



FIRST SESSION - TWENTY-FIFTH LEGISLATURE

of the

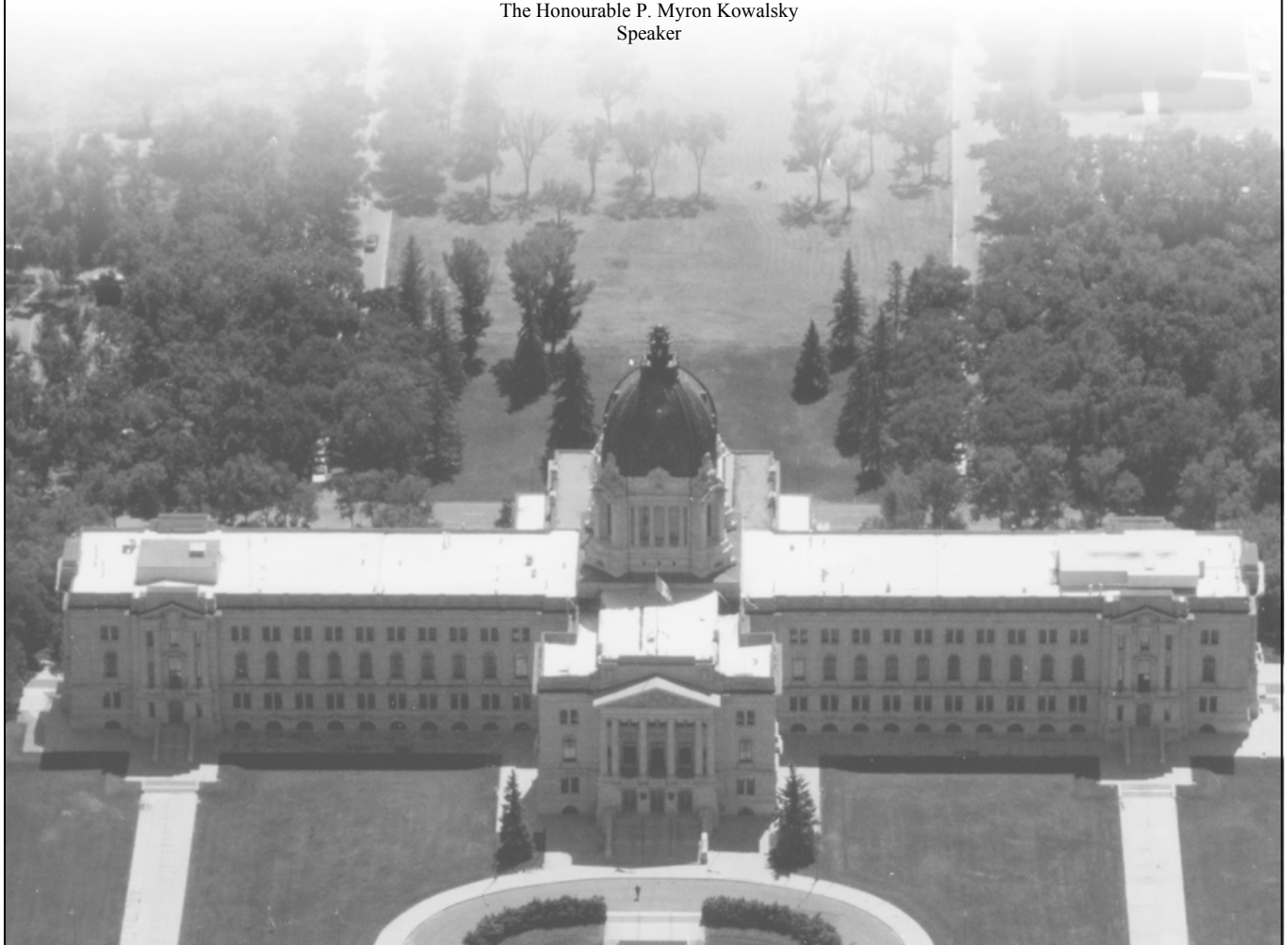
Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan

**DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS**

(HANSARD)

Published under the
authority of

The Honourable P. Myron Kowalsky
Speaker



MEMBERS OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF SASKATCHEWAN

Speaker — Hon. P. Myron Kowalsky
 Premier — Hon. Lorne Calvert
 Leader of the Opposition — Brad Wall

Name of Member	Political Affiliation	Constituency
Addley, Graham	NDP	Saskatoon Sutherland
Allchurch, Denis	SP	Rosthern-Shellbrook
Atkinson, Hon. Pat	NDP	Saskatoon Nutana
Bakken, Brenda	SP	Weyburn-Big Muddy
Beatty, Hon. Joan	NDP	Cumberland
Belanger, Hon. Buckley	NDP	Athabasca
Bjornerud, Bob	SP	Melville-Saltcoats
Borgerson, Lon	NDP	Saskatchewan Rivers
Brkich, Greg	SP	Arm River-Watrous
Calvert, Hon. Lorne	NDP	Saskatoon Riversdale
Cheveldayoff, Ken	SP	Saskatoon Silver Springs
Chisholm, Michael	SP	Cut Knife-Turtleford
Cline, Hon. Eric	NDP	Saskatoon Massey Place
Crofford, Hon. Joanne	NDP	Regina Rosemont
D'Autremont, Dan	SP	Cannington
Dearborn, Jason	SP	Kindersley
Draude, June	SP	Kelvington-Wadena
Eagles, Doreen	SP	Estevan
Elhard, Wayne	SP	Cypress Hills
Forbes, Hon. David	NDP	Saskatoon Centre
Gantfoer, Rod	SP	Melfort
Hagel, Glenn	NDP	Moose Jaw North
Hamilton, Doreen	NDP	Regina Wascana Plains
Harpauer, Donna	SP	Humboldt
Harper, Ron	NDP	Regina Northeast
Hart, Glen	SP	Last Mountain-Touchwood
Heppner, Ben	SP	Martensville
Hermanson, Elwin	SP	Rosetown-Elrose
Higgins, Hon. Deb	NDP	Moose Jaw Wakamow
Huyghebaert, Yogi	SP	Wood River
Iwanchuk, Andy	NDP	Saskatoon Fairview
Junor, Judy	NDP	Saskatoon Eastview
Kerpan, Allan	SP	Carrot River Valley
Kirsch, Delbert	SP	Batoche
Kowalsky, Hon. P. Myron	NDP	Prince Albert Carlton
Krawetz, Ken	SP	Canora-Pelly
Lautermilch, Eldon	NDP	Prince Albert Northcote
McCall, Warren	NDP	Regina Elphinstone-Centre
McMorris, Don	SP	Indian Head-Milestone
Merriman, Ted	SP	Saskatoon Northwest
Morgan, Don	SP	Saskatoon Southeast
Morin, Sandra	NDP	Regina Walsh Acres
Nilson, Hon. John	NDP	Regina Lakeview
Prebble, Hon. Peter	NDP	Saskatoon Greystone
Quennell, Hon. Frank	NDP	Saskatoon Meewasin
Serby, Hon. Clay	NDP	Yorkton
Sonntag, Hon. Maynard	NDP	Meadow Lake
Stewart, Lyle	SP	Thunder Creek
Taylor, Hon. Len	NDP	The Battlefords
Thomson, Hon. Andrew	NDP	Regina South
Toth, Don	SP	Moosomin
Trew, Kim	NDP	Regina Coronation Park
Van Mulligen, Hon. Harry	NDP	Regina Douglas Park
Wakefield, Milton	SP	Lloydminster
Wall, Brad	SP	Swift Current
Wartman, Hon. Mark	NDP	Regina Qu'Appelle Valley
Weekes, Randy	SP	Biggar
Yates, Kevin	NDP	Regina Dewdney

The Assembly met at 13:30.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRESENTING PETITIONS

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Cypress Hills.

Mr. Elhard: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, even though the government has offered an interim measure to satisfy some of the concerns revolving around Crown grazing leases, I continue to have petitions presented to me. And I ask your indulgence to present this one today.

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.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

Mr. Speaker, this petition is signed by constituents from the communities of Eastend and Claydon.

I so present.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Kelvington-Wadena.

Ms. Draude: — Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased today to rise on behalf of the people from the Kelvington-Wadena constituency who are really concerned about the closures of hospital facilities. The prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to take the necessary action to ensure that the Foam Lake Health Centre is not closed or further downsized.

The people that have signed this petition are from Wadena and Foam Lake.

I so present.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Thunder Creek.

Mr. Stewart: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to present a petition signed by citizens concerned about the possible closure or downsizing of the Herbert-Morse Union Hospital. And the prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to take the necessary action to ensure that the Herbert-Morse Union Hospital is not closed or further downsized.

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

Mr. Speaker, this petition is signed by individuals from the

communities of Herbert, Gouldtown, Prince Albert, Saskatchewan; and Fort St. John, BC (British Columbia).

I so present.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Saskatoon Southeast.

Mr. Morgan: — Mr. Speaker, I rise on behalf of citizens concerned about the whistle-blower legislation. And I will read from the prayer for that petition:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to introduce and support whistle-blower legislation.

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

These are . . . citizens signed this one from the town of Wadena, and, Mr. Speaker, I so present.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Estevan.

Ms. Eagles: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present a petition on behalf of citizens in my constituency with grave concerns regarding the closure and further downsizing of health care facilities. 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 action to ensure that Mainprize Manor & Health Centre is not closed or further downsized.

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

And this is signed by residents of Macoun, Estevan, and Bienfait.

I so present. Thank you.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Wood River.

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again I rise with a petition from citizens of my constituency who are getting extremely concerned about the potential closure of long-term care beds and health facilities in the Wood River area, as well as around the province. And the petition reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to take the necessary action to ensure that the Lafleche & District Health Centre is not closed or further downsized.

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

Mr. Speaker, this is signed by the good citizens of Woodrow and Lafleche.

I so present.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Arm River-Watrous.

Mr. Brkich: — I also rise with a petition with citizens opposed to possible reductions of services to Davidson, Imperial health centres.

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to take the necessary steps to ensure that the Davidson and Imperial health centres be maintained at their current level of service at a minimum of 24-hour acute care, emergency, and doctor services available, as well as lab, public health, home care, long-term care services available to users from the Davidson and Imperial areas and beyond.

As is duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

Signed by the good citizens from Davidson, Saskatoon, and Rouleau, I so present.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Biggar.

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition from constituents who are opposed to possible reductions of health care services in Biggar. The prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to take the necessary steps to ensure that the Biggar hospital, long-term care home, and ambulance services are maintained at the very least their current level of services.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

Signed by the good citizens of Biggar and district, I so present.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Kindersley.

Mr. Dearborn: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today in the House to present a petition on behalf of citizens of west central Saskatchewan concerned with long-term and acute health care services. 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 actions to ensure the Kerrobert Hospital is not closed or further downsized.

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

Mr. Speaker, this petition is signed by the good folks from Kerrobert, Major, and Doddsland, Saskatchewan.

I so present.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Last Mountain-Touchwood.

Mr. Hart: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I rise to present a petition on behalf of constituents concerned with the condition of Highway 22, that section between Junction No. 6 and Junction 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 take immediate action and make necessary repairs to Highway 22 in order to address safety and economic concerns.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

Signatures to this petition, Mr. Speaker, come from a variety of communities including Regina, Fort Qu'Appelle, Earl Grey, Saskatoon, Lumsden, and Southey.

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. 48, 63, 96, 97, 145, 158, and no. 160.

NOTICES OF MOTIONS AND QUESTIONS

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Wood River.

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I give notice that I shall on day no. 40 ask the government the following question:

To the minister of SPMC: with regard to the provincial building in Meadow Lake, what is the current square footage under lease to the provincial government? What is the length of the lease? How much of the leased space is currently vacant? What are the financial terms of the lease, and who is the owner of this building?

And while I'm on my feet, Mr. Speaker, I have a similar question. I give notice that I shall on day no. 40 ask the government the following question:

To the Minister of the Environment: how much space does the department have leased in the provincial building in Meadow Lake? How much of that space is vacant, and what are the financial terms of the lease?

I so present.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Arm River-Watrous.

Mr. Brkich: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I give notice that I shall on day no. 40 ask the government the following question:

To the Minister Responsible for SaskPower: how much did SaskPower contribute to Ducks Unlimited in 2003, 2004, and 2005?

While I'm on my feet, I have a similar question for Sask Water. Thank you.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Saskatoon Meewasin.

Hon. Mr. Quennell: — Good afternoon, Mr. Speaker. It gives me pleasure to introduce to you and, through you, to other members of the Assembly first of all an official with the Justice department, Murray Sawatsky, who is executive director of the law enforcement services with the department.

And with Mr. Sawatsky, Staff Sergeant Rick Bourassa, who is with the planning and research section of the Regina city police. They are both here as interested individuals and representing interested parties in The Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act legislation which is being read a second time this afternoon. And I hope that all members of the Assembly will welcome them here.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Cumberland.

Hon. Ms. Beatty: — Mr. Speaker, I'm very honoured and very pleased to introduce to the members of the legislature, four people involved with a youth suicide prevention walk, and they're sitting on the west gallery. The group includes Lena Wilson, Thomas Watts, Reno Trimble, and the president of the youth suicide prevention walk, Vincent Watts.

The group is walking across the country to raise awareness of the growing problem of youth suicide in Canada, but in particular amongst the First Nations communities. They left Nanaimo, BC on March 31 and will arrive in Ottawa on National Aboriginal Day, June 21. I ask all members to welcome these young people and their mentor to our legislature.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — The member may continue, the member for Cumberland.

Hon. Ms. Beatty: — I have a second introduction, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and to the members of the Legislative Assembly our summer student. And she's sitting on the west gallery again. Her name is Lonette Pelletier, and she's from the Cowessess First Nation. Lonette is in her third year at the faculty of administration at the First Nations University, and she will be working with us until the end of August.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all members of this House to join me in showing a warm welcome to Ms. Lonette Pelletier.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Saskatoon Southeast.

Mr. Morgan: — Mr. Speaker, the opposition would like to join with the government in welcoming Officer Bourassa and Mr. Sawatsky to the House today. Mr. Sawatsky, I'm familiar with before; I've had dealings with in the past. And I look forward to the debate and discussion that this Bill and this matter will lead to. It's something of significant concern to all members, and we're looking forward to that and would like to welcome them to the House.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Kelvington-Wadena.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to join with the government in welcoming the youth that are here today with youth suicide prevention. We know it takes a lot of energy and commitment to make the type of effort they have to work across this great country of ours, and we'd like to offer them our best wishes for all their future endeavours.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Members, it is my pleasure to introduce to you several people who are seated in the Speaker's gallery who ordinarily are in all parts of the building but only come into this building when the members are not in here. And I'm referring to the people who are working with our visitor services in this building.

And today we have with us the summer staff who has been recently hired, and some of you may have seen. And I'm going to mention their names and put them on the record. And I would ask if they would give a wave as I bring their names, and here they are: Sonia Millette, Jonathan Epp, Ryan Malley, Jesse Michaud, Salema Forrest, and Justin Bell. They comprise the summer staff. And of course seated behind them with a watchful eye are the seasoned staff: Arnold McKenzie, Theresa Kutarna, Marianne Morgan, and Lorraine deMontigny.

And I would ask members to welcome them all to the chambers here this afternoon.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Carrot River Valley.

National Police Week

Mr. Kerpan: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise in the Assembly today and ask all members of the House to recognize National Police Week, May 9 through May 15 across Canada.

Mr. Speaker, the four objectives governing national police work are helping to reinforce ties within the community, honouring police officers for the public safety and the security they provide, promoting the work police do in our communities, and informing the public about the police's role in keeping our communities safe. Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan is very fortunate to have 2,000 brave and dedicated men and women who 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year, protect and preserve our way of life.

In spite of the NDP (New Democratic Party) government's broken promises to hire more police officers and with an ever-dwindling level of funding and resources, Saskatchewan's police officers continue to go above and beyond the call of duty. They too must be frustrated with our high crime rates. They too must be disappointed in our justice system, yet they continue to persevere. They are our first line of defence in

moments of tragedy or violence and have become to symbolize safety, security, protection, and peace, usually in those times when we have lost all hope and have nowhere else to turn.

Our law enforcers deserve our respect and our recognition, not only for the jobs they do today but for all the work they have done in the past and for all that is yet to come. I ask all members to recognize National Police Week with special thanks to all law enforcers living and working here in Saskatchewan. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(13:45)

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Regina Walsh Acres.

Order of the Eastern Star Donates to Lung Association

Ms. Morin: — Mr. Speaker I recently had the opportunity to attend the grand chapter session of the Order of the Eastern Star here in Regina.

Mr. Speaker, the Order of the Eastern Star has the distinction of being the largest fraternal organization in the world to which both men and women can belong. It also has the distinction of being an organization comprised of generous and caring individuals who are prepared to give of themselves in order to improve the quality of life for those in need.

