. We see a parade of people across the country that know that government auto insurance is better. And you're know what they're trying to do? They're trying to get in front of the parade. Mr. Speaker.

But I'll tell you what their phony tactics are going to bring them, Mr. Speaker, when they get out in front of that parade when the election comes, they're going to be trampled by the people, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — And the reason that they're going to be trampled by the people, Mr. Speaker, is that they have been getting up in this House for the last number of years criticizing SGI. They have been on their bed of privatization. They want people to have to pay high insurance rates to private companies and, Mr. Speaker, they are not going to get away with it.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — They are not going to get away with it. They're not going to get away with it, Mr. Speaker. And they laugh, Mr. Speaker, because they're nervous. They know . . . They know, Mr. Speaker.

And the public doesn't have to take my word for it. The public can go to *Hansard*. It's on the Internet, Mr. Speaker. And they can go through question period for the last two or three years, and they can see that those members have got up day after day relentlessly and attacked the minister in charge of SGI and attacked SGI and tried to undermine SGI the last few years as they have done throughout their history, Mr. Speaker.

And now they have the gall to come before the people and say elect us to defend government insurance? Mr. Speaker, it's like electing Colonel Saunders to take care of the chickens in the chicken coop. It's absolutely ridiculous.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — And I want to say to those members over there, Mr. Speaker, who have made a career out of telling the people that the government cannot run anything . . . That's what they always say. And they say that we should sell off the Crown corporations to their rich friends, and that the people should have to pay higher rates to their rich friends who they want to own the Crown corporations. And the New Brunswick example, and a comparison of the auto insurance rates across this country, Mr. Speaker, proves that the privatization agenda of the opposition Saskatchewan Party is not in the public interest, Mr. Speaker. It is not in the public interest.

And this party, this party has been defending government insurance and public enterprise in this province for 60 years, Mr. Speaker, and we don't need to take a back seat to these

people who have done nothing but try to undermine the Crown corporations, including SGI, for the last 60 years, Mr. Speaker. The public knows that when it comes to things like public health care — which they now say they support. Public health care was brought in over their opposition, Mr. Speaker, and everybody knows it.

The public knows that they have been opposed — up until the recent New Brunswick election — to government insurance. But I want to say this too, Mr. Speaker. It's a good thing that the member from Saskatoon Nutana got up and proposed an amendment to their resolution, because do you know what, Mr. Speaker? Their resolution also shows that they don't support public government insurance because their resolution doesn't say we should keep SGI, Mr. Speaker. It doesn't say that and the people need to know that.

The resolution says they encourage that the Auto Fund continue, but what about the rest of SGI? Today they're saying that they support the Auto Fund, which we know from what they've said in the last two years and beyond is not true. But they don't say, they don't say, Mr. Speaker, anything about house insurance that we get from SGI, any other insurance that we get from SGI. They don't mention that at all, because there's absolutely no doubt even from what they say that they want to privatize that, Mr. Speaker, because they want people that have to buy house insurance and business insurance in this province to be in the same position as people are in other parts of the country who have to buy private auto insurance because they want to sell off the public insurance company to their rich friends, Mr. Speaker.

And they can deny it all they want, but Shakespeare had a saying, Mr. Speaker, and it was this: he said, methinks thou doth protest too much, Mr. Speaker. And the reason they're up denying that they want to sell SGI is because that's exactly what they want to do, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Pursuant to rule 17(2) we now have up to 10 minutes of questions and comments.

(15:30)

Mr. Wall: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the last speaker, the Minister of Industry. And it's a pretty simple question, Mr. Speaker. In light of the fact that the government and opposition completely agree on the importance of maintaining public auto insurance, in light of the fact that we agree with him, why is he so angry, Mr. Speaker?

Hon. Mr. Cline: — I'll tell you what makes me angry, Mr. Speaker. It makes me angry when someone can stand up one day and condemn SGI, and come into this House the next day and say I'm the best friend of SGI. And it makes me angry, Mr. Speaker, because it's as phony as a \$3 bill. That's why it makes me angry.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Van Mulligen: — Mr. Speaker, although the motion deals with one aspect of public enterprise in Saskatchewan, my

question would be for the member for Rosthern who moved the motion. What assurance can he give the people of Saskatchewan that the Saskatchewan Party will never deregulate the electric industry or otherwise privatize the electrical industry in Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Heppner: — Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all that's a ludicrous question in view of the fact of where that particular motion went. But I will tell the NDP member something over there, what he wants to know about the people of Saskatchewan. We just had an election fought on auto insurance in the Maritimes, an election fought on the auto insurance in the Maritimes. And there's a very key point that has been missed.

After that election was over — fought on their auto insurance, as they've just talked about in their speeches — did their NDP folks out there get one more person sitting in the House? Not one more, Mr. Speaker. They basically sent all of them skeddaddling and said the NDP view of their auto insurance in that particular province was null and void of any intelligence. They didn't send any more of them back. They kept one, Mr. Speaker, one — just a token NDP.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my question is for the member for Saskatoon Nutana. Can that member give us her assurance that she will continue to push the current government to maintain the Auto Fund as a low-cost provider of auto insurance?

The reason that the minister . . . I'm asking the member that question is that the investment track record that she has supported with the Crown corporations have lost the province of Saskatchewan millions and millions of dollars including SGI's loss of over \$10 million in Coachman Insurance in Ontario. These losses — this was just in the last year — these losses, Mr. Speaker, endanger both SGI and its administration of the Auto Fund, Mr. Minister. Can she assure us that she will push for proper investments in Saskatchewan and not money-losing foreign adventures?

Ms. Atkinson: — There's a number of questions in that diatribe but what I can say to the member is that yes, I will continue to support a compulsory, publicly administered by Saskatchewan Government Insurance Auto Fund, Mr. Speaker.

But I also will say to the member is that the Crown sector in this province has delivered over \$1.6 billion in revenues to the people of this province to help pay for health and education.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I will answer the question; then I'd like to ask the members a question.

Thank you very much. This is to the member from Rosthern. The member from Rosthern, when I was speaking, certainly I think I heard him indicate that the Saskatchewan Party government will allow private insurance companies to sell vehicle insurance above the basic licensing fee. And he indicated, when I was speaking, that this is already allowed in the province of Saskatchewan. So if it's already allowed in the province of Saskatchewan, I would like an understanding of the definition by the Saskatchewan Party of the basic licensing fee.

Mr. Heppner: — I think the answer lies exactly in what is happening now in Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker. We have Mennonite Mutual, we have Wawanesa, we have a number of other companies doing that exactly. And if you listen to the question carefully, it says over and above — over and above — the basic. That happens right now. That plan, Mr. Speaker, was instituted by the NDP sitting right over there, so the question, Mr. Speaker, was redundant and ridiculous. Thank you.

Mr. Toth: — Mr. Speaker, we've had a fair bit of debate on this motion this afternoon. I'm just going to ask the Minister of Justice if he's prepared to allow his members to now stand in their place and vote on this motion?

The Speaker: — Order, please. This is a private members' debate. I will allow the member from Mount Royal or anybody to answer, but not as a minister.

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Well as the member should know, Mr. Speaker, unlike the members opposite, the position of members on this side of the House is well known.

We have taken a consistent position throughout the decades, Mr. Speaker, to support Saskatchewan Government Insurance. Our party implemented Saskatchewan Government Insurance; we don't need the members opposite telling us that we should have government insurance. What we need is for the members opposite to apologize for their attacks on the concept of government insurance in this House, in this session, and in the years previous which have . . . Their criticisms have been proven to be incorrect across the country; they know it and they're backpedalling, Mr. Speaker. That's what's happening here and the people should know that.

Mr. Van Mulligen: — Mr. Speaker, my question is for the member for Rosthern. The member for Rosthern, in his remarks, went on at some length about SaskTel and all the supposed failings of SaskTel. A recent survey of telephone utilities throughout North America, that was shown in *The Globe and Mail* by an American firm, showed that the cheapest telephone rates in all of North America are right here in Saskatchewan.

My question for the member would be: what assurance can he give the people of Saskatchewan that a Sask Party won't mess with SaskTel to ensure that the telephone rates will in fact remain the cheapest in North America? Can he give us some assurance that he will not privatize and sell off any portion of SaskTel that might cause those rates to go up?

Mr. Heppner: — Mr. Speaker, the debate today is on Auto Fund. That member may not want to keep it on the Auto Fund.

What I want to see, Mr. Speaker, is to see if the NDP has the nerve to vote on this. We want a vote.

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. My question is to the member of Saskatoon Nutana. I'd like her to explain, as indicated by many members, that there have been a number of companies that sell additional insurance beyond the basic registration that is included at a licence plate. We have companies like Mennonite Mutual, Sask Mutual, and used to be, Mr. Speaker, the company of Wawanesa Mutual used to sell

that in this province and they have since withdrawn.

Could the member indicate to the people of Saskatchewan why Wawanesa no longer provides additional insurance beyond the licence plate in the province of Saskatchewan?

Ms. Atkinson: — I guess I need a point of clarification. The member indicated that he . . . that insurance companies are able to provide insurance beyond the basic registration. I just wanted to point out to the member that the basic registration for a licence plate in the province of Saskatchewan is \$58.

And that's why, Mr. Speaker, I wanted to have a clear understanding of what a basic licensing fee means, as defined in the Sask Party policy. Because registration is . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Mr. Speaker, I'm trying . . . Mr. Speaker, I'm trying to answer the question. Now . . .

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

Ms. Atkinson: — Mr. Speaker, I'm trying to answer the question. I wanted to know what their definition of a basic licensing fee is because that's important, because registration in the province is \$58 for a 1998 2.5TL Acura. The insurance is \$904. So what I'm talking about is are we going to make the insurance compulsory because that's important. Because if the insurance is not compulsory and there's competition, then people and the cost of public . . .

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

Hon. Mr. Thomson: — My question is for the member for Rosthern. Why should any person in Saskatchewan believe a Saskatchewan Party that has campaigned time and again, that has said in this House they would not keep their campaign commitment to hold a referendum before privatizing, that is ideologically hidebound, that is connected with . . .

The Speaker: — Order. Order, please. I think the member is somewhat off topic here. If the member could . . . Would the member put his question.

Hon. Mr. Thomson: — My question is very clearly on the question around the auto insurance and privatization of that. Why would any member of this province, any citizen, believe or trust the Saskatchewan Party to keep their word?

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all, if we want to know who to believe, let's just check the reference, the history of the member from P.A. (Prince Albert) Northcote who misled, who told all kinds of stories in this House. After six years, Mr. Speaker — six years of doing on that — six years he was forced to apologize to this House.

That's why we're worried about what the Auto Fund is going to do. We've seen that. What we want, Mr. Speaker . . .

The Speaker: — Order. Order. I believe time has elapsed and I . . . Order. Order. Order. Order. Order, members. Order, order. Order. Order. Order. Order.

And, members, with my apologies in particular to the member for Regina South, I erred. I should have simply called the clock

at the appropriate time rather than allowing the member to proceed. I think it would have helped the situation in more than one case.

PRIVATE BILLS

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

Bill No. 301 — The Western Christian College (Amendment) Act, 2003

Clause 1

The Chair: — Order. And I recognize the member for Regina Elphinstone and he does not need to introduce his official.

Mr. McCall: — Actually before we proceed to consideration of the Bill, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'd like to seek leave of the committee to introduce guests.

Leave granted.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Mr. McCall: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce today a group in the Speaker's gallery — a fine looking group — that are here today to see this important stage of this Bill be reached. And without any further ado, I'd like to introduce . . . These are board members and staff members and friends and supporters and students, in some cases I believe, of the Western Christian College.