Saskatchewan chapters of the Order of the Eastern Star provide a variety of scholarship programs supporting music festivals, university academics, and religious studies. They do community service work, taking part in programs like meals on wheels delivering nutritious meals to those who use home care. And, Mr. Speaker, they support charitable organizations, taking on tasks like folding dressings to be used by cancer patients for the Cancer Society.

This year the Order of the Eastern Star's special project was the Lung Association of Saskatchewan. Through the sale of angel pins and other fundraising efforts, members of the order from Saskatchewan were able to raise over \$10,000 to donate to the Lung Association. Mr. Speaker, I ask my colleagues to join me in acknowledging the good work of the Order of the Eastern Star, and in thanking its members for their compassion and generosity. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Saskatoon Silver Springs.

World Lupus Day

Mr. Cheveldayoff: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, today is World Lupus Day 2004. Lupus is a chronic inflammatory disease that can affect any organ or system in the body. It is estimated that more than 50,000 people in Canada suffer from the disease. Lupus affects men, women, and children, but women of childbearing age make up the majority of sufferers.

Right now researchers do not know what causes lupus, but they do know it is not infectious or cancerous. Common symptoms of lupus include joint pain, a red rash across upper cheeks and the bridge of the nose, extreme fatigue, and an unusual reaction to sunlight, chest pain, swelling of legs and feet, and weight gain.

My constituent, Betty Bellamy, brought World Lupus Day to my attention. Betty's journey with lupus is featured in the spring 2004 issue of the *Lupus Canada Bulletin*. Back in 1961 Betty had already suffered ongoing symptoms of the disease for five years, but while pregnant with her son and in hospital with fever, sore throat, and ear infection, her family doctor and hematologist gave the health concern the name lupus. Betty delivered a healthy baby boy and went on to educate herself on the various aspects of the condition. Each phase of life brought different challenges: severe arthritis, experimental medications, hospitalization, and continued antibiotics. Lupus takes many forms, and Betty and so many others with the disease have learned to adapt and look forward to a brighter tomorrow.

I ask all members of this Assembly to recognize May 10 as World Lupus Day 2004, and let us work together to conquer lupus.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Regina Elphinstone-Centre.

Chili for Children

Mr. McCall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Friday night I, the ministers of Finance and Aboriginal Affairs, FSIN (Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations) Chief Alphonse Bird, Vice-chiefs Morley Watson and Guy Lonechild, and many other distinguished guests had the pleasure of attending Chili for Children's gala dinner and art auction at the Centre of the Arts.

Chili for Children is a hot-lunch program that began in north central Regina because of the commitment, motivation, and energy of one remarkable woman, Senator Theresa Stevenson of Cowessess First Nation. Mr. Speaker, 19 years ago Ms. Stevenson mobilized a group of volunteers, businesses, and community groups to feed hungry children in north central Regina. Since then, Chili for Children has been helping children to receive the basic necessities of food, shelter, clothing, and education. Last year the program served more than 42,000 meals.

Mr. Speaker, there is no greater investment that we can make than one we make in our children. It is unfortunate that there continues to be a need for a program like this, Mr. Speaker, but it is also a reflection of the co-operative spirit of Saskatchewan people. Chili for Children is an example of what individuals working together can do to enrich the lives of children and families.

Mr. Speaker, I'm sure my colleagues will join me in acknowledging the hard work of Shelley Lavallee and her staff at Chili for Children, all their volunteers and supporters, and a very special thank you to the founder, FSIN Senator Theresa

Stevenson, for her sincere commitment and dedication to our young people, especially as they come up on their 20th anniversary. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Arm River-Watrous.

Concerns of Wildlife Federation

Mr. Brkich: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to talk about the flood of letters that have arrived in my office this week from the community of Hanley. Members of the Brightwater, Blackstrap wildlife federation expressed their concerns over the loss of 200 employees of the Saskatchewan Environment as a direct result of this new NDP (New Democratic Party) budget. They're rightfully upset that this government obviously does not consider enhancement and protection of the fish and wildlife of Saskatchewan a priority. They go on to say that natural resources create millions of dollars in revenue, but without the people that manage them, what does the future hold?

The Blackstrap federation has over 150 members and is a branch of the Saskatchewan Wildlife Federation. Its membership is over 25,000 in 128 communities across this province — this from a conservation group that is among the largest per capita in the world. This membership is clearly telling this government that environment positions are mandatory, not optional.

Darrell Crabbe, executive director of the Saskatchewan Wildlife Federation, puts everything into perspective when he says:

For this government to . . . contemplate, let alone implement these staff reductions and policy changes, shows their true colours — and it is not green.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Saskatoon Centre.

Great Western Wins Silver at World Beer Cup

Hon. Mr. Forbes: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan's own Great Western Brewing Company has won yet another award at the World Beer Cup. The World Beer Cup is held every two years and is considered the Olympics of beer competitions. This year the World Beer Cup had a record 1,566 entries from almost 400 breweries in 40 countries.

Mr. Speaker, this year Great Western's Brewhouse Pilsner won a silver medal in one of the competition's most prestigious and competitive classes, the American-style lager. This category includes 26 other entries from around the globe. This adds to the silver that was won by Brewhouse Light in 2002 along with bronze medals awarded to the Western Premium Light in both 2000 and 2002. Mr. Speaker, the World Beer Cup is not the only prestigious competition to recognize Great Western. Last year the Monde Selection international beer competition also recognized Great Western with three gold medals.

Mr. Speaker, Great Western is an example of another great company from Saskatchewan that is thriving in the marketplace and showing the world that nobody does it better than the people of Saskatchewan. Mr. Speaker, I ask all the members of this House to recognize the excellence of this homegrown company. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Kindersley.

Lieutenant Governor's Arts Awards

Mr. Dearborn: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It was my privilege on Friday to attend, with the member of Saskatoon Southeast and Her Honour, the Lieutenant Governor, the Lieutenant Governor's Arts Awards presented by the Saskatchewan Arts Board in Saskatoon at Kinsmen Park. Around 300 people turned up for the awards held in a big circus tent, and it was a wonderful gathering. I'd like to recognize some of the winners.

There were four winners in four different categories from many, many nominees. In the innovation in the arts, the winner was Michael Hosaluk a visual artist. In the Leadership Award group the winner was Gary Hyland, a volunteer advocate and artist from Moose Jaw. In the 30-below category, which recognized young artists, Ms. Sheri Benning, a writer, was the recipient. And finally, last but not least, in the Life Time Achievement Award, this very prestigious award went to Mr. John Arcand, master of the Métis fiddle.

And Mr. Arcand was, for all of our pleasure, able to put on a demonstration of his fiddle ability with some traditional Métis dancers, and it was absolutely fabulous. This was a world-class performance, I think, seconded nowhere. And he was very moved to receive the award, and we're glad that this recognition was able to take place.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like all members to join with me in congratulating the winners of the Arts Award and congratulate the artistic community in our great province. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ORAL QUESTIONS

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Cypress Hills.

Internet Phone Scam

Mr. Elhard: — Mr. Speaker, Sherri Hillcoff is a single mother of three from the community of Fillmore and she recently got her April phone bill from SaskTel and was shocked to find nearly \$700 in long-distance charges to São Tomé — that's a small island off the west coast of Africa.

Now Sherri had not made any of these calls so she contacted SaskTel. And as it turns out, she was the victim of an Internet scam. Certain pop-up ads are designed to worm their way into your computer and change your dialer settings so that your computer starts calling Africa and you don't even know about it — at least until your next phone bill arrives.

Mr. Speaker, what is the minister prepared to do about this African-based Internet scam and its attack on SaskTel subscribers?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister Responsible for SaskTel.

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd be pleased to look into this particular situation that the member raises today. We are, in SaskTel I think, fairly diligent I should say on issues like this and try to warn the public in advance, make them aware of circumstances like this. I'm not, I have to say quite frankly, familiar with this particular circumstance, but I'd be pleased to sit down with the member after question period to see what we could do to address the specific issue that he raises here today.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Cypress Hills.

Mr. Elhard: — Now, Mr. Speaker, SaskTel told Sherri that, you know, a lot of people are getting ripped off by this Internet scam based out of the west coast of Africa. And Sherri Hillcoff among others simply can't afford a \$700 phone bill. She's in danger of losing her phone service because she made a . . . she was billed for calls that she didn't make, and because of a scam she knew nothing about.

Now, Mr. Speaker, this scam has been making its rounds for some time now. There was an article about it in *The La Crosse Tribune* on March 25 and another one courtesy of the Canadian Press in the April 14 edition of *The Globe and Mail*. Mr. Speaker, why hasn't the government been warning people about this Internet phone scam?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister Responsible for SaskTel.

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well let me say again, I mean, I'll certainly look into this circumstance that the member raises. We do in circumstances, without trying to panic the public, try to make the public aware of circumstances like this. You don't want people to feel that they will be unnecessarily affected by some of these viruses when there's no reason . . . when you don't know for sure what the impact of some of these viruses might be. Having said that, whenever SaskTel is aware of a circumstance that they think will impact their customers or clientele, they do try to warn them as best they can, Mr. Speaker.

Having said that, the member, I think, should be aware as well that . . . I mean this affects private utility companies or phone companies as well. This is not unique to SaskTel. SaskTel has, I think, a fairly good reputation when it comes to protection of its customer base on issues related to this, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Cypress Hills.

Mr. Elhard: — Mr. Speaker, SaskTel is telling Sherri that she has to pay this \$700 bill for calls to Africa that she never made.

So that means that SaskTel is actually going to make quite a bit of money off of this particular scam. Someone in Africa is also making quite a bit of money off this scam.

Meanwhile, Sherri Hillcoff, a single mother of three, living in Fillmore, is getting ripped right off. Mr. Speaker, is that fair? Is this NDP government going to make Sherri Hillcoff pay SaskTel \$700 for calls to Africa that she never made?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister Responsible for SaskTel.

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Well thank you. There isn't much more that I can say, Mr. Speaker. I am prepared, as I've said in the answer to my first question, to look into this with the member right after question period if he has the time, and I'd be pleased to do that.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Cypress Hills.

Mr. Elhard: — Mr. Speaker, there are fewer people living in the entire country of São Tomé and Príncipe than there are in the city of Regina. Not only that, there are only 4,600 phone lines in the entire country. So when SaskTel customers start racking up hundreds of dollars in long distance charges to São Tomé, you'd think that somebody would have seen a red flag pop up at SaskTel.

Mr. Speaker, Sherri Hillcoff was charged nearly \$700 for calls to Africa that she never made. Now what arrangements does SaskTel have with the phone company in São Tomé? How much of that money would SaskTel keep and how much would be sent to the phone company in Africa?

The Speaker: — I recognize the minister for SaskTel.

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Well again, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I really don't know what I can say in response to the member, other than to say and give him assurance that I will look into this immediately following question period with that member if he would want.

Mr. Speaker, I think there is a suggestion as well though that — in the questioning — I don't want to be too judgmental in this, but it makes me feel as if he's suggesting that SaskTel should be doing some things or isn't doing things that other private telephone companies are not doing now, Mr. Speaker.

Every phone company is affected by circumstances like this, Mr. Speaker. It is my understanding that from the reports that are provided for me that SaskTel probably exceeds the standards that many private phone companies have with respect to circumstances like this. For any of our customers that are affected in an adverse way, we try to rectify those as best we can, Mr. Speaker. And in this particular circumstance I will, I give that member my assurance that I'll look into this particular situation.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(14:00)

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Cypress Hills.

Mr. Elhard: — Mr. Speaker, this isn't a situation that just arose this past weekend or in the last 24 hours. Mr. Speaker, this has been known since the middle of March. It was printed up in the *Globe and Mail*, courtesy of Canadian Press, on April 14th. We've had some time to make customers aware of this situation.

The question, Mr. Speaker, is how ready was SaskTel to warn their customers? They send out warnings via the Internet when there are viruses happening. They send out warnings from time to time on other issues, but not once has this particular issue been made available. A warning has not been made available to customers of SaskTel about this particular scam.

SaskTel customers are being ripped off for hundreds of dollars through this Internet scam based in West Africa. It seems to me that the NDP government should be doing a little bit more to warn people and prevent it from victimizing innocent people.

Mr. Speaker, could the minister please find out how many other SaskTel customers have been caught up in this Internet scam, and how much money has SaskTel made off of these customers? And Mr. Speaker, furthermore, how much money has the phone company in São Tomé made off Saskatchewan's SaskTel customers?

The Speaker: — I recognize the minister for SaskTel.

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well because there was . . . It's a very specific question, Mr. Speaker. I've just been handed some information, and the information that has been provided to me, Mr. Speaker, says that SaskTel has been aware of this for a period of time that the member opposite indicates — for the past month or so — and is sending out in its bills warnings to its customer base and is prepared to work with any of its customers who have been adversely affected by this particular virus, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Last Mountain-Touchwood.

Echo Valley Conference Centre

Mr. Hart: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my question is to the Minister Responsible for the Saskatchewan Property Management Corporation. Mr. Speaker, our caucus has received a letter from many stakeholders in the Fort Qu'Appelle area asking for support in lobbying this NDP government to put a two-year freeze on the closure of the Echo Valley Conference Centre, while a long-term viable solution can be found for that centre, Mr. Speaker.

Will the minister listen to the pleas of the community leaders by putting the NDP's plan to shut down the Echo Valley Conference Centre on hold for two years?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister Responsible for SPMC (Saskatchewan Property Management Corporation).

Hon. Ms. Higgins: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased that at the end of last week I had an opportunity to meet with the community from Fort Qu'Appelle and the surrounding hamlets that are all affected by the announced closure of the Echo Valley Conference Centre.

Mr. Speaker, the mandate of Saskatchewan Property Management is to provide service and supply to government departments. And the more effectively that we can do this, the more resources that government departments have to deliver services to the people of Saskatchewan. Mr. Speaker, we stand by that mandate and we believe that is our role that we play within government, and we will continue to do so.

And, Mr. Speaker, over the last number of years we have come to the conclusion with this budget, that SPMC can no longer subsidize the Echo Valley Conference Centre.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Last Mountain-Touchwood.

Mr. Hart: — Mr. Speaker, during last fall's election the Premier visited Fort Qu'Appelle and he made a number of promises which have since been broken. But at that . . . one thing the Premier didn't mention at that time was the NDP's secret plan to shut down the Echo Valley Conference Centre.

Mr. Speaker, the mayors of Fort Qu'Appelle, Fort San and B-Say-Tah, along with representatives from SGEU (Saskatchewan Government and General Employees' Union), the SFL (Saskatchewan Federation of Labour), the Fort Qu'Appelle Chamber of Commerce, and youth leaders in the community, have written to the minister expressing disappointment that, and I quote:

. . . at no time did this government ever consult with or ask the local community for input or co-operation.

Mr. Speaker, will the minister set aside the NDP's plan to shut down the Echo Valley Conference Centre and work with the people of Fort Qu'Appelle to find a solution?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister Responsible for SPMC.

Hon. Ms. Higgins: — Mr. Speaker, we had a very good conversation with the community representatives last week over the Echo Valley Conference Centre. And, Mr. Speaker, that was one of the reasons that the closure was announced during the budget. And it won't be closed, the facility will remain operating until into the fall. And that gives the community six months, and parties that are interested, to work on plans if they feel this is a viable centre. Then by all means — I've encouraged the community — please come forward with a proposal and we would be more than happy to work with them.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Last Mountain-Touchwood.

Mr. Hart: — Mr. Speaker, the community leaders have indicated that six months is not long enough to develop a viable plan for that centre. And further, they've asked the minister for detailed budgets regarding the operation of this centre, Mr. Speaker. And they've asked us to ask the minister, on their behalf, for the minister to provide those detailed budgets so that they can incorporate them in their plans, Mr. Speaker.

Also, Mr. Speaker, they put forward a very sensible solution. They're saying that at the end of two years if they can't find a viable plan for that centre, Mr. Speaker, they will work with the government to shut it down. So once again to that minister, Mr. Speaker, will she give the community two years to find a viable plan for that centre?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister Responsible for SPMC.

Hon. Ms. Higgins: — Mr. Speaker, I will repeat again for the members opposite that SPMC's primary objective and mandate is to provide supply and service to government departments. The better we can supply these services to government departments, the more resources that every government department have to deliver important services to Saskatchewan citizens. Mr. Speaker, that's our mandate.

The Echo Valley Conference Centre has been operated by SPMC for just over 10 years. There has been some ups and downs with the usage of the place, but the fact is that it is at one-third of capacity. We had a very good meeting with members of the community from Fort Qu'Appelle and surrounding hamlets, and, Mr. Speaker, we have six months before the closure is expected to take place after the . . . or into the fall. And, Mr. Speaker, I would again encourage the community that if you have a proposal, please come forward.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Kindersley.

Funding for Youth Employment and Firefighting in the North

Mr. Dearborn: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Minister of Culture, Youth and Recreation. As the MLA (Member of the Legislative Assembly) for the northern constituency of Cumberland, this minister is supporting an NDP government that is abandoned her own constituents by deciding they'll allow most northern forest fires to burn out of control this summer. And she's also supporting an NDP budget that eliminates funding to regional parks for the centennial student employment program. Mr. Speaker, that means that at least 70 young people will not get a summer job this year in a regional park.

It's bad enough the member for Cumberland is abandoning her own constituents to support the NDP's devastating budget, but why is this minister responsible for youth also abandoning young people by hacking regional park funding for youth employment?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of the Environment.

Hon. Mr. Forbes: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the question about regional parks. It's a really important part of how we celebrate summer.

Regional parks will be receiving some funding from Environment, from our department. I understand that that program itself has been wound down and that's unfortunate, but we've started such initiatives in co-operation with Culture, Youth and Recreation such as the Green Team and it's a very important part of our platform, and we're delivering on that promise and we're happy to do that. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Kindersley.

Mr. Dearborn: — This is a typical of the NDP government, saying one thing and doing something else, Mr. Speaker. They're saying the youth is our future. They're saying they're youth friendly and where is the proof in the pudding, they're cutting 70 jobs.

And we haven't heard from the minister today about why they're cutting jobs, a minister that's backing a budget which is cutting forest firefighting in our own constituency. And will she tell the Premier that she won't support the budget that attacks young people by hacking funding for youth employment?

Mr. Speaker, that question to the Minister of Culture, Youth and Recreation: why are these jobs being cut? And how is that helping grow the future of this province? And does it support the campaign promises made by this government?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of the Environment.

Hon. Mr. Forbes: — Mr. Speaker, I take particular offence about the rumours and the fear that is being spread by the Sask Party about the forest fires in the North. That's completely outrageous. We have not cut back in people working on the forest fires. This is really important. Our budget in fact has gone up. We have a new strategy about how to fight forest fires up in the North. That's a very important thing.

And we do value the input of the young people in this province. And so I know that we have a youth advisory committee that works with us to tell us what we should be doing, and I'm really proud, Mr. Speaker, of the good work around the Green Team. And this is a very important start to what we are doing for youth here in Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Kindersley.

Mr. Dearborn: — Mr. Speaker, the people of Saskatchewan don't find this rumour, that's why I have a letter that I'm prepared to table. There will be 70 fewer jobs this summer.

Mr. Speaker, further to that, we have a Minister of the

Environment that has a great idea on campfire taxes for three bucks, but he's going to let them burn out of control in the North.

And Mr. Speaker, this issue is about the credibility of this government. Mr. Speaker, they promised a new direction for youth, and what do they do? They go forward and they cut 70 jobs. They say one thing; they do something else.

Mr. Speaker, again, to the Minister of Culture, Youth and Recreation: when is she going to stand up and take responsibility for these jobs being cut from young people in Saskatchewan?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of the Environment.

Hon. Mr. Forbes: — Well I find it very ironic today, Mr. Speaker, that we're talking about the 70 jobs, and they don't talk about the Green Team or the 6,000 jobs that were raised on . . . that we found out about on Friday — the 6,000 new jobs — some incredibly good news.

And so right away on Monday morning these folks have to get negative about the good things that are happening in this province — 6,000 jobs, 6,000 jobs. And here we are; we're talking about this. No mention of the Green Team. I think this is pretty sad on their part, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Saskatoon Silver Springs.

Funding for Post-Secondary Education

Mr. Cheveldayoff: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, another day, another cut to post-secondary education in Saskatchewan. On Friday the University of Saskatchewan had to raise tuition fees by an average of 5 per cent, and it had to announce a number of cuts to a number of colleges. According to U of S (University of Saskatchewan) president, Peter MacKinnon, the institution's hands were tied. The NDP's latest budget failed to provide an operating grant increase that even matched the rate of inflation.

As MacKinnon says, and I quote:

The 1.52 per cent increase in our operating grant from the provincial government . . . fell short of the required 6.7 per cent increase needed to meet our basic financial obligations without incurring a deficit . . .

To the minister: how can he square his commitments to our young people and our universities, all the while forcing the U of S to hike tuitions and cut programs?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Learning.

Hon. Mr. Thomson: — Mr. Speaker, I want to reiterate this government's commitment that has provided 5.778 million more — 5.7 million more — to the University of Saskatchewan.

And yes, I hear the former leader of the opposition say, not enough. And that is what we hear from that party all the time, not enough — not enough funding for education, not enough funding for health care, too much in terms of tax increases, and no consistent plan to move forward.

Mr. Speaker, it is my view — and I have communicated this to the president of the university — that they need to bring their costs in line, that a 7 per cent inflation rate in the universities is too high, and that we need to find a way to move the universities into an affordability model.

The government is committed to providing new money, as we have this year — nearly 6 million more to that institution alone — and we stand by that commitment.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Saskatoon Silver Springs.

Mr. Cheveldayoff: — Mr. Speaker, it amazes me how this minister can stand in this House and slough off the concerns of students across Saskatchewan and slough off the concerns of the presidents that represent those students at the universities.

Although the University of Saskatchewan's tuition hike brings tuition rates in line with other universities, the tuition rates are still going up, some colleges by as much as 19 per cent. If Saskatchewan universities have the ability to offer tuition rates below the national norm, just think of what an extra competitive edge that would give us.

Mr. Speaker, tuition hikes are also act as a barrier for students of low- and middle-income families. And it's this NDP government that they can thank for failing to provide the U of S with funding to meet its very basic needs.

To the minister: how is 1.52 per cent increase good for low- and middle-income students who want to pursue their education here in the province of Saskatchewan?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Learning.

Hon. Mr. Thomson: — Mr. Speaker, the college, the University of Saskatchewan has put into place a tuition policy which will see its tuition rise towards what is the national average. This is a policy which has been debated over many years on that campus, has been agreed to by the student body, has been agreed to by the university senate, has been agreed to by the board of governors. This is the policy they are pursuing.

As a result of that policy, this year we will see about three-quarters of the student population see an increase in tuition of 2 per cent or less. The member is right that in high-cost colleges there will be an increase in tuition as the university has set forward, but that is on the tuition basis that they have opted for. If the member opposite seeks some different arrangement, he should talk to the president of the university.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(14:15)

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Saskatoon Silver Springs.

Mr. Cheveldayoff: — Mr. Speaker, I do talk to the president of the university, and obviously a lot more often than the minister of Education does. I'll remind the minister of the president's words. He says his hands are tied, he had no choice, 19 per cent increase for the College of Commerce.

In addition to hiking tuition fees, the University of Saskatchewan was also forced to cut the number of colleges on campus. Again, because the NDP government remains uncommitted to providing stable funding to the University of Saskatchewan. Mr. Speaker, the Colleges of Agriculture, Nursing, Pharmacy, Nutrition will now see their budgets cut by 10 per cent. At a time when we need more nurses in this province, the NDP is forcing cuts to the College of Nursing.

The extension division, the university initiative that brings the university to the people, had its budget cut by 40 per cent.

How can this NDP government claim to be committed to the success of public universities as drivers of the economy, while forcing cuts to colleges that are so vital to our economy?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Learning.

Hon. Mr. Thomson: — Well the member opposite continues to spew forward a bunch of bafflelegab that has nothing to do with what the university's decision-making process is. The president of the university has presented a plan, a multi-year plan, to move forward in terms of transforming that university into what he believes will be a pre-eminent international institution. That is the direction that university has chosen to pursue.

The University of Regina, on the other hand, has chosen to pursue a path which will focus more on community-based initiatives. Those are two different approaches to moving these universities forward. Both will provide us with national pre-eminent universities.

We need to decide in this legislature whether we are setting the agendas for the universities or whether they are. And that is a fundamental question that the member opposite needs to address with the university president. President MacKinnon has identified a path, they've identified a plan, it has gone through their approval process and it's the way that they are going to move forward.

It is worth noting that there is no impact on the number of seats available in the College of Nursing. It is worth noting that more than 70 per cent of students will see no more than 2 per cent increase, and it's worth noting that this government is providing almost \$6 million more in operating support for that university. I would appreciate the member opposite recognizing that.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Saskatoon Silver Springs.

Mr. Cheveldayoff: — Mr. Speaker, it's worth noting for the minister opposite that students in Saskatchewan in the College of Commerce are going to be paying 19 per cent more in tuition fees. If that sits well with him, fine. It doesn't sit well with me.

The president said his hands are tied. What part of this doesn't the minister understand? This is not the president's first choice. He doesn't want to do this, but he has to do this.

Mr. Speaker, in the last election campaign the Premier told the youth of this province that he was committed to them. Well, today we see how hollow the Premier's words are ringing. The NDP can talk all it wants about commitments to youth, but its actions speak louder than words.

The NDP has cut funding to the centennial student employment program, and with that funding goes 70 jobs for young people. The NDP are closing down the Echo Valley convention centre, a focus point for cadets and other young people in the Fort Qu'Appelle community. And finally, the NDP is forcing universities to hike tuition rates — a move that throws up barriers to low- and middle-income students.

Mr. Speaker, to the minister: why should Saskatchewan youth believe anything this NDP government or this NDP minister has to say?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Learning.

Hon. Mr. Thomson: — Well, Mr. Speaker, the member opposite spews forward a bunch of partisan rhetoric in terms of the approach that he sees, with no solution whatsoever in terms of where the money comes from.

I would remind that member and I would remind the citizens of Saskatchewan, that the Canadian Association of University Teachers has demonstrated that Saskatchewan has provided the single largest increase on a per pupil basis to post-secondary institutions.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Thomson: — A 12 per cent increase larger than any other province during the last decade. Well the member opposite argues that this is over 10 years. It is, and it shows a consistent . . . pattern that this government has consistently increased funding while other provinces have consistently not done so.

It is time . . .

The Speaker: — Order, please. Order, please. Order, please. Order, please. Member, allow the response to be fully given. The member for . . . Minister for Learning.

Hon. Mr. Thomson: — Mr. Speaker, this government has provided a sizeable increase over the last many years that we have been in office to our post-secondary institutions. We have done so to support a broad range of programs, we have done so to support affordable education, and we have done so respecting the autonomy of the universities to decide where that money is spent.

Mr. Speaker, this government, this New Democratic Party, remains committed to youth and committed to post-secondary education, and I would encourage the member opposite to join us in that support.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

The Speaker: — Order, please. I recognize the minister responsible for Highways and Transportation.

Aboriginal Employment Development Program Partnership

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to advise my colleagues in the legislature that our government signed its 54th Aboriginal Employment Development Program partnership this past Friday afternoon in Humboldt. Our partners in this signing are the Carlton Regional College and the Saskatchewan Government and General Employees' Union local 4039-1.

This partnership agreement will have a significant impact on Aboriginal participation in the workforce. It means, Mr. Speaker, another education institution and union local are on board to welcome Aboriginal people to our new workplace and education opportunities into the future.

Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to a representative workforce, one where Aboriginal people are included at all occupational levels in proportion to their population. It is through partnerships such as this one that we can build a representative workforce.

The Aboriginal Employment Development Program will work with its new partners to remove workplace barriers and to share information about skills training and job opportunities. Mr. Speaker, the Government of Saskatchewan is guided by a vision to make Saskatchewan ready for the next generation — the young people of today.

Young Aboriginal people are one of the province's greatest resources and statistics show that young Aboriginal people are the fastest growing segment of our population.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — We face a challenge to ensure that these young people are part of our economy and a part of our society, Mr. Speaker. We need to make that challenge and turn it into an opportunity. Young Aboriginal people are tomorrow's workers, professionals, and business and community leaders. Mr. Speaker, our government believes that Saskatchewan has a very bright future because our future is tied to the future of Aboriginal people.

We are therefore dedicated to finding success in integrating Aboriginal people on their own terms in this province's social, economic, and employment structures to achieve prosperity for everyone in Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, our efforts through this employment development

program are seeing success. We have signed partnerships across the province with large public and private sector employers, organized labour, government departments, Aboriginal organizations, post-secondary institutions, and community-based organizations.

Through these partnerships we have been able to employ more than 1,700 Aboriginal people; 900 Aboriginal people have completed training directly linked to employment with other partners, and more than 7,000, Mr. Speaker, 7,000 employees have received cultural awareness education that will assist in preparing the workplace. Mr. Speaker, with this new partnership those numbers will continue to increase and we will be that much closer to achieving our goal of a representative workplace.

This partnership will help in a significant way towards achieving meaningful change in the lives of Aboriginal people. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Kelvington-Wadena.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank the minister for sending a copy of his statement over earlier. And I'd also like to congratulate him on the partnership that's so important in building our province.

The Aboriginal Employment Development Program is an initiative that we support in principle. In fact, we fully support it. This representative workforce strategy is one where the Aboriginal workers are represented at all occupational levels, whether it's the entry level, the middle level, or the senior management. Mr. Speaker, building business partnerships and integrating Aboriginal people into the workforce and creating an equal playing field is important to all of us in this province.

One of the primary components of the strategy is to develop partnerships between employers — both public and private — and the Government of Saskatchewan. Of the 54 agreements that have been signed so far, one of the concerns that we have is that there's only four businesses and one chamber of commerce that have actually . . . a part of these partnership agreements. And we look forward to the day when that actually is a much larger component of the number.

There have been over 1,700 people hired through the partnerships and we do congratulate those people as well as the partners who have provided work-based training.

Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan is in a unique position in our history. We have a baby boom that's coming in a short while, and one of the few provinces that actually can look forward to having young people that are available to fill some of the very many jobs that are needed. We're looking for skilled workers and we have a number of young people who have a desire for the skills that will allow them to have a bright and prosperous future.

Saskatchewan really does have a lot of opportunities in all areas of life, in the work in natural resources, and human resources,

and the goods and services industries. We need the energy and the commitment of not only experienced workers, but of the young people that are going to be part of the workforce. The business and government have to tap into all of our potential.

Our Aboriginal population is part of our hope for the future. In fact it is a large part of our hope for the future. Saskatchewan will grow and begin to succeed when all of our people become engaged in the vision of building a better tomorrow for all of our children. The Aboriginal fathers and mothers that I have talked to have the same goals for themselves and for their children as I have for my children.

The program that was signed on Friday is a signal that we need partnerships between Aboriginal people, government, educational facilities, and the workforce. The program is important. It's a very important first step in building a fully functional working relationship and a workplace for all.

I look forward to the day when this work happens so naturally that we really don't have to sign any agreements and a representative workforce will be a fact of life in Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 14 — The Highway Traffic Amendment Act, 2004

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — I stand, Mr. Speaker . . .

The Speaker: — Stand no. 1.

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — . . . to move Bill No. 14, The Highway Traffic Amendment Act, 2004 be now introduced and read for the first time.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — The minister has withdrawn the stand, and it has been moved by the Minister of Highways and Transportation that Bill No. 14, The Highway Traffic Amendment Act, 2004 be now introduced and read for the first time.

Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — The motion is carried.

Deputy Clerk: — First reading of this Bill.

The Speaker: — When shall the Bill be read a second time?

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Next sitting of the House, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: — Next sitting.

Motion agreed to, the Bill read a first time and ordered to be read a second time at the next sitting.

STATEMENT BY THE SPEAKER

Remark Out of Order

The Speaker: — Order, please. Members of the Assembly, before orders of the day, I had another opportunity to review *Hansard* and I wish to comment on a remark . . . regarding a remark made by the member for Saskatoon Nutana in *Hansard*, May 6, page 945, which she made in the course of her ministerial statement.

Members, I want to preface it by saying that freedom of speech is considered fundamentally necessary under our democratic system. This privilege exists to allow members to perform legitimate functions in the legislature. This privilege also confers a grave responsibility to those who are protected by it.

Members must bear in mind the possible effects of certain statements. It is not a legitimate function for members in debate to question directly or indirectly the integrity or motives of members individually or collectively.

The member for Saskatoon Nutana, on page 945, spoke generally of people on the opposite side acting in a dishonourable fashion. That remark was out of order. I request such allegations not be repeated.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

WRITTEN QUESTIONS

The Speaker: — I recognize the Government Whip.

Mr. Yates: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm extremely pleased today to stand on behalf of the government and table responses to written questions no. 272 through 274 inclusive.

The Speaker: — Responses to questions 272, 273, 274 have been submitted.

(14:30)

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

SECOND READINGS

Bill No. 43 — The Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Justice.

Hon. Mr. Quennell: — Mr. Speaker, I rise today to move second reading of The Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act. Mr. Speaker, I am pleased today to introduce legislation which seeks to invest in one of our most valuable commodities — the neighbourhoods and communities in which we live and work.

The purpose of this Bill is to provide for additional powers for police and justice agencies in their efforts to foster safer communities and neighbourhoods in Saskatchewan. The Bill does this in co-operation with our police services and

municipalities by establishing new civil procedures to address problem residents and businesses in our neighbourhoods separate and apart from existing criminal law and municipal bylaw options.