So in no particular order I'd like to introduce them. And when I do introduce them, if you could please stand, and if I miss out anyone, my apologies, but we're a work in progress here. Anyway, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to introduce Curtis Parker from Regina. Curtis is an alumnus of the Western Christian College and a board member.

(15:45)

I would like to introduce Lowell Hodgson. I had the pleasure of meeting Mr. Hodgson earlier on in this process around the Western Christian College Bill and Mr. Hodgson has joined us from Red Deer, Alberta — such is his devotion to the cause.

We have with us Jeremy and Jacinthe Frost. Jeremy is from North Bay, Ontario, and Jacinthe is from Quebec City. Vieux Québec, so bienvenue à Saskatchewan.

We also have Larry and Karen Boswell of Regina. And we have Faye Hickman, who's a diligent staffer with the college and has just moved not two weeks ago to Regina from Dauphin.

And last but certainly not least I'd like to introduce Mr. Clinton Brazle. Now Mr. Brazle is from Bozeman, Montana, and was Chair of the board back in the '80s when the college was at Weyburn. Mr. Brazle is looking forward to his 80th birthday next March. He's still preaching one Sunday every month, and he's got a lot of spring in his step and a sparkle in his eye. So it's good to see you out here today, Mr. Brazle.

I guess with that, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to . . . just before I

welcome the guests, I'd like to explain that these folks have been out and about in the community, meeting members of the business community to herald the coming of Western Christian College, to develop contacts, and to spread the good word about Western Christian College coming back to Saskatchewan and moreover coming to Regina.

So with that, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to ask all members to give these fine folks a warm welcome to this Assembly.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

Bill No. 301 — The Western Christian College (Amendment) Act, 2003 (continued)

Clause 1

Mr. McCall: — I'd just like to say a quick few words to the Bill. I've had the opportunity to speak to it in committee and in different forum, Mr. Speaker, and I'd like to say that it's been a great process getting to know the folks from Western Christian College. It's great to see you coming back to Saskatchewan. They take possession of the old Canadian Bible College and CTS (Canadian Theological Seminary) facility on July 1, classes in this September, and it's an exciting time.

So I'd just like to say that it's . . . In this process of, you know, trying to facilitate the return of Western Christian College to Saskatchewan, there's been a lot of co-operation and patience extended by all members of this Assembly. And so I'd like to say thank you for that, as the Bill's sponsor.

And I'd also like to say it's a good day, and I look forward to the first semester beginning very soon. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Toth: — Mr. Chair, I'd just like to add to the member's comments and first of all just welcome the guests from Western Christian College. I've had the pleasure of getting to know a number of people through the college through the years, being invited by the McMillans down to fundraising efforts when it was in Weyburn, and was sad to see it move to Dauphin. But we're pleased to see that they've looked at Saskatchewan again.

And I think, Mr. Speaker, or Mr. Chairman, what the motion is doing, just recognizing the move back and acknowledging some name changes, and I thank the member for his informing us about the process and the inquiry. And I can assure you that our members certainly are not opposed and we're quite pleased to see this motion coming forward and are very supportive.

And so, welcome to the guests and we look forward to the moving forward of this motion.

Clause 1 agreed to.

Clauses 2 to 4 inclusive agreed to.

Preamble agreed to.

The committee agreed to report the Bill.

THIRD READINGS

Bill No. 301 — The Western Christian College (Amendment) Act, 2003

Mr. McCall: — I would move that the Bill No. 301, The Western Christian College (Amendment) Act, 2003 be now read a 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.

Hon. Mr. Hagel: — Mr. Speaker, I request leave of the House to go to government business.

Leave granted.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

COMMITTEE OF FINANCE

General Revenue Fund Environment Vote 26

Subvote (ER01)

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

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. To my immediate left is Bob Ruggles, who is the assistant deputy minister of programs division; and to my immediate right is Dave Phillips, assistant deputy minister for the operations division; directly behind me is Lynn Tulloch, executive director for the corporate services division; and directly behind Mr. Phillips is Ron Zukowski, executive director of policy and assessment division.

And other departmental officials in attendance are Wayne Dybvig, vice-president of operations, the Saskatchewan Watershed Authority; Rick Bates, director of communications; Al Willcocks, director of forestry ecosystems branch, Joe Muldoon, director of environmental protection; Dennis Sherratt, director of fish and wildlife branch; Donna Johnson, corporate services; and Dave Tulloch, fire management and forest protection.

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I'd like to welcome the minister and his officials again here today. We have a number of questions on a number of different topics and areas, so I'd like to just get into it.

The first question concerns Cypress Hills Park. What is the long-term plan for the park?

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you very much for the question. I want to point out first of all that we had the opportunity to travel to Cypress Hills last year where we celebrated the discovery of Comet Petriew. And of course when you visit different parks, you certainly have an appreciation of some of the work and some of the effort being undertaken in our park system.

And I can point out that the long-term plan that we have for Cypress Hills clearly is to continue keeping it as a vibrant park, all the while being aware that part of the vibrancy of our park system is that we have ecological integrity.

And so some of the programs that we are doing, for example, would be vegetation management where you'd look at how we could anticipate some of the problems we could have with fuel management — because obviously trees burn and we want to make sure we minimize those risks — as well as we do things like vegetation disturbance where we obviously want to continue to regenerate the ecological management of all the different species of plants and animals and so on and so forth. And of course all that work is a work in progress; you're continually moving forward.

We also constantly assess some of the programs we have and the general day-to-day improvements, whether it's infrastructure or services and so on and so forth. All the while we keep in close communication and contact with our local park advisory.

So clearly there's a wide range of activities within the Cypress Hills Park. And these are specifics but we want to make sure that we have a vibrant park. And part of the vibrancy of any of our park systems is certainly the ecological integrity aspect that I speak about from time to time.