Mr. Speaker, this Bill, which draws from similar successful legislation in the province of Manitoba, seeks to hold property owners accountable for threatening or disturbing activities that are regularly taking place on their property. The Bill will improve community safety by targeting and if necessary shutting down these residential and commercial buildings and land that are habitually being used for a list of specified activities including producing, selling, or using illegal drugs; prostitution; child sexual abuse; solvent abuse; or the unlawful sale and consumption of alcohol.

Mr. Speaker, this Bill authorizes the minister to appoint a director of community operations in the Department of Justice who will be empowered to investigate complaints from the public that these type of activities are regularly taking place on a particular piece of property in the complainant's neighbourhood.

Under the Bill this process is commenced when one or more residents in the neighbourhood make a confidential complaint to the director of community operations. This complaint is kept entirely confidential and the identity of those who file a complaint cannot be revealed at any time.

Once in receipt of the complaint, the director conducts an investigation to determine the validity of the complaint and to compile the evidence necessary to prove that the unlawful activities are occurring.

Having completed the investigation, the director then has discretion under the Bill to take steps to address the problem, including resolving the matter informally, dismissing the complaint as unfounded, or seeking a community safety order from the Court of Queen's Bench.

A community safety order under this Bill when granted would include such provisions that the court deems necessary to bring an end to the illegal activities and ensure public safety, including enjoining all persons from causing or contributing to the unlawful activities, requiring the owner to do everything reasonably possible to prevent those activities, requiring the property to be temporarily vacated, terminating any tenancies or leases of occupants with respect to that property, and if necessary closing the property entirely from any use or occupation for a period of up to 90 days.

Where an owner tenant or residential tenant is affected by such an order, they have a right to apply to the court to vary the order, based on their particular circumstances, as long as they have not been participating in creating the problem. The owner of the property will also have the right to appeal any order of the court to the Court of Appeal on a point of law.

Where the court has directed the closure of a property in a community safety order, the director may take any measures necessary to safely and effectively close the property including attaching locks, hoarding, or other security devices, all at the cost of the owner.

Mr. Speaker, this legislation is intended to provide a framework by which communities themselves may identify and take steps to address residences or businesses that are being used to undermine the safety of our communities and neighbourhoods. This Bill enables citizens to take back their communities.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Quennell: — While the Bill does contain considerable legal authority for the courts to order and enforce measures under the Act, the ability of the director to conduct dispute resolution is particularly important as it has led to voluntary resolution of the vast majority of cases in Manitoba.

Mr. Speaker, all members of this Assembly are aware that on any block in any neighbourhood, just one house that is harbouring these types of unlawful activities can undermine the safety and well-being of all members of that community and drive down the value of properties throughout the neighbourhood. By partnering with community members, police services, and our municipalities, this Bill will provide new tools to address these chronic problem houses and allow our communities the peace of mind necessary to improve themselves and to flourish.

Part II of this new legislation addresses fortified buildings. Under this part, where an investigation by the office of the director has identified a residential or commercial building which has been fortified to an extent well beyond that which is normal or appropriate for that type of residence or business, the director may designate that building as a threat to public safety and issue a removal order specifying the fortifications that must be removed from the building within a certain period of time. Failure to comply with that removal order will result in a closure order entitling the director to vacate the premises and to take any steps necessary to remove the fortifications and make that property safe, at the cost of the owner or occupant.

In seeking to determine whether a building constitutes a threat to public safety, the director is required to consider the number and type of fortifications in the building; whether the fortifications would significantly impair the ability of emergency response or law enforcement officials to gain access to that building; whether the fortifications would impair the ability of people inside the building to escape; the nature of the neighbourhood or area in which the building is located, and the proximity of the building to schools and playgrounds; and whether the fortifications are reasonably necessary given the purpose for which the building is used.

Under the Act the director is not permitted to designate any fortified building as a threat to public safety if it is simply fortified in a manner that is normal for that type of business or residential dwelling.

Mr. Speaker, clearly the purpose of these provisions is to target residences or businesses that are turned into fortresses to facilitate illegal gang activity or to intimidate other members of the community.

While our police services advise us that such gang fortresses are fortunately not common in Saskatchewan, these provisions are recognized as an important aspect of creating a hostile

environment for organized crime before it does become a larger problem.

Mr. Speaker, this legislation will build on the solid foundation established by our community activists and our police services by providing a clear legal framework to address problem properties and by establishing a new investigation capacity within the Department of Justice.

Mr. Speaker, our police services have advised us that in our larger cities there are often single residences that account for a disproportionately large number of police calls in any one neighbourhood. These houses, most often owned by persons not living in those residences, must not be permitted to burden our communities.

With this initiative this government is making a commitment to working with our communities and our police services to make it clear to owners and occupants that such activities will not be tolerated in Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, I invite all members of this Assembly to join with the government in supporting passage of this important new legislation to promote vibrant, healthy Saskatchewan communities.

Mr. Speaker, I move second reading of An Act respecting Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods and to make a consequential amendment.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — It has been moved by the Minister of Justice that Bill No. 43, The Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act be now read a second time. Is the Assembly ready for the question?

I recognize the member for Melfort.

Mr. Gantfoer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to rise this afternoon and to speak briefly on the legislation that was introduced by the minister today regarding safer communities and neighbourhoods Act.

Mr. Speaker, the official opposition certainly supports and encourages and congratulates initiatives that will make our communities, our neighbourhoods safer places and make sure that we do not send contrary messages that activities that are illegal, such as drug activities, prostitution, and youth crime and things of this nature are somehow tolerated in any way at all. And so for that point of view that this legislation embodies, we certainly support and congratulate these initiatives.

Mr. Speaker, I think it's pretty obvious that this is a relatively new direction for Justice departments across Canada. The minister alluded to the fact that the only jurisdiction in Canada that has legislation similar to this is Manitoba, on which this legislation, I believe, was modelled and where some insights and previous recommendations have been acquired from Manitoba.

And so I think that, you know, I'm sure that police services across Canada have been frustrated in some of the restraints that

they've had in destabilizing these types of physical locations and properties in our communities. And the legislation that would be available currently under the Rentalsman or things of this nature are probably pretty woefully inadequate with dealing with circumstances that are a real determined effort to make sure that crime and illegal activities are being generated from a particular property. And so I think, Mr. Speaker, that it's important that this legislation be considered in this House.

I note as well that the department embodies in this legislation the creation of a new position in the director of community operations, where citizens can go to this office and lodge concerns or complaints, either publicly or anonymously, about suspicions of illegal activity in a particular location.

And I think it's important that this be available in a way somewhat like Crime Stoppers, that this empowers then people without necessarily identifying themselves to raise complaints. But it also then embodies a responsibility that these complaints are not frivolous and unfounded, and that they are potentially kinds of things that, you know, do not . . . are not envisaged in this legislation and end up being inter-neighbourhood or community individuals' rivalries or whatever, that then could end up with being a serious situation triggered by these kinds of complaints.

And I note that under section 19 there is the provision for frivolous and vexatious complaints. But it really is something then that says you can appeal to the court in order to get redress and the court can levy fines or penalties for someone that does this. And so I think it's important to state that we have to make sure that innocent activities that may be suspicious to neighbours aren't also somehow targeted inadvertently in this kind of legislation, and that it really is specifically geared towards those activities that are plainly envisaged in this legislation.

The other thing that I think it's important that the minister stated and is in the legislation, that there is sort of a hierarchy of procedures. And one of the first things that is done is that if the director of community operations finds enough grounds to be concerned, that they consult with the landowner, the property owner, and to see if jointly there can be measures taken that will remedy the situation without it going to the higher level of activities that occur and the more onerous level of activities.

And I think it's important that it should be stated that I can't imagine a property owner who would deliberately rent their property to someone that he knows is going to be involved in illegal activities. I don't think that that is the case. You don't sort of have stamped on your forehead that you are intending to do some illegal activities when you try to rent a property. And so I think it's important that the property owners are brought into this exercise as well, in a way that protects them from getting caught outside of the loop and, rather, I think it's important that they're part of it.

Mr. Speaker, in section 31 it outlines the authority of the director of community operations and it says, among other things, that they can collect information from any source. And I wonder if that involves working with the police force and existing law enforcement agencies or if there actually is the ability of the director to hire special investigators and things of

that nature. And I think that it's important to know and to understand what some of these clauses mean.

The second component of this legislation, as the minister mentioned, is to potentially prevent buildings from becoming fortresses for illegal activity and to make it almost impossible for the law enforcement agencies to gain access to those properties in a timely manner in the conduct of their investigations. And I think, as well, that that is also an important signal to send to the people of the province.

A concern, I think, across the province is the seeming rise, at least for we civilians, of the incidence of gang activity. And that might be youth gangs that are in many locations across the country or, indeed, biker gangs like the Hells Angels who raise grave concerns that are spreading quite widely across the country, and in some jurisdictions seem to be much more problematic than in our jurisdiction.

So I would certainly also encourage the department to make sure, if they're thinking of these kinds of activities, that they consult certainly with Manitoba that has this information available. But maybe specifically about this fortification of properties, there would be some value in consulting broader than just Manitoba into those jurisdictions that have particular high incidence of gang activity in their communities, and probably more experience with the direct results of the fortification issue than perhaps maybe Manitoba does or Saskatchewan does.

Mr. Speaker, I think it's important that we do everything we can to destabilize illegal activity. I think this legislation may well be a significant step in that direction. However, as I've outlined, there are certainly some issues that we certainly want to have some opportunity to consult with people in this province in regard to the property rights and things of that nature, and also to consult with other jurisdictions to see if this legislation goes as far as it needs to and is an appropriately . . . balance between the rights of the individuals and the need to have, as the minister said, the opportunity for neighbourhoods to take back their communities. We think that that's an admirable goal.

But in order to make sure that this legislation lives up to that challenge, we would propose that we adjourn debate at this time.

The Speaker: — It has been moved by the member for Melfort that the debate on second reading of Bill No. 43 be now adjourned. Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — Motion's carried.

Debate adjourned.

(14:45)

Bill No. 47 — The Pension Benefits Amendment Act, 2004

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Justice.

Hon. Mr. Quennell: — Mr. Speaker, I rise today to move second reading of The Pension Benefits Amendment Act, 2004.

Mr. Speaker, The Pension Benefits Act, 1992 governs employer-sponsored pension plans established in respect of Saskatchewan employees. It does not apply to employees engaged in work that is subject to federal jurisdiction nor does it apply to members of certain provincial government or Crown corporation pension plans.

Pension plans are subject to standards legislation designed to enhance the security of pensions and to promote a fair treatment of members and their spouses. The Pension Benefits Act, 1992 is administered by the superintendent of pensions and the pensions division of Saskatchewan Financial Services Commission.

Mr. Speaker, the environment in which pension plans operate is constantly evolving. In order to facilitate an efficient and effective marketplace, the regulatory framework must keep pace with these changes. The amendments in this Bill are part of this government's ongoing commitment to ensure that Saskatchewan's pension legislation remains up to date and effective in this changing marketplace. The Bill is also designed to harmonize Saskatchewan's pension legislation to the greatest extent possible with that of other Canadian jurisdictions.

The amendments to the Act are designed to increase flexibility for employers and employees. Enhanced protection of Saskatchewan pension plan members reflect changes that have been made in the pension benefits legislation in other jurisdictions.

Currently the Act does not accommodate flexible pension plans. In general terms, a flexible pension plan is a defined benefit plan with an added feature. Members are permitted to make optional additional contributions to be used to purchase enhanced pension benefits at retirement.

Mr. Speaker, the amendments will enable, but not require, employers and unions to develop flexible pension plans. In particular, the amendments will introduce new rules regarding flexible pension plans including: exempting the optional additional contributions and benefits from the 50 per cent employer cost rule and the locking-in provisions of the Act; requiring that interest be paid on optional additional contributions; requiring optional additional contributions to be forfeited if a member's accumulated contributions exceed the amount that can be converted to optional ancillary benefits in order to comply with Income Tax Act; and requiring a flexible pension plan to specify the method to be used for the conversion of optional additional contributions to optional additional benefits. Flexible pension plan provisions have been introduced in Quebec, British Columbia, Alberta, New Brunswick, and Nova Scotia.

Mr. Speaker, today's Bill also provides for changes in the area of pre-retirement death benefits. The existing legislation sets out minimum standards for death benefits. Currently, if a member dies before retirement, the surviving spouse is entitled to receive a pre-retirement death benefit that's equal to the value of the member's pension. However at the present time this rule only applies with respect to service on and after

January 1, 1994. The amendments will modify the application of this rule so that it applies to all years of service.

This amendment will increase the death benefit paid to some surviving spouses and simplify administration of this provision for pension plans. Consultation with the pension industry indicate that the costs of providing an increased death benefit to the surviving spouse would not have a material financial impact on pension plans. Many plans already do so.

Mr. Speaker, the existing legislation provides that a surviving spouse may elect to transfer the pre-retirement death benefit to a prescribed retirement savings plan or to purchase an immediate or deferred life annuity. The amendments will also provide the surviving spouse with the additional option of receiving the pre-retirement death benefit as a lump sum cash payment.

In addition, the amendments will permit a spouse to waive entitlement to a pre-retirement death benefit. This may be desirable for estate planning purposes or in the breakdown of a spousal relationship. The amendments to these provisions are consistent with the approach taken in other jurisdictions.

Mr. Speaker, this Bill will also enable regulations to be made to raise the threshold for unlocking small pensions. Currently, the legislation provides the pension plan may provide for a cash payment to be made to a person entitled to receive a pension where the value of the pension does not exceed 4 per cent of the year's maximum pensionable earnings. The year's maximum pensionable earnings is a figure determined under the Canada Pension Plan on an annual basis. For 2004, the small benefit limit is \$1,620.

Saskatchewan's small benefit rule is substantially lower than a number of other Canadian jurisdictions. As well, many financial institutions will now provide an annuity based on the existing small benefit limit. The amendments will allow this threshold to be increased. The standard that is emerging across Canada would see the threshold increased to 20 per cent of the year's maximum pensionable earnings or about \$8,100 for 2004.

Further amendments include allowing exceptions to the locking-in provisions to be set out in the regulations and exempting additional voluntary contributions from enforcement proceedings by creditors. This last amendment will extend the protection currently provided to locked-in pension money and other forms of retirement savings to additional voluntary contributions in a pension plan.

Mr. Speaker, in reviewing this legislation, we have consulted with the pension industry in Saskatchewan, including plan administrators, employers, unions, actuaries, and pension consultants. I appreciate the time, effort, and co-operation these groups have contributed to the development of this Bill.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to move second reading of An Act to amend The Pension Benefits Act, 1992.

The Speaker: — It has been moved by the Minister of Justice that Bill No. 47, The Pension Benefits Amendment Act, 2004 be now read a second time. Is the Assembly ready for the question?

I recognize the member for Humboldt.

Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to stand before the House today to speak to Bill No. 47, the Act to amend the pension benefit Act.

After listening very carefully to the minister it appears as if this particular piece of legislation is much housekeeping in nature. He said that the changes that are in there are to address the changing marketplace. I noticed in quickly reading though it that there are a number of changes to definitions to make them more transparent, and there's also a number of changes to different terms that are used from the original Act.

However, there are two new sections; there's section 25.1 as well as section 33 that are new. The first lays out terms for how optional voluntary pensions can be paid out. The second is the addition of options for how spouse's benefits are paid out if deceased spouse of a member of the plan. So these are two options that I think should be examined more closely to make sure that they are for the benefit of the insured person. So with that, Mr. Speaker, I would like to adjourn debate.

The Speaker: — It has been moved by the member for Humboldt that the debate on second reading of Bill No. 47 be now adjourned. Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — Motion is carried.

Debate adjourned.

Bill No. 48 — The Vehicle Administration Amendment Act, 2004

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister Responsible for Saskatchewan Government Insurance.

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to move second reading of The Vehicle Administration Act, 2004. The Vehicle Administration Act, administered by Saskatchewan Government Insurance, is a document that outlines the laws regarding the registration of vehicles and the licensing of drivers here in Saskatchewan. The proposed amendments to the Act will clarify some of the existing laws and make the Act more efficient, consistent, and cost-effective for the people of Saskatchewan.

The first proposed cost saving amendment I'd like to outline is Saskatchewan's move to a single licence plate system. The existing dual licence plate has been in place since 1977. This amendment will introduce the single plate system over a period of time as single plates will only be issued on transactions requiring a new plate. While customers will be able to remove their existing front plate, SGI (Saskatchewan Government Insurance) will not be replacing double plates with new single plates on existing registrations.

The move to a single licence plate is an example of a cost saving initiative that makes SGI more efficient. It will save Saskatchewan motorists about \$370,000 a year — a good move

that will help SGI to maintain among the lowest auto insurance rates in the country.

Saskatchewan is also joining five other provinces and all three territories in adopting a single licence plate.

The next amendment continues the trend of cutting red tape to better serve SGI's customers. Any driver subject to an administrative suspension for drinking and driving will be able to appeal to the Highway Traffic Board instead of SGI. The Highway Traffic Board is an independently appointed board that hears appeals right across Saskatchewan. Therefore it is better equipped to handle these appeals quickly and fairly.