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you. To the minister on another topic. I've had a number of letters and phone calls and discussions concerning landfills in small communities. We recently received a memo that was sent out to all the ratepayers in the RM of Vanscoy and I'd just like to read it into the record. It says:

Close your landfills are what we've been told by Sask. Environment and Resource Management. Only government certified landfills may be left to operate under strict guidelines.

We may convert landfills to collection sites, but the costs are substantial. Our estimate to convert the Pike Lake landfill to a collection site, with one year of operation, is a minimum of \$116,950.00. This would mean a tax levy increase from \$150.00 to approximately \$450.00 per household, depending upon your assessment

Last year the cost to operate one landfill and one collection site was in excess of \$44,000.00. This amount does not include capital costs required for the conversion of an existing landfill into a collection site. Should we have two collection sites this amount would more than double for the operation alone.

The question is:

What are the options?

1. Close Pike Lake landfill and everyone use the Grandora collection site.
2. Turn Pike Lake landfill into a collection site on a user pay basis. If a collection site it may cost up to \$3.00 per

bag. (and)

3. Close both Pike Lake and Grandora and everyone take their waste to a certified landfill. (As an example) . . . Saskatoon landfill or (a) Lorass landfill in Martensville.
4. The communities organize to have someone collect their garbage and take it to a certified landfill. (and) This could become an opportunity for a small business for someone in the community.

The note is:

It is everyone's responsibility to recycle. Please do your share. It only takes minutes. It helps the environment . . . cuts costs.

Rumour has it that the school mill . . . may take a significant jump this year, which will affect all of us. The Federal Government has reduced their financial responsibilities to the Provinces, and the Provincial Government in turn has reduced their assistance to our local Municipal Governments. We have to raise operating costs from somewhere and that is where the ratepayer fits in. We are in a jam. People want services but no one wants to pay for it.

(16:00)

Then it asks for submissions and comments to the RM.

That opens up a number of questions and concerns. One of the concerns that was highlighted to me was concerning . . . was the cost of closing the landfill. And I know the Centenary Fund does . . . is available for certain items.

So I guess initially, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'd like to ask the minister and his officials exactly what Pike Lake in particular or other communities can do to cover the costs of closing their landfill or covering the costs of setting up a transit site; and how does the Centenary Fund . . . how much money is available for these projects; and what can this community do to look after this problem?

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you very much for the question. What I'd point out first of all is that we have, don't have the information as to where Pike Lake fits in the sense of whether they are part of a regional landfill partnership. We'll get the information to the member as soon as we can.

And very quickly I would point out that one of the things I think is important here is that we have roughly 600 landfill sites dotted throughout the province. People know that we should be doing something to manage these landfills because they are certainly an environmental challenge for all of us.

We allow approximately \$485,000 from the Centenary Fund now that is going to support some of the regional landfills throughout the province. So some of the money that is available is to help decommission some landfills or convert them to stations where people can drop certain items off. And it will certainly be managed as well as can be given the fact that there's a lot of distances and a lot of costs involved.

Right now we have seven regional authorities and we anticipate more are coming forward. And the whole plan here, as you are aware, is to try and see if we can reduce the number of landfills throughout the province, reduce the amount it costs to manage these landfills, to also reduce the amount of garbage that is going to the landfill. So we're able to, in the overall point, to try and reduce the cost of solid waste management.

In that sense, what I would point out is the Centenary Fund and all the different work being done by the RMs and the municipalities that are involved in trying to get some of these problems sorted out is that . . . And I think that the municipalities are the ones doing the majority of the work as the RMs are just starting to look at this whole issue of regional waste management. They are actively involved.

They also explain to people that the handling of waste management, the solid waste management, is never going to be zero. There's always a cost attached to it.

We could try and reduce and reuse and recycle as much as we can, but I think the premise of the partnership that we're trying to establish through the centenary funds is, number one, is to have as many regional landfills as possible to reduce the number of 600 separate landfills — that's reducing the cost — and to give as much financial support as we can under the premise that people have to know that operating landfills and solid waste management, you can never reduce and reuse and recycle to the point where it doesn't cost you any money.

So we try as hard as we can to reduce those costs. Ultimately the RMs and the municipalities, towns and villages, they have to . . . And they've told us that we've accepted the fact that there are costs attached to solid waste management. Let us work together to bring down those costs and move forward in making sure that we have a better operation and maintenance of our landfills.

And that's basically the premise that we're undertaking when it comes to the issue of regional landfills that you spoke about.

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you. You mentioned the 600 landfills. I was wondering how many of them are certified? And I guess the question is how many more will be certified in the future? And in the context of the regional authorities, I assume the . . . and I guess I'll ask the government how many landfills do they expect to have when the transition is done and the decommissioning is finished?

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you very much for the question. Just to point out that we don't generally set a target for the amount of landfills — that we want to have a reduced amount from 600 to 100, say for example.

What we typically do is we'll sit down with the regional waste authority and generically they may have one, two, or even three major landfills that they operate within their operation or operating area. So it's typically one to three major landfills in an area that encompasses a number of communities.

One of the examples I'll use is the REACT (Regional Authority of Carlton Trail) model in Humboldt, where they have 26 municipalities and they have one landfill. Obviously that's one

of the shining examples in the province. We want to continue building on the success of REACT to make sure that people understand the value of us co-operating and working together when it comes to solid waste management.

We do have roughly 2 or 300 landfills that are licensed. There are different degrees of licences given, you know, the relationship and discussions with the regional waste authorities.

But one of the things that is very important in this partnership approach is that we not create any undue economic hardship on some of the partners that are out there — that they don't see a dramatic, overnight increase to some of the costs that they're trying to contain. I think that's one of the things that we want to stress when we sit down with the regional waste authorities.