The next amendment, Mr. Speaker, sets out specific guidelines regarding appeals to the Highway Traffic Board. The proposed amendment will set out clear rules for any appeal to the board that deals with licensing issues. This will make the appeal process more efficient and easier to understand.

The next amendment addresses more efficient licensing of interprovincial carriers. The Government of Saskatchewan has entered into special . . . into several, I should say, agreements that are designed to facilitate interprovincial trucking. One of these agreements is the international registration plan, or IRP. The IRP is a North American agreement allowing carriers to register in one jurisdiction rather than in every jurisdiction in which they operate. The home jurisdiction pro-rates the carrier's registration fees to the jurisdiction they travel in and bears the risk of insuring those international carriers whose base plate is in that province.

Under the IRP, the determination where a carrier may register is based on the carrier having an established place of business in the base jurisdiction. Recently this has proven to be a difficult issue for SGI to administer because carriers are falsely declaring Saskatchewan as their home jurisdiction to take advantage of the province's low insurance rates.

To address these concerns and prevent Saskatchewan truckers from subsidizing high-risk, out-of-province carriers, it is felt that registration requirements work best within a legislative framework. The proposed amendments set out specific criteria that carriers must meet to prove they have an established place of business in our province.

The amendment also indicates when a small Saskatchewan carrier, who is a legitimate resident of Saskatchewan but can't meet the established place of business requirements, may register under the IRP. The amendment gives SGI the authority to determine who can register under the IRP in Saskatchewan as well as the authority to cancel the vehicle registration of a carrier that does not comply with the established place of business or residency requirements.

The proposed amendments also outline an appeal procedure to the Highway Traffic Board if there is a dispute between SGI and a carrier regarding registration under the IRP. It is anticipated that these amendments along with a pre-registration screening process will greatly reduce the abuse of IRP registration, protect legitimate Saskatchewan businesses, and maintain among the lowest auto insurance rates in the country.

The next amendment, Mr. Speaker, clarifies the treatment of people who refuse payment to SGI. Currently if an individual owes money to the corporation, many provisions allow for the suspension of a certificate of registration and a driver's licence. In practice SGI does not often suspend the driver's privileges, but instead refuses to conduct further business with the individual until they have paid the money owing. The proposed amendment clearly defines the situations when SGI will refuse to conduct business with a customer if they owe the company money.

The next proposed amendment addresses driver education. Currently a driver with a poor driving record that meets certain criteria is required to attend an interview with SGI. The consequence of the interview may result in restrictions put on the driver or suspension of the driver's licence. Although the interview process is valuable in many instances, in others it is more appropriate to require the driver to take a driver education course. The proposed legislation allows SGI to require a driver with a poor driving record to attend a driver education course, thus eliminating red tape and creating a proactive solution to the problem.

The next proposed amendment I will outline deals with eliminating unnecessary vehicle inspections. Currently there are set rules as to when a vehicle must be inspected for safety. However, in certain circumstances industry use and practices eliminate the safety concerns that require these inspections. For example, oil well service vehicles will often sit at a well site for a number of weeks or months and then move a few miles down the road to the next well site, with very low exposure to other road users. The proposed amendment would enable SGI to waive periodic vehicle inspections for these vehicles, and in other appropriate circumstances. This amendment will save money and avoids causing an inconvenience to SGI's customers.

The next two amendments deal with specific drinking and driving legislation. The first amendment of the two clarifies that the 90 days administrative suspension, including the 7-day grace period, begins immediately after any 24-hour suspension imposed on a driver. This clears up confusion and clearly separates both types of suspensions.

The second amendment changes the offence period for convicted drunk drivers. Presently, the length of administrative suspension for multiple convictions of drinking and driving and other related offences is based on a number of convictions within a five-year period. The national strategy to reduce impaired driving is recommending the jurisdictions increase this period to 10 years. Accordingly, the proposed amendment establishes a 10-year window for offences. The increased window ensures that reoffending drunk drivers will face the maximum penalty possible. This amendment targets chronic repeat offenders and assists in keeping drunk drivers off our roads.

(15:00)

The next amendment improves communication between SGI and individuals facing administrative suspensions. Frequently the individual is not advised by the courts upon conviction that he or she is subject to an administrative suspension. The

proposed amendment prevents the suspension from being applied until SGI notifies the driver of the suspension. This will eliminate confusion and make the procedure more efficient.

The next amendment enables SGI to cancel, revoke, or suspend a licence plate with no expiry date. This amendment sets the stage for future customer service initiatives by allowing regulation of a certificate of registration and insurance with no expiry date.

The final amendment contains four housekeeping changes to bring the Act in line with current practices. First, the amendment enables SGI to suspend a driver's licence when a person receives an absolute or conditional discharge. The suspension will only be applied if a recommendation is received from the designated official for a prostitution-related offence.

Second, the amendment ensures that registration requirements apply to both the certificate of registration and a 24-hour permit. The amendment also makes the suspension of a certificate of registration not mandatory when a judgment is registered against a driver. Finally, the amendment reinforces legislative changes allowing the reinstatement of a driver's licence for long-term offenders where circumstances warrant.

That, Mr. Speaker, concludes the outline of proposed amendments found in The Vehicle Administration Amendment Act, 2004. These amendments work to make our vehicle licensing and registration procedures more efficient and cost effective for the people of Saskatchewan. Therefore, Mr. Speaker, I move second reading of An Act to amend The Vehicle Administration Act.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — It has been moved by the Minister Responsible for SGI that Bill No. 48, The Vehicle Administration Amendment Act, 2004 be now read a second time.

I recognize the member for Indian Head-Milestone.

Mr. McMorris: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it's a privilege to respond to the second reading speech of the minister regarding Bill No. 48, An Act to amend The Vehicle Administration Act.

It's quite interesting; I have been following along with the media coverage of this Bill over the last week or two. And the interesting part that I find is, having gone through the Act and listening to the minister speak about the Act, there has been one piece in this Act, one section in this Act, that has received a fair amount of press. And that's the piece about the one . . . we're going to one licence plate, where we don't have to have the front licence plate on our vehicles any more; we'll go to one plate on the back. And that has received an awful lot of press.

But, you know, Mr. Speaker, it's sometimes typical when you look at this Act. Really, what does the fact of whether we have one plate or two plates have to do with traffic safety in the province? And that's what this Act really speaks towards, is trying to make our roads and streets much safer.

Unfortunately so many of the changes and revisions in this Act have been overlooked by, whether it's the media or a lot of people I guess, and everything is focused on the one licence plate. And frankly I don't know if provinces that have one plate or two plate have any difference in fatal collision rates or accident rates. I don't really see the significance of whether we have one plate or two plates on a vehicle when it comes to traffic safety.

But unfortunately, that's a piece of legislation that has got the most coverage in the media. And it goes over and over again. I know there's a couple of articles on it.

The one area . . . And I mean I dealt in traffic safety for a number of years and I remember about 10 or 12 years ago when this was visited one other time. And I was working at the Saskatchewan Safety Council at the time and hearing lobbies from the police services, be it the RCMP (Royal Canadian Mounted Police) or city police, of the problems that that would have if we moved to one plate as opposed to two.

And I see again that not all people are happy about moving from two plates to one. I know there's a certain talk show host in the province that is quite happy that we're moving to one plate as opposed to requiring two plates on his vehicle. He was commenting on that just not too long ago.

But you know, for the average person I don't know if it makes a lot of difference. People buying newer vehicles that don't have the capability of holding that front plate do incur some costs because in vehicles now, I guess, generally are being manufactured only with the ability to hold the rear plate.

But it's really the police services that are impacted by this change. And listening to some of the arguments from city police and RCMP, there is an issue there, although when you see that five provinces have moved towards a single plate and all three territories are on the single-plate process, that I think those issues can be overcome.

Certainly when you see so much more of the intersections being forced through cameras, red-light cameras, they take the rear plate and so that is by far the most significant identifier of any particular vehicle.

The front plate does come into play at times, I guess, when a vehicle is approaching a stop check and sees that a stop check is there and wants to beeline away from the stop check and the police can see that vehicle coming towards it and then get a true identity of the vehicle.

But for the most part, you know I would think that a rear plate in probably 99 per cent of the cases through enforcement is sufficient for police services to identify the vehicle. So I would agree with the change even though I think it's very insignificant compared to the rest of the changes in the Act.

And I just want to go through some of the other changes that the minister mentioned in his second reading speech. One of the first changes that prohibits a person from obtaining a driver's licence, if that person is in default of a deductible financial agreement . . . which I think, you know, again in many years of dealing with traffic safety we always said that drivers' licences

are privileges, is a privilege, not a right. And sometimes we assume it is a right.

Again I often go back to the days when legislation would come through and, you know, fines would be in place but there didn't seem to be any real teeth. I remember a number of years ago SGI talking about how many suspended drivers there are travelling in our province, people that have lost their licence that continue to drive. And the number was staggering. Which really doesn't have any significance until you come into a collision with one of those drivers that is unlicensed. And then, of course, it's into the whole insurance issue as to, you know, whether the person is insured or not and that vehicle would be insured or not.

But this, you know, talks about not allowing the person to receive a driver's licence if they haven't met their financial requirements, whether it's to . . . SGI, I guess, is who they'd be talking about. And I would agree with that, that if the person isn't paying for previous fines or insurance that he has received through SGI, should that person be granted a licence. And I would say no, because it goes back to the initial statement that driver's licences are not rights — it's not a right to have a driver's licence — it is a privilege. And if you don't meet with the circumstances around that privilege, then should you be granted the privilege to drive? And probably not.

It goes on to other areas enabling the administrator to require a driver who meets certain prescribed criteria to either attend an interview or attend a education or safety seminar. Well, that's kind of an interesting one. I've certainly been fortunate enough myself not to have to have an interview with any of the SGI interviewers before, and that usually comes because a person has been involved in a number of accidents or received a number of tickets. I do have some friends that have been called in front of an interviewer and, talking to them after, it didn't seem that . . . Did it change their outlook on driving? Perhaps. But it is, I guess, an intervention before the person runs into more trouble.

I find interesting, though, that it talks in that change that the administrator or SGI could require a driver to attend an education or safety seminar. And again coming from my previous life I would have to agree with that. I would be very interested though what the administrator or SGI would be looking at as far as what type of safety seminars or education courses they would be not granting, but finding acceptable.

They're saying that drivers may have to attend an education course or a safety seminar. Well what is the availability of those courses for people around the province? Again, I remember years ago where we thought that was a good idea and we went to SGI with that idea. One of questions that they had back to us and so I would have to SGI now is, for example, if people that are living in remote communities in the north that have had some issues with their driving record and are now asked to attend a safety seminar or education course, what is the availability?

And what is the criteria of these courses? What type of a course does SGI accept for . . . would a defensive driving course for example, or certainly I know the DWI (driving while intoxicated) course has been recognized, but there are many

courses available out there and what is the criteria? Will SGI or the administrator start certifying particular courses for people to attend? And that certainly isn't outlined in this Act at all, so we'll certainly have some questions as to what they mean by that revision or that change.

The minister talked about some drinking and driving changes to the Act, and certainly, you know, anything that will reduce the amount of drinking and driving that we have on our streets, the amount of collisions that we have as a result of drinking and driving, our side would applaud.

I think there have been great strides made in the province over the last 20 or 30 years with regards to the amount of drinking and driving done. I certainly can remember many, many years ago that people I don't think were as aware of the results and consequences of drinking and driving as they are now. It's certainly not uncommon for people that have been out and have consumed some alcohol to be looking for other means of transportation, and that's seems to be pretty common not only in the big centres but also in small-town Saskatchewan.

People are certainly more aware of drinking and driving now then they were 20 and 30 years ago; 20 and 30 years ago it didn't seem to matter, it was perhaps the person that seemed to be the one least affected by alcohol would get behind the wheel and drive, and that didn't necessarily always mean that person was the most qualified to drive. So there certainly have been some changes and this Act goes to strengthening our drinking and driving laws.

Although what it does do is it transfer the appeal of a drinking and driving suspension to the Highway Traffic Board as opposed to SGI. And I can see a bit of a conflict there. I mean SGI is the granter of the licence and certainly controls that. And what they're doing is the appeal process then will go to the Highway Traffic Board which, you know, on first reading tends to make some sense — that that's probably where the appeal should be heard through is through the Highway Traffic Board.

Some of the other changes and revisions in the Act are — there are a number of them — clarifying that a person is not eligible for either a certificate of registration or a registration permit if the person owes money to the administrator or to SGI. And again that would make some sense. If a person has some outstanding debt to the corporation, should SGI be granting further certification, further permits, further registration permits — things like that — to the person that has some outstanding debt? And I would think the changes in the Act would speak to that and probably be received favourably, that if you're not caught up in your financial obligations over the last number of years, should you be granted a certification to drive?

And I'm sure SGI, I would hope that they would work with the person that may be having some financial troubles that would find themselves in the situation and work with them to make the process work better for that person. There are situations where people absolutely need their vehicle and absolutely need their licence to continue employment. So perhaps if they're not paid up now and then they take away their ability to register a vehicle or their driver's licence, what are the chances of that person then continuing their work to then further on pay whatever debts are outstanding?

It also talks . . . again back to the drinking and driving area, it clarifies that the 90-day suspension period will be calculated after the imposition of the 24-hour suspension and some issues around that. The 24-hour suspension would be, you know, getting the person off the road immediately, then moving to, I believe it — boy, this is testing me — I believe .04 now for a 24-hour suspension, and then moving it to a 90-day suspension.

I used to have all those numbers in the back of my . . . in my palm; I dealt with them so often, but I'm having a hard time recalling the exact limits now. It used to be at .06 but I believe it's dropped down to .04 now.

An Hon. Member: — You're right.

Mr. McMorris: — Thank you, the minister says that I am correct now.

The other area where it talks about . . . I found it quite interesting and I just have to find it here in the Act where it talks about if you are caught drinking and driving, you're charged with impaired driving within a five-year period of your last suspension, and it's looking at expanding that now to up to 10 years; that if you're caught drinking and driving within the 10-year window of the last time you were charged, it would be classed as probably your second offence.

(15:15)

I remember back from the Criminal Code, the Criminal Code issues, I believe the five-year window was mainly derived from the Criminal Code, that that would be on your record for five years. And now it's interesting to see SGI moving to a 10-year sliding window from your first offence or second offence to third and subsequent offences, which is quite a significant amount of time.

But I guess, you know when you look at traffic accident rates in our province and the issue around drinking and driving and fatalities and injuries in our province, we've seen it decrease significantly over the last 20 years. And perhaps if we've made no changes maybe we would plateau and bottom out. I guess SGI is looking at being proactive and trying to push the envelope a little bit and continue to have people aware of the amount . . . or the impact that drinking and driving has in our province by making changes like that.

So there are a number of changes in this Act that deals with, you know, from driver's licence suspension to administrating licences, drivers' licences, to one licence plate, to drinking and driving changes. So there are a number of issues in the Bill that we'll be following along with and hearing from groups as to their agreement or disagreement.

I'm sure the city police and RCMP will like to make their points known and have us be more than aware of the issue around the single licence plate. There are other groups around that will want to certainly be heard from regarding the driver's licence suspension and those type of areas. And until we hear from those various groups, Mr. Speaker, I'd move that we would adjourn debate.

The Speaker: — It has been moved by the member for Indian

Head-Milestone that debate on second reading of Bill No. 48 be now adjourned. Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — Motion is carried.

Debate adjourned.

ADJOURNED DEBATES

SECOND READINGS

Bill No. 13

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Cline that **Bill No. 13 — The Labour-sponsored Venture Capital Corporations Amendment Act, 2004** be now read a second time.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Saskatoon Northwest.

Mr. Merriman: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak on Bill 13, an Act to amend the labour-sponsored venture capital corporation.

I wish to preface my remarks today by saying that the formation of capital is one of the cornerstones of economic development in any jurisdiction, and Saskatchewan is no exception to that. The labour-sponsored venture capital corporation is an important vehicle for the formation of capital in Saskatchewan and is one of the cylinders in the engine of growth of our province.

As noted in recent government publications, the two Saskatchewan-based labour venture capital corporations have invested over \$32 million in our province, and in the past year have seen a significant \$3 million increase in sales of fund units on a year-over-year basis.

My colleagues and I wish to congratulate the Saskatchewan labour venture capital corporation funds for their vision and effort. But why does this program work? Why does this program grow on a year-over-year basis? Why is the labour venture capital corporation program a success?

Mr. Speaker, some would say it's because investment in this funds are eligible for tax credits. Other would say it's because the government has something to do with the program as evident by the Act we are debating today. I would submit, Mr. Speaker, that the success of the labour-sponsored venture capital is based on the very same principles that govern any business — solid management that delivers value to its clients.