And we also look at things when they select a site, that we work with them and look at things like does this affect underground water, is it near a river, how's the soil compact — is it good, is it sandy? These are some of the things that we give them advice on.

But clearly over a period of time that we work very closely with the regional waste authorities. We try and minimize the number of landfills. We have patience. We have conditions in terms of where they build them. And of course they want to manage them quite well.

So for us to say we're telling our regional waste authorities that we want this — the amount of landfills in the province to be down to 100 — that would be unfair of us to impose those kind of conditions.

Although we all want to achieve that, what we want to achieve first is be patient, to be thorough in some of our work, and work with the regional waste authorities to try and reduce the numbers as quickly as we can and as economically as we can. And this is the whole partnership bond that we're under when it comes to the establishment of regional waste authorities.

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you to the minister. The number of problems around what is developing right now is, as landfills are closed and the cost of transferring waste is higher and higher, there are circumstances where people are dumping their garbage quite literally in the ditch or just burying it in their own backyard or in their own land. This is a potential health hazard; there's, you know, concerning rats and runoff into water systems.

It gets to a point, I believe — or there's a possibility of getting to a point — where the distance involved in moving waste is going to be cost-prohibitive. And there's just . . . The community isn't going to be buying into it and it's going to create a big problem.

Could you possibly comment on what the department is doing to — as far as the cost of this to the local taxpayer — what is the department plans to make sure that the system will be working properly to the benefit of everyone and be also cost-effective?

(16:15)

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you very much for the question. I guess I'd like to characterize the question as absolutely we're aware of the sensitivity that you've expressed in terms of people that may not want to go an extra 20 miles or 30 miles to have their garbage handled and managed.

First of all I want to point out that burying your garbage in your backyard or certainly dumping the garbage in a ditch somewhere, these acts, while I believe the majority of people of Saskatchewan are responsible stewards of the land, if they are occurring, then we would encourage the people to not do that any more and discourage that kind of activity.

And if people have evidence of folks that are burning garbage all over the place, well that's contrary to what we all . . . what I believe is all our responsibility, that is being proper stewards of our environment. So I would point that out burying garbage and dumping garbage, I don't think it's a common practice in Saskatchewan. I believe the Saskatchewan people really look at their role as stewards of the land as a very serious role.

However there are those few that wish to disrupt it for the rest of us, then we encourage folks to call in the COs (conservation officer). And there's certainly rules and regulations that prevent people from doing that, and while we never want to charge Saskatchewan people — it's not in our wish nor is it our desire to do that — it's important that we can't have that kind of activity occurring on a regular basis because that really makes the environment suffer.

What we have then for your information is we've looked at the REACT model. And SERM (Saskatchewan Environment and Resource Management) was the first ones to the plate in the sense of having a three-year pilot project with REACT; and we put a \$1.5 million budget attached to REACT to see how we could really begin to manage solid waste on a regional basis. And while this pilot project happened over a three-year period, there is many very valuable lessons learned from the REACT model.

And as a result of the REACT model, the next step of course was the centenary funding and trying to expand the success of the REACT model to other regions. Again, we believe the Saskatchewan people want to be able to see less landfills and better management of landfills.

And we never force anything on our partners. We have often asked municipalities and RMs to be part of the process.

There is a legal requirement for the RM or for the municipality to provide a landfill site for solid waste management. They have to do some of these things.

So as opposed to having 600 and not jointly working together, we certainly want to encourage that a regional system be set up and following some of the leads, some of the examples of REACT so they can be applied right throughout the province.

So to make a long story short, we want to discourage burning or dumping garbage anywhere. We want to encourage folks to learn the lessons of REACT and move on a regional basis. We want to make sure that we support them to a certain extent through the Centenary Fund. And all the while they explain to

their ratepayers or land tax payers that the management of our solid waste is never a zero sum balance, there's always cost to it.

And what we're finding is that a lot of Saskatchewan people are accepting the challenge. There's been a lot of great groups that have been established, a lot of proactive people. So I feel confident about the program overall. And, yes, it would be perfect if we could bring down those costs dramatically but of course that kind of effort is a work in progress.

And we'll continue to look at options with our partners to begin reducing that, hopefully, over a period of time, to have what we all want and that is of course having less landfills throughout our province and having cleaner land, water, and air for the future generations to benefit from.

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. To the minister, my understanding that REACT in Humboldt started out as a private initiative and was taken over by the local municipal governments and the provinces.

I would just like to ask the minister how much public funds is going into REACT? And also just to add on to that question, has the government entertained any private bids or private partners as far as solid waste management?

I mean, I know there's a number of private operators in the province now but they seem to be shut out of any of the regional authorities that the government is involved with right now. And I believe there certainly should be a business plan done to see if these private operators could do it cheaper than the public regional authorities and/or . . . Not necessarily just exclude one from the other, but to have a joint operation where both could operate in a . . . to keep costs down and be more effective.

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Just to clarify that the REACT project was private in the sense that the local municipalities were operating a REACT model. What we simply did was we provided them with some dollars, \$1.5 million over three years as a one-time pilot project to learn how we can do this better. And that intelligence-gathering exercise will certainly become property of the public in the sense that it would use the practice learned from REACT all throughout the province.

So I think in reference to the second question, is REACT getting any money now, and the answer is no. We felt that the learning process over a three-year period is something that was very valuable and it'll serve that area for a number of years. I believe the life cycle or the lifetime use of that particular landfill near Humboldt is 100-plus years, if I'm not mistaken. And so really I think in that sense it was a private operation and they basically took advantage of some of the need that we had to find out some specific information as to how we operate regional landfill partnerships.

The final point I will make is that, is there room for the private sector? As we mentioned earlier, it is not us to determine nor will we dictate to the regional landfills how they operate their business. We clearly are in a partnership mode with them. We want to support them and work with them and learn from them and begin to position them better and better as time goes on to

do a more effective job.