Labour venture capital, Mr. Speaker, are unique in that our society has added a tax credit element to the initial investment of the value matrix. This tax credit reduces the risk of investing in these funds and helps attract a percentage of the total annual investment pool in our province and fosters the formation of this capital for investment.

This is the key differential of the labour venture capital funds from other investment vehicles. And, Mr. Speaker, I would submit that in the absence of this element, these funds would not exist.

Having said that, Mr. Speaker, it is important to note that success of the labour venture capital corporations program is not due to a tax credit alone. The success of the labour venture capital corporation program is due to the management of the funds and the responsibility matrix of the program itself.

Notwithstanding the tax credit paid on acquisition, an investor in a labour venture capital corp looks at the performance of the fund to determine whether the investment is a good one. A Saskatchewan investor may make one annual investment in a labour venture capital corporation, attracted by tax credit. But if the investment declines in value, he or she will be very reluctant to make another investment in subsequent years. It is this follow-on investment that proves the success of the labour venture capital corporation program in Saskatchewan.

And, Mr. Speaker, our funds are attracting following-on investment. Investors see not only a tax credit upon investing in a fund, but solid year-over-year returns on their hard-earned capital through the quality management of the funds' portfolios.

Mr. Speaker, this program works. It works because of good management and a clear method of evaluating the results. Once approved, government only becomes involved in the labour venture capital corporation through the provision of a tax credit — a good model. In fact, Mr. Speaker, I would submit that this program works precisely because government has limited involvement in the program. Government approves a fund for labour venture capital corp. status, ensures that the reporting is accurate through the requirement for audited financial statements. but — and this is very important, Mr. Speaker — does not direct or try to influence the investment that these funds or the investors make in the funds.

As such, Mr. Speaker, the government fosters the information of capital, does not direct the capital. That is left to the fund managers who are responsible for their results and accountable to the unit holders. As we have success . . . And we have success, pardon me.

What happens, Mr. Speaker, when governments try in managing investment portfolios? Well let's see, we had SPUDCO (Saskatchewan Potato Utility Development Company) — the great government development with a \$28 million loss. We had mega bingo, Persona, Austar, and on and on. And these investments aren't even in Canada. Do you think, Mr. Speaker, that investors in this fund would want to reinvest? I don't think so.

My point, Mr. Speaker, is that government is simply not organized to effectively work in this area. By their very nature, government-managed investments are set to fail. There is almost no responsibility matrix. And with the provincial treasury behind them, there is very little accountability.

When government does what it should, such as foster capital formation, as in the case of the labour venture capital corporation, we see organizations created to manage funds on a

professional and accountable basis. We see year-over-year profit for shareholders, and we see available capital for quality business managed by professionals who are clearly responsible and clearly accountable.

Who, Mr. Speaker, is accountable for the SPUDCO debacle? Was it the president? Was it the minister? I note that the president of SaskTel remains in his chair, notwithstanding the Austar disaster. I believe, Mr. Speaker, that the facts speak for themselves. When government picks winners or losers, we have disasters.

Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, the government is at it again. The labour venture capital corporation program works because government has no involvement in the investment decision — neither in the investment made by the funds, nor in what funds the Saskatchewan investor should buy. The government has no interest in the funds and therefore does not bring its historical incompetent investment analysis and decision making to the table.

However, Mr. Speaker, this government would like to change this. Notwithstanding the success of the labour venture capital corporation in the capital formation process of our province, notwithstanding the government's sad and disappointing record on government investment, the NDP wishes to put their particular stamp on the labour venture capital industry as well, through potential allocations of tax credits being approved by the labour venture capital corporations — allocations, Mr. Speaker.

The amendment to section 6(4) of this Bill, addresses a new clause (c) that says, I quote:

(Allocation) . . . the tax credits amongst the registered corporations.

Let's review that, Mr. Speaker. The tax credits are granted to investors after they decide to put their money . . . pardon me, put their capital into the labour venture capital corporations. The NDP are saying you may want to put your investment in fund A, but we know better. If you want a tax credit, you'll put your investment into fund B, or you won't get a tax credit. Allocation, Mr. Speaker, bureaucratic control, picking winners and losers — won't this government ever learn? Or maybe this is just a reflection of how the NDP thinks?

If a labour venture capital corporation is successful, as evident by the investors and the number of people willing to buy units in a fund, and has success in selling its units to the public, a vote of confidence by the market . . . The NDP wants the power to say you're successful enough; don't grow any more. We're going to allocate the tax credits to another fund who might be having trouble selling its units because we know better than the investor what he or she should buy. We're going to allocate your success.

And if this government could recognize a business success before it happened, Mr. Speaker, this is outrageous. It's also sad. It is also completely consistent with the NDP mantra of mediocrity: don't get too big. We are a have-not province. Things are bad, but be happy because they could be worse. We could never grow; what a silly idea that is. And if something

gets too successful, we'll just stop the growth with allocation.

Mr. Speaker, I'll be moving an amendment to this Bill, striking this increase to government power from the Act because I believe in the people of Saskatchewan. Big brother across the House may give lip service to trusting the people, but here we have it in black and white — allocation your success to others. You can have a tax break on your own money, but we know better, and we'll tell you how to invest it. This is the NDP way. We see it time and time again from this government and from this Premier. The state knows best. The state should be the primary investor in the economy. The state rules all.

Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, we have seen again and again what happens to amateurs in government move into the big leagues of business. SPUDCO, mega bingo, Persona, Ag Dealer, Austar, and the list goes on and on. The labour venture capital corporation system is valuable because the people see clearly who and what they're investing in. The people make the choices. The people take the risk, and the people reap the reward.

We also wonder why, Mr. Speaker, we're looking at allocating head offices of these labour venture capital corporations outside of Saskatchewan. Why doesn't the government trust the people? The people will hold various labour venture capital corporations responsible and accountable. I ask the NDP to trust the Speaker . . . the people, you too, Mr. Speaker. Sorry.

Mr. Speaker, many of the articles and Bills in this Bill are useful, reasonable housekeeping amendments to bring the Act up to date. However as long as the NDP plan to slip their allocation control mechanism into the Act, one has to ask the question. Mr. Speaker, I would like to adjourn debate on this motion at this time.

(15:30)

The Speaker: — It has been moved by the member for Saskatoon Northwest that debate on second reading of Bill No. 13 be now adjourned. Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion.

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — Motion is carried.

Debate adjourned.

Bill No. 36

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen that **Bill No. 36 — The Provincial Sales Tax Amendment Act, 2004** be now read a second time.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Last Mountain-Touchwood.

Mr. Hart: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I certainly look forward to entering the debate on this Bill, the Bill that this government has brought forward to increase the PST(provincial sales tax) from 6 to 7 per cent.

You know, Mr. Speaker, the government accuses us. Members opposite accuse us of refighting the last election and so on. And with the election just happening some few months ago I think it is important, particularly with regards to this particular Bill, to revisit the campaign promises and what the NDP had said during the last election. You know, Mr. Speaker, there was no mention of increasing the PST. In fact what we heard from those people on the other side, Mr. Speaker, is that they have a very modest, affordable plan. They could handle the Boughen report.

The Minister of Learning is chirping from his seat. I wish he would stand up in this House tomorrow or later this day and give us his government's response to the Boughen report. But oh no, he's afraid to do that. He's using school amalgamations as a smoke screen to deflect attention from that. He says we need to amalgamate more schools before we can address the issue of how we finance the K to 12 system — nothing but nonsense, Mr. Speaker.

And, Mr. Speaker, the reason I raise the issue of what this NDP party and this government said in the last election is that, as I said on a prior occasion when I was speaking to the budget, Mr. Speaker, the voters and the citizens of this province do pay attention to what we say particularly during an election campaign. Quite often in between elections, people's lives are busy, and they don't perhaps pay as close attention as we would like them to. But during an election campaign they do. They listen. They compare, and they analyze, and they make their decision as to how they're going to vote based on what they hear during the campaign, Mr. Speaker.

And that was brought home to me, Mr. Speaker, earlier this spring when I was attending a church service in Regina, where the prayers of the faithful led off with, that all politicians keep their campaign promises, Mr. Speaker. I think that speaks volumes, Mr. Speaker. People put their trust in political parties and in governments to carry forward their plans and be truthful with them. And that's something that we haven't seen from this government, particularly with this budget.

Mr. Speaker, this government said that they have to raise the PST because expenditures have risen more dramatically than revenues — as if that should come as a surprise to a governing party, a party that's been in power for some 10 or 12 years. Quite often parties who are newly elected to the government side of the House, they don't have the full financial picture before them when they are in opposition and during the campaign, and they find a number of surprises. But that's not the case with this government, Mr. Speaker. And as I said, there was no mention of raising the PST during the last election campaign then, and all of a sudden they said, surprise, surprise. Guess what?

The cupboard is bare, and we have to go and see if we can squeeze a little bit more milk out of that cow called the taxpayer, Mr. Speaker. And you know what? The taxpayers of this province are getting . . . are concerned that they are being overtaxed and . . . or at the very least, Mr. Speaker, that the money that is being raised is not addressing the issues that need to be addressed.

The Minister of Finance during the second reading, his second

reading speech said that the additional revenues will be going to fund education and primarily health care, which are certainly laudable objectives and uses of additional money. But the minister also failed to mention the fact that of the . . . that there's 110 million new federal dollars that have been allocated to the health care budget. The minister mentioned that his government is increasing expenditures to the health care budget by some 160 million. Well 110 of that is already being provided by the federal government.

They go on to say that they're putting \$45 million into education and that's going to solve — in the K to 12 (kindergarten to grade 12) system — and that's going to solve all the issues. Putting more money into a department, into programs is only one part of managing, Mr. Speaker, and of governing.

You also have to look at how you're spending those dollars. I mean, the history of increases to the health budget in the last 10 years, every year there's new money being put into the health care budget. Now is that a bad thing? Well it . . . No, it isn't, but it certainly isn't being demonstrated that we see improved health care in our province. What do we see now? We see the longest waiting lists for MRIs (Magnetic Resonance Imaging); we see people waiting up to three years for knee replacement and back surgery, Mr. Speaker.

Just for a few facts as far as where our health care budget has gone . . . come from and where we are today. Back in the early '90s, Mr. Speaker, the health care budget was \$1.6 billion. We're up to 2.7 now. Has our health care, have our health care services and our health care delivery system improved by a billion dollars worth of spending? I think if you ask the people on the waiting lists, they would have to disagree. They would say, no, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the government received a report long before the budget was presented calling . . . a plan to deal with the funding system of education for the K to 12 portion of education, Mr. Speaker. And that report was authored by Ray Boughen, Mr. Speaker, and Mr. Boughen laid out very clearly where we need to go in this province. We need to go from over 60 per cent of funding coming from property tax and only 40 per cent from the government; we need to go where 70 per cent of the funding comes from government and 30 per cent from property tax. He told us where we need to go. He also laid out a plan, Mr. Speaker, and there's a number of groups that have a problem with his road map to get to that goal, Mr. Speaker.

And the Minister of Learning continues to chirp from his seat. Why doesn't he just stand up in the House, Mr. Speaker? I'll gladly yield the floor and let him tell us how he's going to deal with the funding in the K to 12 system. But does he do that? His silence is deafening, Mr. Speaker. He's afraid to stand up because you know what? He hasn't got a plan, Mr. Speaker. He uses amalgamation; he says we've got to amalgamate more of our school division, a foolish argument that nobody's buying out there, Mr. Speaker, because amalgamation in most cases doesn't save a lot of money. In some cases it does. But what it does is it improves services to students, Mr. Speaker . . . Mr. Speaker. So as I said before the Minister of Learning tried to get in, and if he wants to get in I'll certainly take my place and let him stand up, Mr. Speaker. But there are a number of groups

who are directly affected by Mr. Boughen's plan have some problems with the way we get to where we need to go, including SUMA (Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association) and school board associations and mostly that government over there has the biggest problem with that plan.

And SARM (Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities) has a few reservations but I think they were comfortable with some of the road map anyway. But will this government develop a plan to get there if they don't like the one that Mr. Boughen laid out? Well then, develop another plan. But we need to go where Mr. Boughen said, Mr. Speaker.

But as I'd said earlier, the comments from the Minister of Learning, his silence is deafening. And perhaps one day he'll screw up his courage and he'll stand up in the House and he'll tell us how his government's going to deal with this, Mr. Speaker.

So what has this government done? The Boughen report says increase the PST. Well they accepted part of it. They increased the PST but they didn't do anything to address property taxes, Mr. Speaker. They claim they need the money for health care.

Well when we look more closely of the \$160 million of new money in the health care budget, 110 comes from the federal government. So of that 136 million that they are going to raise in the increase in the PST, Mr. Speaker, only a small portion will actually be going into the health care budget.

They say they're putting another \$45 million into the K to 12 system. The school board associations tell us that'll barely look after the increase in teachers' salary till the end of August, Mr. Speaker.

There are a number of initiatives and items that we need to explore and the impact of this 1 per cent increase in the PST, Mr. Speaker. So I think we need to come back and further debate this Bill, Mr. Speaker, so I would now move adjournment of the debate.

The Speaker: — It has been moved by the member for Last Mountain-Touchwood that debate on Bill No. 36, second reading, be now adjourned. Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — Motion is carried.

Debate adjourned.

Bill No. 37

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen that **Bill No. 37 — The Tobacco Tax Amendment Act, 2004** be now read a second time.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Wood River.

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, as the time draws on I'll only take a few minutes this afternoon

to debate a little bit about The Tobacco Tax Amendment Act. And I know the members opposite would like me to be able to go on for about an hour on this, but I do know we want to get to Health estimates.

Mr. Speaker, this tax amendment basically increases the tobacco tax 16 cents per cigarette, up to 17.5 cents, and there's also some changes to the tobacco and cigars.

Mr. Speaker, well one can debate whether a tax increase is necessary or not. I guess that's part of the debate that can be ongoing. But when the minister introduced this tax Act, one of his comments he was quoting the executive director of the cancer clinic, and he said, over time cigarette taxes increase will reduce the number of people who smoke and go on to develop cancer, and reduce rates for smoking among the youth.

Well that's part of what I would like to talk about briefly, Mr. Speaker, because the minister is standing up and saying that, we will increase the tax on tobacco products because we all know and understand that it can lead to cancer. But isn't it interesting — when we raise the tax on the tobacco, it generates about \$17 million.

Now I believe those are the figures quoted from the Minister of Finance. So it's not something that's just dreamed up; that's what the minister is using. But keep in mind that we're putting the tax on to try and cause people to reduce smoking so they will not get cancer.

Now here's the interesting aspect of this. Only \$6.5 million of the 17 million is going to the cancer agency. So there's a bit of a dichotomy there, Mr. Speaker, that we're doing this to try and stop cancer, but we're not going to give it to cancer. So where is the \$10.5 million going to?

Mr. Speaker, pardon the pun, but it almost seems like this tobacco tax is a smokescreen for generating money for general revenue. So I think I'm very interested in how this \$10.5 million is going to be spent.

Mr. Speaker, I know we've talked about and debated about reducing the incidence of youth smoking. And by upping the price of cigarettes, I guess we can argue and debate that actually it will reduce the number of people that smoke. The people that are addicted to smoking may not change; another cent and a half per cigarette probably will not cause them to quit. In some cases it may, and hopefully it will. But the youth, I don't know if you know any numbers about how many youth we restrict or dissuade from smoking by adding another 1.5 cents per cigarette.

Now also, Mr. Speaker, we look back in the tobacco debate of a couple of years ago when we were trying to discourage young men and women from smoking. And what did we do? What did we or what did the NDP government come up with? We put a blanket over the cigarettes. Now that's almost laughable that to try and stop youth from smoking, we put a blanket over top of cigarettes; in outlets, in stores, and in gas stations, and markets, where cigarettes are sold.

(15:45)

Now if there was any, any real drive to try and have youth stop smoking, the least — the least — that could be done is make it illegal. Make it illegal, not unlike the alcohol. Right now, there's an age limit on alcohol. If you drink alcohol before you're of the legal age, you may be fined. So why couldn't that have been done also with cigarettes?

Right now, it's very ironic, Mr. Speaker, that youth can have somebody go into a store, buy cigarettes behind the blanket . . . from behind the blanket, come outside and stand and smoke. And how is that stopping young people from smoking? It really just doesn't make any sense.

Mr. Speaker, there's an awful lot more to this Bill that I would like to relate to how it affects other businesses etc. But as we see the time is drawing . . . that we would like to get into Health estimates, at this time I would like to adjourn debate.

The Speaker: — It has been moved by the member for Wood River that debate on Bill No. 37 be now adjourned. Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — Motion is carried.

Debate adjourned.

COMMITTEE OF FINANCE

General Revenue Fund Health Vote 32

Subvote (HE01)

The Chair: — Order. Committee of Finance. The first item before the committee are the consideration of estimates for the Department of Health, vote 32 found on page 77 of the Estimates book, for those that are following along on TV or through the Web site from Newfoundland to British Columbia.

I recognize the Minister of Health to introduce his officials and make a brief statement if he wishes.