And a lot of these regional waste authorities do have a lot of interest in the private sector. They have a lot of discussions. That's completely within their right because they are responsible for the solid waste management, and we encourage them to look at all the options.

So to make a long story short again, we think that the private waste management authorities can look at the private sector as many times and many ways that they want. We will simply encourage them to look at the best options available to them, and again work very closely with them.

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you to the minister. Another topic, I have a letter from a Janet and Dan Carter from Asquith. I'll just read part of it:

We are interested in installing a geothermal heating system in our home and it will (not cut, it will) not only cut down on our heating cost by at least 65 per cent but also act as an air conditioner in the summer. We are currently using an electric furnace as we are on an acreage and not close enough to the natural gas line.

Because of the high initial cost of a geothermal unit we are looking for sources of funding, grants, loans, etc. We feel that this system is not only a way of reducing power consumption but is also important environmentally as there is no exhaust pollution. In light of the concern over greenhouse gases and cutting back on energy uses, we are wondering if the government offered any assistance programs?

I guess, to the minister, I guess maybe on a specific case like this if you could answer a question, but more on a general thought on Kyoto and where types of systems like this are going to fit in in the whole Kyoto scheme, and what help is this Kyoto plan going to give to individuals, or will there be any help to individuals to convert in . . . to more efficient systems?

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you very much for the question. The first thing I'll point out is that I want to commend the individuals that you made reference to. I did miss their names and I want to point out that it is that kind of attitude of people that have come forward and said, look, we have some options, we have some ideas; is there any kind of support for this? And they ask some very good questions, and certainly their intent is very clear in a sense that they want to look at options that not only reduce operating costs of their acreage but certainly help the environment out at the same time.

We certainly know that that technology could be advantageous to people in Saskatchewan because of the cold winters. We also know that we have been very, very active in reference to try and engage the public in a sense of saying look, listen, we all have to do our part. Little parts here and there certainly add to finding the solution overall for Saskatchewan when it comes to trying to look at the whole notion of the emission of greenhouse gases.

We as a government are quite proud of some of the activity that we've taken, for example, the Office of Energy Conservation.

They may have specific information on a geothermal heating process. The Saskatchewan Research Council also may have additional information for the family that you've mentioned, that they may want to contact them and get some specific information.

(16:30)

We know that the Kyoto Protocol . . . As you are aware, we are trying to achieve, you know, greenhouse gas reduction of 6 per cent below the 1990 levels by the year 2008 and 2012. We think that that is sincerely a challenge that Saskatchewan's got to brace itself for. We want to position our province to be able to do their part and be environmentally responsible to the rest of the country and to the world in a sense of trying to address and arrest this particular problem.

So we've encouraged different groups to look at all kinds of options. As a province we've led everything from the Office of Energy Conservation to looking at ag sinks to looking at wind power. These are some of things that we have done. And we'll continue looking at the options.

We have 12 conditions we put in front of the federal government. You want us to reduce some of these targets, here's some conditions that we can work with. So we are acutely aware of what the challenges around Kyoto is all about.

And what I want to again point out to the couple you made reference to, is that we think that the biggest players could be some of the folks that live on acreages and live on farms, where one day I envision many, many farms become environmentally friendly where they take care of their own wastes, they have their own heating systems, they generate power, they have organic farming. Like we see all kinds of benefits with agricultural community and they see the benefits as well.

So we want to encourage folks, although it's early pioneering work in the sense of looking at geothermal costs versus what it costs to heat your home by power, we want to encourage them to continue looking at these options because the technology works. It's a question of affordability and perhaps one of these days, if we all do our part, we'll be able to meet some of our Kyoto obligations.

But I would encourage them to get the information, do the analysis, look for a lot of the information needed from the different groups that I made reference to, and to point out that SERM at this time doesn't have any funding that would look after some of the needs that they would have when you look at the geothermal heating option.

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you. Mr. Chair to the minister, on another item concerning Pike Lake Park. These people had a concern and they wrote to your department and they weren't looked after as far as they were concerned.

And the issue in the park is that there's a number of households there and some people live there year-round, some just on a seasonal basis.

And one of the people there backfilled a ravine and caused flooding in the spring. And they wrote the minister's

department and . . . well it just says here:

The problem is very serious and I take it from the tenor of the minister's response that the department may choose to ignore the problem. Even the park officials were advised of the illegal infilling and did nothing.

I just would like to know in general what the department does with these cases and specifically in this case possibly I could send the letter across to your officials and see if you could revisit this situation and address it.

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you very much for the question. I would certainly appreciate the letter, and what I would point out is two major points.

Number one is that we do take the concerns of every individual that do write the department. In reference to some of the issues that you've raised, we take them very seriously. So by way of a copy of the letter I'll get one of the officials, you know, to work on it.

And the second point I'd make is that where resolution could be found, we work very hard at trying to find that, you know, that happy medium between the complainants.

Often what SERM does not do is not go there and create trouble for folks. What they do is they are often asked to come in and solve a conflict, or really try to correct some of the problems that may occur when two people have two different interpretations of a particular property or some issue in some park. So in that sense we try and strive to look for a resolution of some of the conflict out there.

So I can assure the member that once we get your letter, that our officials will follow up and we do take those concerns very seriously.

Mr. Weekes: — Mr. Chair, I'd like to thank the minister. I will be sending the letter across.

On another case, Mr. Chair, this is a letter from Glen and Grace Rayner, Little Bear Lake Campground, Choiceland. I'd just like to read the letter into the record:

We are operators of the Little Bear Lake Campground, mile 62, Hanson Lake Road. We are writing to you with our concerns for a policy being implemented by the Saskatchewan Environment and Resource Management. This policy is asking us to have all our permanent campers to remove the storage sheds from their campsites.

We find that this policy would be unfair to our campers, some of which have been camping at Little Bear Lake Campground for at least 10 years. This is a provincial park policy that should not apply to our campsite as we are not in a provincial park.