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm pleased to have with me today to my left, Mike Shaw, the associate deputy minister of Health; and to his left, Rod Wiley, the executive director of the regional policy branch. Behind Rod is Max Hendricks, who's the executive director the finance and administration branch; directly to his right is Lawrence Krahn, assistant deputy minister; and then Duncan Fisher, assistant deputy minister; and Roger Carriere, who is the director of the community care branch; and then to my right is Lauren Donnelly, who is the executive director of the acute and emergency services branch.

Mr. Speaker, these are the people who will assist me today and I look forward to the questions and the conversations this afternoon.

The Chair: — Administration (HE01). I recognize the member from Melfort.

Mr. Gantfoer: — Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and welcome, Minister, and the officials from the Department of Health. This is our first occasion to get together to inquire about the estimates for the Department of Health. And as we generally do, we spend more than one occasion, in fact several occasions on the Health estimates, and I think that that will be the case this session and this year as well.

I think for the record, and the minister and I have agreed in the past that many times a lot of the questions and answers are provided not only for information for ourselves in this Assembly, but we have a greater responsibility to also provide information for the citizens at large who have the opportunity over the Internet or by direct broadcast observing these proceedings.

So I trust that if some of the questions and answers are those that we should and do already know, that you will appreciate the fact the many times other people watching and listening don't have that opportunity to understand as fully.

Minister, since this is our first session and I want to sort of be pretty broad in terms of the direction, and perhaps in subsequent sessions we can narrow it down a little bit. If we have an agreement in terms of how the rest of the session is going to go, that will certainly make that, I think, possible.

First of all, Minister, you've noted and your government has noted on a number of occasions subsequent to the budget, that there is an additional \$160 million being spent on the health care budget this year, and that the government has worked very hard in terms of decisions they've had to make in order to find these extra funds. And it's quite often mentioned that the provincial sales tax is one major . . . the increase in the provincial sales tax, if you like, was one of the decisions that had to be made in order to accomplish the \$160 million commitment to health care.

Minister, by way of background though, of that \$160 million, I wonder if you'd break out for us the federal contribution specifically to health as a result of the \$2 billion that was committed across Canada. And I believe there was also a first ministers' accord that committed monies to the provincial government that was allocated in this provincial budget. So would you please outline what the commitment has been from the sources from the federal government in this budget year?

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Thank you. Mr. Chair, in this specific budget for the year 2004-2005, there is an incremental amount of 46.4 million — 40 million goes to the prescription drug plan, 4.4 million to home care and primary care, and 2 million to diabetic supplies and therapeutic nutritional products. So those are the allocations.

The specific question around the \$2 billion, that was included in last year's financing because the federal government provided it just before the year-end.

Mr. Gantfoer: — Mr. Minister, last year when the money came — and I believe it's something in the magnitude of \$62 million that came at virtually the end of the fiscal year — that didn't change the health care spending decisions for last year because of when it was promised and when it arrived. So did

that money just sit in extra surplus then for last year and was not used for health care? Or did you bring it forward this year then and use it for health care this year?

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Chair, the funds that came in last year, which were approximately \$62 million as the member has noted, were booked into the 2003-2004 year. Those funds were available and provided the flexibility that allowed us to have the \$160 million increase this year, in the sense that they were available in the overall General Revenue Fund. But this federal money does flow into the General Revenue Fund.

Mr. Gantfoer: — So then, Minister, it would be fair to indicate that, as you've indicated, there was 47.4 or \$48 million came this year directly that you acknowledged. And because there was this extra money in the General Revenue Fund last year that was made available for this year, is it fair to say of the \$160 million that has been increased for health care spending, approximately \$110 million came as a result of these two special programs from the federal government?

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Chair, I think the explanation has to be that that money flows into the General Revenue Fund and we, in fact, are spending \$2.7 billion on health care and that because of the way that it came in at the end of the last year, that allowed us some flexibility. But it was money that was expended, sort of, in the Health budget. But because we had some extra revenue that we weren't certain at the beginning of the year, we then had the flexibility as we moved forward into this budget.

Mr. Gantfoer: — Mr. Minister, there seems to be a lot of discussion and I think some concern from the federal government in terms of accountability and targeting expenditures that are funds that are transferred to the provinces so that the federal government has some sense of the fact if they're going to contribute 2, 3, or \$4 billion extra for health care, that there are some criteria and there's some transparency and there is some requirements as a provincial government to make sure that it's documented in the appropriate way that these expenditures are made in a targeted kind of a program.

You mentioned some targeted initiatives in the \$48 million this year. Were there any requirements or criteria set by the federal government for the way the approximately \$62 million was spent from last year's contribution?

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Chair, I think the member's specific question relates to the \$62 million. And that was a one-time payment that came in March of this last year and it wasn't tied in the same way as some of the previous amounts were to the three priorities that came from the Romanow report that were part of the premiers' and prime minister's agreement.

So that's one of our challenges is that that \$62 million isn't there this year, although there has been some discussion that it may be there. And then that becomes one of the issues as we move forward in this year.

(16:00)

Mr. Gantfoer: — Minister, it seems when you look at the budget document — and on page 15 of the overall budget

document so that you have the reference point — and where it has the estimated 2003-04 budget as well as the forecast 2003-04, from what I understood you to say, Mr. Minister, is that you really didn't know that the \$62 million was a certainty when the last year's budget was presented. And it shows from your forecast of \$2.5 billion — well 2.522 billion — that the estimate was 2.526 billion, so there really was no substantial change last year. So the six . . . there's \$4 million from the forecast against what was estimated, and so the \$62 million just went into general revenue last year. There was no real change in the Health budget as a result of actually receiving that money. So this money then was available as a one-time opportunity for this current budget, even though it was accounted for as being receipted in the General Revenue Fund last year.

So my point is: is it fair to say that the federal government contributed approximately \$110 million of the \$160 million that was increased for health care funding this year?

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Chair, I think the challenge here is that funds that come in as revenue are dealt with in one side of the budget. As it relates to expenditures, we deal with those on another side. We try and lump together all of the costs that we have. We had a budget estimate. We didn't know whether the funds were going to be coming from the federal government. I'm sure that the Department of Finance was very pleased when those funds did come through at the end of the year. That increased the flexibility then as we planned for the present budget because there was another \$62 million that would be available in the General Revenue Fund.

But that money, when it came from the federal government, was not tied to any specific program or plan and it was very clear that we spent substantially more than \$62 million last year in our Health budget.

Mr. Gantefer: — Mr. Speaker, I just wonder about the planning of the department where you end up with a situation that is in some ways a bit of a windfall from the federal government at the end of the last fiscal year. And while that money is being turned into the General Revenue Fund, health authorities were asked to initiate programs of severe cost containment including, for example in the Saskatoon Health Authority, where they were delaying surgeries in order to keep their deficits from growing.

At the same time the provincial government received from the federal government a windfall of \$62 million. And it seems to be difficult for the minister to now admit that this money is clearly now being brought forward into this budget year so that of the \$160 million that the government takes so much pride of contributing to the health care system, in reality \$110 million of it came as a direct result of federal transfers to this province.

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Chair, what I think we need to do here is explain a little bit how budgets work and how government departments work. Basically here in the Department of Health, a year and a half ago approximately, we set out a plan for spending in health care, which included spending for regional health authorities and spending for all of the other responsibilities that the Department of Health has. And we tried to set some very clear parameters.

And as the member noted on page 15, the schedule of expense, the forecast expenditure amount was very close to the estimate that was originally given. And those are the amounts that we stuck with.

Basically the Department of Finance manages the revenue side as to where the funds come from. And what they did was look at well, are there monies that come from sales tax, personal income tax, other kinds of taxes within the province, resource revenue, federal government transfers, all of those things?

The \$62 million at the beginning of the year wasn't booked as a revenue expense because we weren't certain that it was going to come. Some provinces did put it into their revenue estimates; this province didn't. But when it did show up finally at the end of the year, that meant that the amount of money that was available in the Fiscal Stabilization Fund was slightly more and could then be used to deal with all of the costs of government. But as we go forward, it's very clear that the \$62 million was spent on health as part of the commitment that we made to the federal government.

Mr. Gantefer: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. The reason I raise this issue is because as I understand, unless there's further program, that the First Ministers' Accord would provide for approximately \$42 million or whatever. Is that ongoing or is that commitment going, they are going forward, or are we now going to approach the next budget year?

I think that we're agreement of saying that \$110 million came into this current budget year. What is the understanding that the province has about the federal government's commitment to date going forward? I understand there's talking of first ministers' meetings to discuss these issues, but on the table, on the record right now, what's the amount that can be expected in the next budget year from the federal government?

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Chair, I thank the member for the question about the health reform funding which is the money that's tied into some of these federal agreements. In the '03-04 budget, the Health Reform Fund provided about \$31 million. In the '04-05 budget, that sum will be \$16 million higher which is \$47 million, and that was the expenditures that I gave you previously that totalled \$46.4 million. In the '05-06 budget we anticipate that the health reform funding amount will be \$108 million, and so that it will increase again by about \$61 million.

Mr. Gantefer: — Mr. Minister, just for clarification I tried to jot these down quickly. I took it you said from '04-05 about \$16 million and then it moves up from '05-06 to \$108 million. Did I misunderstand that?

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Yes. I think if you wrote down the numbers 31, 47, and 108, then you would get the total picture. And effectively what happened was the federal-provincial agreement that was set up that set up the Health Reform Fund was . . . it escalates fairly dramatically over the next couple of years, and that's of assistance.

It still doesn't quite obviously meet all of the costs in the system, but it does mean that we have some of these revenues to deal with next year. And I'm sure if you looked at the four-year plan in the budget, it would include those as part of the

Department of Finance's revenue initiatives.

Mr. Gantefoer: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Minister, one of the main cost drivers, if you like, of a Health budget is probably the impact of salaries, wages, remunerations for personnel. I believe the estimates of how much of a proportion of the total budget at human resources, if you like, occupies anywhere from 75 to 80 per cent of the total budget for health care in one form of human service.

Minister, the government has stated that it has an objective and a policy of wage settlements in the order of 0, 1, and 1. When do you see the impact of the government's stated policy in the budget about the restrained salary, availability amounts, increases available? When do you see that taking effect in the health sector?

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Chair, I think we will see some of the effects in this year. Most of the contracts are up this year. The SUN (Saskatchewan Union of Nurses) contract is up next year. And so we will see some effect as we move forward this year.

Mr. Gantefoer: — Minister, if they are in effect across the piece, would we not see a rather dramatic decrease in the overall inflation rate for the Health budgets going forward or do you see other sectors of the Health budget taking, you know, the vacuum or the slack that's been created by the restrained health contracts?

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Chair, we will see some impact this year. I think we'll see greater impact next year. We anticipate that it will bring the fairly dramatic increases in health care costs down, but it will only be one factor.

I mean, clearly the issue related to how we fit into the national perspective and the things that are happening in other provinces also will have an impact on the overall costs in health care.

As it relates to other major cost issues in health care, like the cost of pharmaceuticals, that's possibly on a different plan and it may relate to some of the kinds of discussions that we'll have on a national level. But our plan clearly sets out a goal to bring the costs of health care down to not a flat line, but at least less of an incline than there has been for the last few years.

Mr. Gantefoer: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. I would like to move to another topic, at least briefly.

On budget day there was a press release issued by your department under a heading, "Health budget combines new investments with sustainability measures." And in the second paragraph of that news release and I quote:

Although these are significant increases, changes in health delivery are required and will include further administrative efficiencies, changes in staff mix, facility closures or conversions, and reductions in long-term care bed numbers.

Mr. Minister, I know that there's been a great deal of discussion, and certainly there have been communities and community leaders and people across the province bringing their concerns about what is implied in that sentence in the

budget documents that were tabled with the budget some many weeks ago.

Minister, I recognize that you have not . . . or you are not in a position to be able to say definitively what the implications are but I would like to ask you if there is a time that you have allocated where you are going to come to a conclusion because I'm sure, being as objective as I can about this, I mean this creates a lot of uncertainty. If there is implied changes in a fairly significant level, there is concerns. There is concerns in the community from the people that are in the institutions, their families, the staff members trying to wonder and make determinations about the long-term viability of their positions.

There is just a lot of people that are very anxious about knowing what the direction and specific terms is going to be. So while I believe that you're not in a position to answer though when you intend to make announcements and what the rollout plan is and what your timeline is on these decisions, so that people can at least know when they can anticipate a decision or a sense of detailed direction?

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Chair, I thank the member for that question because I also share the concern that communities have and individuals have around the challenges that we've got in health care.

What we did on March 31 was provide the increased amounts of budgets available to all of the regional health authorities, knowing full well that there wasn't sufficient amount of money to cover all the things that they've been doing as they had been last year. And I don't apologize for the fact that we're going to have to make some changes. But what I very much appreciate is the hard work that has been done by the officials and the boards and working with communities. My sense of this is that we're getting very close to getting an overall picture of what's going to happen, and as I had said on March 31, we hope to have an answer around the middle of May. And our goal is still to get there, which is obviously in the next week, two weeks approximately.

(16:15)

And so we will try to do that and do it in a fair way. And clearly many of the questions and challenges that are a concern are longer term challenges, and so that it will be more about, well then working with communities and how we sort out what we do. But I think, practically, our goal is to have some decisions made very shortly.

Mr. Gantefoer: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. I am sure you can appreciate the middle of May is this coming weekend, and so time is really in front of us. Are you indicating that you'll be in a position to make these announcements by Friday of this week or Friday of next week or Thursday of next week? Or do you have a specific date that you're targeting towards, Minister? Because, you know, the Minister of Learning has said he was going to have a response to the Boughen Commission report, you know, a month after, and then two months after, and then a month after the budget, and it seems to be going on indefinitely. And I think communities want something a little more specific. Do you have a date in mind other than just a vague generality?

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. As the member clearly indicates and I acknowledge, these are difficult decisions to sort out and get them right for the time and for the place. And we are working very carefully at this and so our goal is to do it not . . . I don't think we will make it by this week — probably within the next two weeks. And so . . . but I think it is our hope that the Minister of Learning will go first.

Mr. Gantefoer: — Well if that's the case we may never know what you have in mind, Mr. Minister. I would think that you'd just sort of stay to your agenda and make your announcements when you have to, and let the Minister of Learning worry about his problems.

Mr. Minister, in terms of these considerations I think that there is certainly a perceived change in terms of where health care is maybe going in this, not only in this province, in the country.

It seems as if the federal government . . . There's a greater discussion right now, maybe pending a federal election in the next days or weeks ahead. It sounds as if on the federal agenda, that the health care issue has moved up on their agenda, both by the government and the official opposition seem to be talking more about this issue.

And I even heard some comments today from the opposition about commitment. So it just seems to be at a higher level of awareness right across this country, both in terms of making sure there's a suitable level of commitment cash-wise into the system, but also looking at how we can perhaps do things better. And human resource settlements and some of those issues are certainly, perhaps, parts of the solution.

Will the government, in light of this, temper the decisions they're making about some permanent changes to the system, to the infrastructure if you like? Will the government temper their decisions in light of, not necessarily just solely the statistical rate of increase we've had in the past that was largely reneged on by the federal government, but in light of perhaps a new reality in terms of the federal-provincial scene in Canada going forward, and also the possibilities of at least of some moderation in the cost side so that we make sure that the decisions being made are in recognition of where we're going rather than where we've been?

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. The member has clearly identified one of the biggest challenges in health care, and that relates to how we set up a system that provides good care to people that's sustainable in the long term. And one of the particular challenges we have this spring and summer is the volatility of the hopes, and then sometimes the despair, as it relates to long-term federal contributions into that system.

My own sense is that we are moving to a time when we will get some predictable amounts that will build on what we already have which will allow us to move forward. And so because of that, we then end up having an even more difficult time as we look at the decisions that we do here in this province. Because we clearly don't want to make choices or decisions about how we provide care in this province based on long-term sustainability, if all of a sudden the rules around what kinds of resources we have change.

And so practically we, in our budget, we're looking at further expenditures in the technology side — MRIs, CTs (computerized tomography). those kinds of things — looking at surgical issues, some of those kinds of issues. But we'd then end up having to balance them against the long-term care decisions and many of the decisions that relate to the system that we have in place now.

And it's exactly that kind of difficult discussion that we're having with local boards as they look at what options they have — and often they're quite limited — and looking at what we can do on a broader basis. And so our goal is to set out a clear plan of sustainability, but we are recognizing the fact that there may be some more positive response from the federal funding as well.

Mr. Gantefoer: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Minister, you touched on the issue of technology and since you opened the topic, I'll head in that direction because I had a few questions on that whole general area.

Mr. Minister, I noticed in your budget that you've allocated 12.4, almost, million dollars for the Saskatchewan Health Information Network. And I think over the years that the accumulated kind of contribution of the provincial government to this entity or agency has approaching \$75 million, \$80 million somewhere in that magnitude. It's a fairly significant amount of money.

And it's also one of the more frustrating kinds of expenditures, I think, that maybe everyone has because you kind of really start wondering, sooner or later, what are we really got to show for the money that we've invested. Because initially we were doing this in relative isolation and now that we've come together nationally in having the SHIN (Saskatchewan Health Information Network) network being part of the national initiative to try to sort of get some sense out of this. But it seems to me very frustrating in terms of really being able to say, have we got decent value for the monies we have spent in the past and are we likely to get decent money for the dollars that we're going to spend going forward.

Because I think everybody agrees, is that the objective of the exercise is to have an electronic patient record system, and a good communication system, the ability to move test results and diagnosis electronically, and all of these sorts of things, is a laudable and very worthwhile objective. What seems to be happening though, we're getting into situation, we're saying, well what do we really have to show for 75, or \$80 million. And if the argument is, is we had to do this front-end investment to just get to the starting point. When do we start . . . think we're really going to start seeing even value for the \$12 million we're spending virtually every year going forward? Because the system does not live up to its billings, in my opinion. It's frustratingly slow to get implemented and it's very, very expensive.

So I would like you, if you would, to give an update of where you think our investment is on the SHIN project and that whole technology piece.

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Chair, I appreciate the opportunity to explain what we've done with the Saskatchewan Health

Information Network. As was mentioned, we've spent about \$78 million since 1997 on the development since it was established. So if you think about that being about just over seven years, it's been just . . . approximately \$10 million a year has gone to delivering the IT (information technology) services for health regions.

So what's been accomplished in that time? Well we now have a secure provincial network connecting over 400 health facilities. We have a central help desk which serves over 6,000 health sector computer users and we have a data centre which provides application systems to the health regions.

Over the past year, 21 clinical system implementation projects have been successfully completed within the health regions. This includes lab, registration, and pharmacy systems in five regions, and a new home care system in six regions.

We've also provided IT support for a number of provincial programs and action plan initiatives that include the implementation of a clinic . . . or a client assessment system for long-term care, which is called the MDS (minimum data system) system. We also provide the support for the renal dialysis program which includes the satellite client clinics. This allows for the doctors to monitor the patients while they're in the service. It includes the Telehealth program. It also includes all of the IT backup for the surgical care registry.

Our success in our province in managing IT developments and delivering innovative IT solutions is reflected in the fact that Canada Health Infoway — which is the \$1.5 billion federal fund — has selected Saskatchewan for one of their very first investments, which is the provider registry project, where we actually set out and we'll have a whole system that keeps the information about all of the health providers. And we will be providing the lead for the country on this. There are some other projects that are coming forward.

I think the information that we now have in our health information solution centre — which is in the Department of Health — has integrated the department IT services and the Saskatchewan Health Information Network services into one unit. The goal is to move very cautiously and carefully, which we have for the past seven years. We have not expended the huge amounts of money that both our neighbours to the west and to the east have done with not getting a whole lot for some of those funds. We wanted to make sure that we spend it very, very carefully.

Now I'll give you some descriptions of things that are happening. The integrated clinical system project, right now the health information solution centre — which includes SHIN — has been working with health regions and the front-line staff to identify key priorities, areas of development, which would allow them to take steps towards building the regional electronic patient records. This is the electronic health records that the member opposite was referring to.

The regions identified in the year 2000 that . . . the key areas that they wanted this to develop was in the lab area, pharmacy, home care, registration of patients, and then the transcription of medical records, and then diagnostic imaging. There was a rigorous procurement process that was initiated. Five

applications were selected. In the '03-04 budget year, we began implementing the clinical applications that had been procured in the previous year as part of the integrated clinical systems project.

The five regions that were initially involved in the project — Prairie North, Prince Albert Parkland, Sunrise, Cypress, and Five Hills — participated in selecting the common applications. Each region agreed to participate in developing a common configuration of the application that would be used by all. So in other words, we would have a standard for the province.

(16:30)

In '02-03 the home care application was installed in the Five Hills Health Region. In '03-04 — last year — the home care application was installed in Prairie North, Cypress, Prince Albert, Sunrise, Sun Country, and Heartland. And in '03-04 the lab and pharmacy systems were installed in each of the five regions. The registration system was installed in four regions.

In addition, in '03-04 the Sunrise Health Region with the assistance of the health information solution centre linked the new lab and registration system so that information from the registration system can flow into the lab system reducing the number of times a patient needs to report their contact and identification information.

What are the benefits of this integrated clinical system project? Well the regions are finding that the applications are very useful in enhancing the delivery of care to the patients. The number of users of the registration system has grown from 143 to 233 between the first and third quarters of this last year. The number of users of the home care system has grown from 124 to 194. And the number of clients in the system has gone from 5,400 to 7,100. The number of visits that have been using this project . . . that are registered on this project have gone from 212,000 to 357,000 just within one year.

The number of users of the lab system has grown from 89 in the first quarter of this last year to 192 in the third quarter. As well the number of lab specimens processed using the new system has grown from 27,500 to 177,600.

The number of users of the pharmacy system has grown from 46 to 68 between the second and third quarters of the year. As well the number of prescriptions filled using this system has grown from 229,000 to 247,000.

Prior to the implementation of the lab system in Sunrise and Prairie North health regions, all lab tests were recorded manually — that's on paper. The Cypress lab staff have discovered that as a result of the chemistry model of the new lab system, they're able to process a large volume of routine chemistry samples in about half the time that it would have normally taken, resulting in quick results reporting time for patients. The interface of the lab system with the registration system in the Sunrise Health Region has meant that the lab test is automatically linked with the correct patient in the registration system.

Since the implementation of the home care application in these initial five regions, other regions have requested that the

application be implemented in their regions. So that's the integrated clinical system.

Another project, which we're in progress with the federal government, is the provider registry. The SHIN participated with the western health information collaborative, which is basically the western provinces and led by British Columbia. This registry initially contained professional information on physicians and dentists only. The '03-04 Saskatchewan project with Canada Health Infoway is expanding this registry to include nurses, and it will be working with health regions as to how the application will be integrated into regional applications. It's anticipated that this work will be finished very shortly.

The advantage of this is that all of the information that's related to professional people — physicians, dentists, and nurses — will be in a central system. And therefore it will be available to the health care system — the records keeping, the providers — on a regular basis. And this reduces the number of paper lists of providers that exist throughout the system and within the provinces.

The health information solution centre help desk is providing much support to all of the people who are using its over 6,000 health sector users on particular machines. The work that's being done is very well received, and it's appreciated by all the people who have that.

Now also the health information solution data centre began centrally hosting a number of new clinical operations in '03-04, and so all of the technical work . . . And that's where some of the dollars have gone. And that's once again the lab application, the registration application, the pharmacy application, the home care application, and the new surgical care registry.

So one of the advantages of doing this centrally through the health information solution centre is that the servers don't have to be purchased in every region. It's all done centrally. We've also not had to hire as many technical people because we have central use and central support.

I think what we're seeing, as I've indicated in this rather lengthy response to your question, is that the investments that we've been making are now really starting to snowball in their benefit to the regions, but also to the whole system.

The other thing I would remind the member about is the fact that we effectively have sort of a tiered IT system, with the tertiary hospitals having a very sophisticated system; the regional hospitals, which is strongly supported by the SHIN dollars, goes out to all of the regional centres, the regional health authorities; and then in community hospitals there's another level. And these things are now becoming fully integrated which will have the benefit that we all want for the health system.

So thank you very much for allowing me to give you a little longer response to that question.

Mr. Gantfoer: — Thank you, Minister. Just a couple of quick follow-ups to your very detailed and complete answer. I think you mentioned that the federal health info system, Infoway, had

chosen Saskatchewan to take the lead on providing a registry system. By taking the lead is there then federal dollars being kind of contributed to this project? And is that special dollars? Is it included then or how does it offset the \$12 million commitment or is it in addition to it?

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Chair, the funds that come in are in addition to the 12.4 that's spent on SHIN. And I can give you the amounts for the last two years. In '01-02, we got zero dollars from them because the funding hadn't . . . they hadn't figured out exactly how to do this. In '02-03 we got \$191,706. And '03-04, we got \$1,000,596 . . . yes, \$1,596,046. And this money is specifically granted to this particular project for the work and so therefore, it's in addition to the amount that's budgeted in our provincial amount for IT.

Mr. Gantfoer: — Minister, is there in any of these specific projects — and you outlined, you know, the pharmacy-physician registry, labs, and different kind of modules or components of this — has there been any discussion about the possible commercialization of these kinds of software? You know, if it's well done and it's very good, is there opportunities to have compensation either through the federal government for other jurisdictions in Canada to use it or other jurisdictions in other countries?

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Chair, the purpose of the Canada Health Infoway project is to make sure that all of these things that are developed by specific provinces are part of the Canadian system and that are therefore shared across the country, so we have no proprietary interest in what's developed there.

Some of the other things that we've used, we've gone to contracts and have different companies come and provide this service and if we end up with some innovations or whatever, I'm sure it comes out in another operation. But there's no intent to get into the business of selling some of these things.

But if in fact we have some good ideas that a particular company who's providing the service wants to use, there may be some ability to receive a small amount of money. But that's not the intent or the purpose. Our goal is to provide a good network, good service.

Mr. Gantfoer: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Time is moving on very quickly, and I would like to certainly touch on an area that I think has been increasingly important as time has gone on and that sort of ties again to the human resources issue, and that is the availability of medical professionals in this province. And some of it may have an impact with our competitive position with our neighbours.

And you alluded to the fact that we may have some ability to diminish the inflationary rate of health care spending in this province. But it has to be in a Canadian context in other jurisdictions because if other jurisdictions are having remuneration packages that are much more generous than what we are doing, that potentially has impact on the availability of personnel.

But, Mr. Minister, a couple of things. I think going back to July 31 2003, there was a release that the government announced

enrolment increases in the Nursing Education Program of Saskatchewan will increase over the next three years. And it said in this, and I quote:

... first-year enrolment will increase by 25 seats in ... ('03-04) academic year, followed by 40 seats in 2004, and (then) another 35 in 2005.

Where are we at the implementation of this, and what exact number of seat increases have we achieved to date?

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Chair, the member asked about the Nursing Education Program of Saskatchewan, and our goal as was stated last summer was that by the fall of '05 we would have 400 people in the Nursing Education Program in each class. And the numbers were for '02-03, 300; '03-04, 325; '04-05, 365; and for '05-06 will be 400.

And so we're having some challenges around getting sufficient faculty, and if you will remember that last week or the week before we announced a number of bursaries for nurses to go and get graduates studies so that we can anticipate and deal with some of the demands we have on faculty. We're also dealing with some of the space concerns, but we are fairly certain that everything will work so that the '05-06 class will have 400 students in that opening class as we planned.

Mr. Gantefoer: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. I appreciate that that is a reiteration of the commitment made July 31, 2003. My question was, is what exact numbers have been achieved to date?

(16:45)

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Chair, the way the increase will take place is that in '04, which is the September class, there'll be 32 new seats in Regina. And then in September '05, there'll be 18 more new seats in Regina, which is 50 seats. As well, there will be 50 new seats in the second degree program stream which will start in the spring of 2005. But that's the goal, and it's basically tooling up; we're getting everything ready for that as was planned.

Mr. Gantefoer: — Thank you very much, Mr. Minister. So then as I understood you, there's 32 in Regina this fall, starting this fall, and there'll be a further 18 next fall for a total of 50. And then there will be 50 seats next year in the second degree program; that's at Saskatoon I believe. Is that correct? Okay, thank you very much, Mr. Minister.

The other area that I would like to talk about in terms of personnel is particularly technicians and radiologists for MRI tests — both the taking of the tests and the diagnosis. My understanding is currently that there are two MRI units in Saskatoon and one in Regina, and in this budget there's promised a second unit to be established in Regina.

Mr. Minister, I wonder if you could provide me with information as to how many hours a day in a ... or a week — whatever the way you compile these statistics — that the existing MRI machines are being utilized in the province in both Saskatoon and in Regina?

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Chair, the operating times for the current MRIs, there's one at the Royal University Hospital, and it's presently operating on a 5/5/4 basis at fifteen and a half hours a day, which is an expansion since budget day. Saskatoon City Hospital is operating at a 5/5/4 basis at ten and a half hours today with the plan that they will increase the numbers of hours in August of this year. And the Regina General Hospital is operating on a 5/5/5 basis, 5 days a week at 16 hours a day, depending on some of the staffing levels. That's when everything's working fine, that's what they go.

This still obviously gives us more capacity for increase, but clearly with the new MRI in Regina that will give us some more opportunity for further diagnostics here.

Mr. Gantefoer: — Thank you, Mr. Minister, and I appreciate, you know, the fact that we're moving up in terms of the hours a day that these machines are being used. And I certainly am not an expert in this, but I understand that the machines themselves basically don't shut down, that the technology or the nature of the machines is they're energized or whatever the right word is 24 hours — 24/7 really — that it isn't a question of shutting them down for maintenance or those types of things. They're essentially a machine that is on all the time and that really the limiting factor in terms of running these machines has nothing to do with the physical machine. It has to do with the personnel. Is that largely accurate?

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Chair, the practiced standard for use of the MRI across the country is 16 hours a day, and then you look at getting another facility. There is some down time that's required each week for maintenance and calibration of the machine. But clearly the main limiting factor is the human resource factor. And there are some issues obviously around times of the day for the patients and when they would maybe come.

But practically, the main issue relates to 16 hours seems to be the standard. And we're moving to that with these machines, and then we're going to expand, obviously, in Regina.

Mr. Gantefoer: — Minister, I'd been told by an individual that knows some of these things that by and large there is almost a 24/7 availability outside of routine maintenance that occurs from time to time, that it is more ... The practical reality is you can use the machines more than 16 hours a day and that the real limiting factor is personnel to work the shifts.

I think that if you gave the choice to a person who is on a waiting list for an MRI and very anxious about having that done in a timely fashion, I'm sure if you asked them if they could be present at the lab at 3 o'clock in the morning or have to wait for 20 weeks, the choice would be pretty clear. People would be willing to come at what would seem to be un-normal hours in order to have the test done.

So I would encourage the department and the minister to look at, you know, making sure that the machines are used as much as they physically can be, irrespective of personnel. But the personnel thing leads me to the next issue.

If the problem of operating the machines even approaching the 16 hours a day is a shortage of personnel, what steps is the

minister taking to make sure that we have the appropriate personnel in order to operate another machine 5/5/5, 16 hours a day or whatever is needed, in order to get our wait times diminished because I understand that the personnel issue doesn't change just by buying another machine.

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — At the present time, there are no vacant positions as far as what's there. What we do have though . . . And I think the specific question actually relates to the bursary programs. In a couple . . . Well two and a half, three years ago, it was very clear that we needed some more staff in this area, and so the Saskatchewan health bursaries were made available. There were five students who accepted bursaries that have return service provisions to them.

There's two of the five have graduated. One's employed in Saskatoon, and the other is employed in Regina. There are three more students who are in their programs that will be completing them in the next few months. And we are hoping to have them slotted into this increased service that we have in both Saskatoon and Regina. Practically we'll continue to monitor this very carefully to make sure we have sufficient staff.

Mr. Gantfoer: — Minister, in terms of the program you have, you indicated five individuals that are in various stages of their program with the return service bursary program. Are you looking at the demographics of our current technician force and things of that nature to ascertain how many bursaries we need in individual years going forward?

And also is there been an assessment about what it's going to take in order to get our wait times down to medically acceptable levels because I think everyone acknowledges that the current wait times in the 20-month period of time are unacceptable, that we have to get this diagnostic imaging done much quicker so that if something serious is indeed confirmed by this imaging, that appropriate intervention steps can be taken in a timely way.

And an additional question is, there is no program to meet the qualifications for MRI technologists in Saskatchewan, I believe. Has there been some consideration of purchasing some seats in another jurisdiction's training programs or something of that nature to make sure that we have an adequate supply?

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Thank you for those questions. I'll start with the answer to the last question first and then work my way back.

We here in Saskatchewan do purchase positions at the Red River College in Winnipeg where they provide this training. Also I would encourage all members here and those people who are watching from their homes too . . . the fact we have five bursaries available now for people in this particular area who would have the qualifications as it often is built on some other education. And so we have the people that are in the programs now, but we do have bursaries available for the fall and encourage people to apply because this, I think, can provide a good career for many of our young people.

On the specific issue around looking at the demographics of the workforce, that's in fact exactly what we've been doing to make sure that we end up with the appropriate planning and getting people working in this area, and it's the whole area of medical

diagnostics which includes MRI, CT, ultrasound, and many other things.

The Chair: — I recognize the Government House Leader.

Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen: — Mr. Chair, I move that the committee will report progress on the estimates for the Department of Health.

The Chair: — The Government House Leader has moved that the committee report progress in the estimates for the Department of Health. Is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — That is carried. It now being near 5 p.m., this House stands recessed until 7 p.m.

The Assembly recessed until 19:00.

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