In conversation with David . . . he stated that this policy might be reviewed within the next couple of years. Removing these sheds would have a negative impact on the environment. Our campers come to our campground to enjoy nature, fish, and hike. They like to come for extended

stays. They need the extra storage space that a shed provides. It has been suggested that they keep their supplies under the campers. But not only would this be unsightly, it would be unsafe as storing food under the campers would attract wildlife, and storing boat and motor fuels creates a fire hazard. Our campground was threatened by fire in 1996 and we do not wish to increase the chance of this happening again.

Could the minister respond in this particular case? And in general, what are these campsites to do with these new restrictions that are being imposed upon them?

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Again one of the things that I think is very important is that the campground in question that you've mentioned is currently being leased. And we want to work very closely with the lessee in terms of putting forward some very proactive solutions to some of the requests made by some of his campers.

And I guess what I would say is we need to understand that there's two type of campers: one camper that'll come out there and stay out there all summer on a regular basis, and some campers that may be intermittent campers where they'll come out maybe once and then come back again a few years later and so on and so forth. So we're kind of dealing with two kinds of campers that obviously would go to such places, you know, as you mentioned.

One of the things we want to do with our campgrounds throughout the province is to make sure that people go out to campsites for the wilderness experience. And our policy is not to try and create some problems for those campers that go out to a site every year, but what we want to make sure is we don't do, is we don't have our campsites become cluttered with things like fences, with storage sheds, and so on and so forth, sidewalks.

These are some of the things that people want to do. They want to make their site more homey, and you can't fault them for it because we do have a very wonderful piece of land called Saskatchewan and people want to go out there.

And I guess one of the things we want to do in SERM is to ensure that the wilderness experience is there for all the people to enjoy, and the less construction of buildings and sidewalks and fences and so on and so forth in some of our campgrounds would certainly enhance that wilderness experience that we're all asking for.

So what I would point out is that in the event that there's some consistent evidence that perhaps storage sheds aren't a major problem — because these people that come back to our campsite every year are regulars; they're very good stewards of the park; they won't build unnecessary to clutter up the park in a sense of taking away the wilderness experience — that's where we've said, well let's have a look at that for some of the lessees that we currently have, some of the campers that are out there on a regular basis, and to see what we can do. And this is why we have the review that's going on now, to see if we can accommodate some of that.

But understand that what we're trying to achieve here is a

balance to enhance and protect the wilderness experience that all the people of Saskatchewan have asked us to do when it comes to the parks throughout our province, and then I think it's only fair to say that we're striving to find that balance and that'll take us some time.

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Another item for the minister and his officials. Back in 2000 there was a lot of complaints concerning biomedical waste being dumped in the Regina landfill. And there was an article and there was some . . . much discussion and questions in the legislature.

And I'd just like to inform the minister that I've had a number of complaints that this problem continues to exist. I've had a number of calls from people saying that dialysis waste is left uncovered — needles, blood, even human body parts or flesh is in the landfill not covered. And at the time, the recommendation was to have the Department of Environment and Resource Management review its medical waste disposal legislation.

I'd like to ask the minister, has the government done this and if they have, what were the results of the study and what can be done to look after this concern?

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you very much for the question. What I would point out is that Saskatchewan Health really leads this particular file and they . . . a review is underway at this time being led by Saskatchewan Health to look at the whole notion of how better to manage the biomedical wastes that you make reference to.

There's no question that there's a lot of leadership on this particular matter. In particular the city here, in Regina, they follow some national standards when they handled some of the biomedical waste. For example, they talk about covering some of the waste, storing it in a certain specific area, watching for leaks, and that sort of thing. But they also go above and beyond the national standards. Like they now, I believe, treat their biomedical waste in the sense of making sure that, you know, they do all they can to stop the spread of infectious diseases and so on and so forth.

So there has been leadership from both Saskatchewan Health on this and by a number of players.

And the one that, of course, we wanted to pay special attention to is the city of Regina. I know they're doing some of this work, and they follow national standards, and they're actually excelling in certain areas.

(16:45)

And to point out that this is a serious matter and they were looking at, in conjunction and co-operation with Saskatchewan Health, on how we can participate to make sure that we store and take care of our biomedical waste as best we can to reduce exposure to the public, and some of the challenges associated with that.

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. I look forward to a timely release of that study, Mr. Minister. On another issue, to the minister, I will just read this letter into the record:

I am a seasonal conservation officer with Saskatchewan Environment. This past year the budget for Environment was cut drastically and as a result we have lost 17 seasonal officer positions as well as 6 full-time officer positions. There's also talk about cutting another 20 full-time positions by the end of the fiscal year. It is obvious that the NDP government has no clue what goes on in our department or how much work we do as conservation officers. There is no way one or two people can cover the areas we do and take on the workloads we do. If you are familiar with our mandate you will know that we are enforcing laws from burning garbage dumps to provincial park enforcement, fisheries, wildlife, etc.

The reason I am writing this letter is because I am . . . would like to know what the government . . .

I'll just paraphrase here, this individual would like to know what the government is going to do concerning seasonal conservation officers, and is there any plans to increase the amount of officers in Saskatchewan or at least increase a budget so that work terms could cover hunting seasons?

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you very much for the question. I would point out one of the most important aspects of Saskatchewan Environment is certainly the enforcement and compliance division.

I would point out that some of the COs have done a tremendous amount of work; there's no question about that. They have a wide variety of tasks, as you mentioned in some of the correspondence that you made reference to. And so we would certainly concur that the COs have a wide variety of tasks; they're covering many, many miles and they have a lot of work that they have to undertake.

I would point out that there's no question that the six vacancies that you mentioned were not filled. And the 17 seasonal officers that you make reference to, some of the permanent officers are doing additional duties now so there isn't a lack of service or, you know, there certainly is extra work and extra duties that the permanent officers have to undertake. But given all the, you know, the challenges we have in maintaining our balanced budget, it's something that we have to be constantly diligent on in reference to making sure that we have, you know, as least disruption in all of our departments when it comes to the budgetary process.

There's also things like, for example, we're trying to encourage a lot of Aboriginal people to join the CO course program. There's attrition. These are all factors that we have to incorporate in our budgetary processes. And that I can point out that all the seasonal officers last year that were available, you know, to be recalled were indeed called back to work.

So it is always a difficult task as you know to the budgetary process, to fight and defend no cuts whatsoever. But I can tell you that as a result of some of the work that we did do during the budgetary process, we were able to save a lot of positions. And I wish we could do more.

But basically on what we have in front of us as a department, we've had some good progress, some good success. And given

the resources we have right now, there's a lot of people doing a lot of extra work which translates into some good work being done by SERM overall. And a big part of our team are indeed the COs as well, and we certainly respect their role.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Chair, Mr. Minister. Mr. Minister, I'd like to get into a bit of discussion regarding some of the issues surrounding underground fuel tanks and the clearance on sites that allowed those sites to be actually sold.

And in particular one that I think your officials would probably be aware of is a site in the community of Glenavon. The hotelier there has attempted to purchase a former Esso dealership . . . not dealership but service shop. And I believe it's either two or three or four years ago, the fuel tanks were removed.

Now as I understand it, the department has not been willing to or from my understanding, give clearance so that the site could actually be sold. And as it currently sits, the owner is basically walking away from the site. He could probably realize some value, but the taxes are accumulating as a result of the inability of the Environment to address this issue.

I'd like to know, Mr. Minister, what process the department takes in regards to these sites. And I don't have the particulars as to when the tanks were removed, at the time what process was taken in removal of the tanks and filling that property up.

But I think, Mr. Minister, we need to arrive at something fairly quick and maybe grandfather, if you will, some of these old sites because there's probably in many communities where people could make . . . some of these properties could be turned into some value and actually be cleaned up and, rather than just deteriorating, could be utilized.

And if the holdup is the requirements we have through the Environment and our policy in that regard, I think we need to take a serious look at how we implement that and what we can do to accommodate a clearance, if you will, given in regards to some of these sites so that they can actually, people can purchase them and turn them into some economic value.

If you've got anything in regards to this property, I'd appreciate that. But maybe you could just let me know where things stand and the overall policy in that regard.

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you very much for the question. What I would point out, first of all, is we don't have specific information on the site that you made reference to. But I'll give you kind of a sketch of how we undertake to do some of the cleanups of some of the other sites.

First of all that we follow national standards when we look at the whole notion of cleaning up some of these abandoned service stations. This station I believe is not considered abandoned, that there is an owner.

And what we have to be careful of is what we don't want to do is assume responsibility or liability for giving a property a clean bill of environmental health, if you will, because there could be issues that we would assume all kinds of responsibility for health or for cleanup costs and so on and so forth.

So if this particular property doesn't follow the national standards and we feel that there's some contamination, that's why you wouldn't get the sign-off that you made reference to.

We are quite adamant that some of the orphaned sites throughout the province, that these have to be cleaned up as well. It's much the same principle as the regional landfills in a sense, that they're dotting all throughout the province and people have walked away from these sites and they continue contaminating groundwater. And some sites aren't as bad as others of course.

And one of the important components that we've undertaken this year is to look at the abandoned service station cleanup program. And by the end of this year we would have cleaned up 110 sites, through the Centenary Fund, of abandoned service stations.

And these 110 — I believe there's 400-and-some in total throughout the province that have been abandoned — these 110 were the worst. So by the end of this year we would have cleaned up the 110 worst sites that were identified. And certainly they're also analyzed in the sense of making sure that they were indeed the worst ones.

So we have national standards. We don't have a specific reason as to why this particular site wasn't signed off, but there's probably reasons that we don't want to assume the responsibility of giving a clean bill of health if it's not fully cleaned up.

The second thing is that we've had good success with the centenary program in concert with the industry themselves to make sure we clean up some of the abandoned service stations throughout the province.

And finally one of the examples we often use is the city of Moose Jaw where they approached us and said look, listen we got two or three service stations throughout the city. We don't know what level of contamination there is on those sites. What we don't want to do is do a tax enforcement process on that particular site, because if we assume it and we find out that the costs of cleanup are dramatically greater than the costs of . . . that we could possibly get back when you sell the land. So make us a deal that if we assume title to it and we dig and we find out that it's so contaminated underneath that we'll never get our money back, that we'll not be held responsible.

So we agreed to that process and lo and behold the sites that the city took back, the abandoned service station within the city took back, weren't as contaminated as they originally thought. So they cleaned up those sites and then they sold them and they made dollars from the sale and they continued putting that into a process where they got other sites cleaned up.

So this is the kind of example the city of Moose Jaw has taught all of us to look at, is how we're able to work co-operatively in looking and addressing the whole issue of cleaning up some of the service sites that have been abandoned throughout the province.

(17:00)

So I would point out that, you know, we have a relationship with both SUMA (Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association) and SARM (Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities) on how we begin to identify these sites and get them cleaned up. And again the whole notion is to not leave them out there contaminating groundwater. The whole notion is we clean them up, give them a good environmental bill of health, and hopefully somebody else will buy them and operate them as environmentally, legally, and certainly to be responsible in how they operate these sites so that you can see the economic stimulation again start to happen.

So we're moving down that path and we're quite pleased with the co-operation of folks like . . . or cities like Moose Jaw, and to point out to people that partnership and information and sharing of all the resources out there is quite important to the success of this program as well.

The Deputy Chair: — Order. Order. It now being after 5 o'clock this committee will stand recessed until 7 o'clock p.m.

The committee recessed until 19:00.

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