



FIRST SESSION - TWENTY-FIFTH LEGISLATURE

of the

**Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan**

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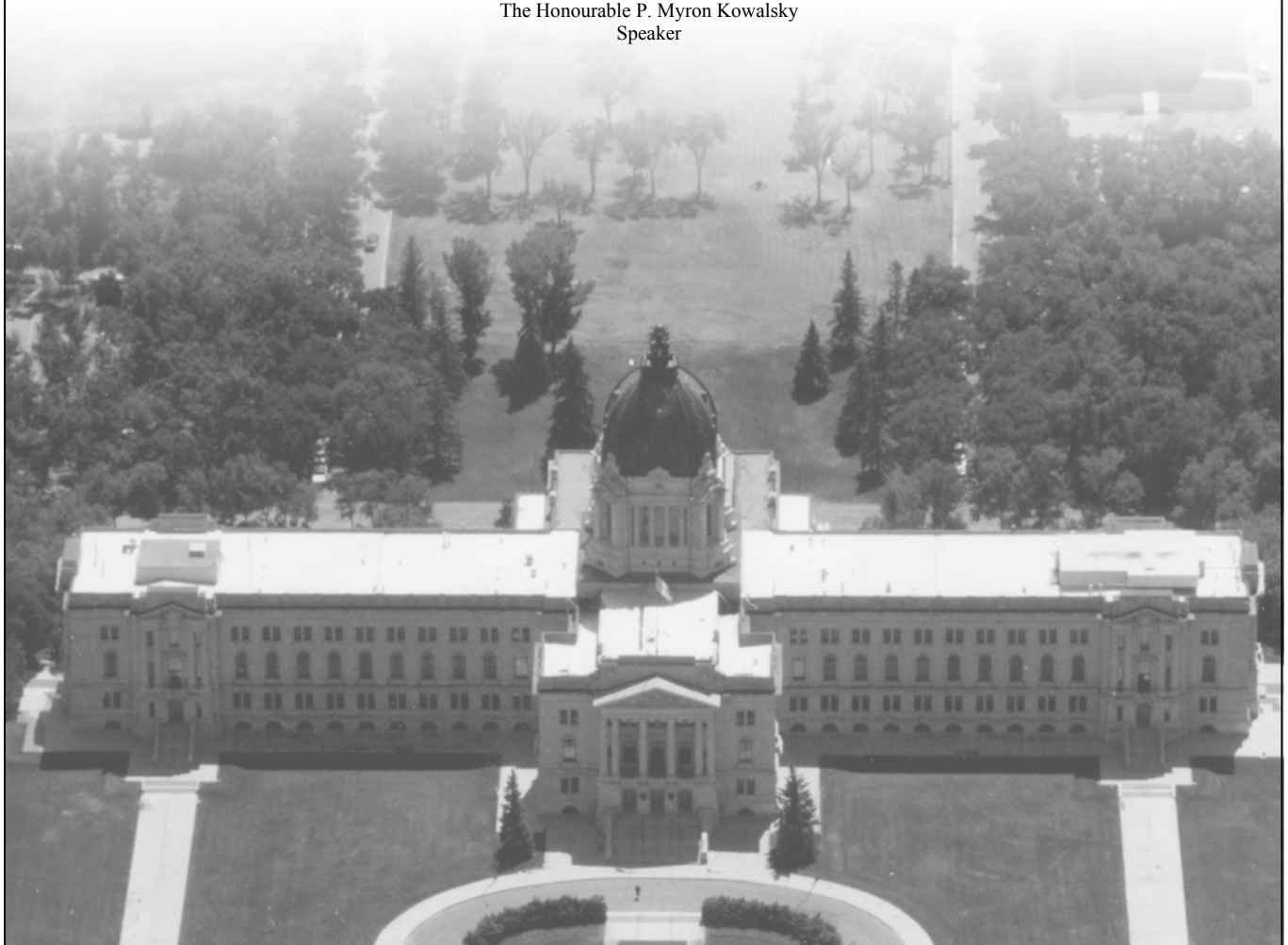
**DEBATES  
and  
PROCEEDINGS**

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(HANSARD)

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Speaker



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EVENING SITTING

COMMITTEE OF FINANCE

General Revenue Fund  
Agriculture, Food and Rural Revitalization  
Vote 1

Subvote (AG01)

**The Deputy Chair:** — Order. The business before the committee is estimates for Agriculture, Food and Rural Revitalization. Would the minister introduce his officials.

**Hon. Mr. Wartman:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. I would like to introduce, to my immediate left, Deputy Minister Doug Matthies. Immediately behind Doug is Assistant Deputy Minister Hal Cushon, and to my right is Assistant Deputy Minister Louise Greenberg. Immediately behind me is Assistant Deputy Minister Maryellen Carlson and — where's Stan? — Stan Benjamin, acting general manager for the Saskatchewan Crop Insurance Corporation.

And I will start down at the far end tonight. Dave Boehm, director of financial programs. And Rick Burton, director of policy branch. And Greg Haase, director of the lands branch. Jack Zepp, director of business services, agri-business development branch; and Ross Johnson. And sorry — I missed Karen Aulie, who is immediately behind Hal Cushon. And Karen is the director of corporate services branch.

**The Deputy Chair:** — Thank you. The question before the committee is subvote (AG01), administration. Is the committee ready for the question?

I recognize the member from Thunder Creek.

**Mr. Stewart:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you, Mr. Minister, for the introductions. And I'd like to take this opportunity to welcome your officials here this evening. I know that they are always very helpful and we look forward to their assistance again this evening. And I will turn the first few questions over to my colleague from Last Mountain-Touchwood.

**The Deputy Chair:** — I recognize the member from Last Mountain-Touchwood.

**Mr. Hart:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. I would ask the member from Moose Jaw North to repeat his comment so that I could respond to it.

Minister, with the changes made to the . . . well the elimination of the extension branch, you said that you would be providing a service, a call centre I believe that would be located in Moose Jaw whereby farm people and other people who are seeking advice or information I guess could call and get answers and that sort of thing. I wonder if you could give us a status report as to how that call centre . . . how many people you have, what type of training and background do they have, and so on.

**Hon. Mr. Wartman:** — Thank you for the question. The

structure there at the Moose Jaw call centre, the manager is an agrologist and we have eight agrologists representing a wide variety of knowledge and understanding in the fields that are necessary. And as well we have four front-line people who would be the equivalent of the rural service reps who used to be in the extension offices, so fairly knowledgeable on a wide range, would be able to help with referrals and so forth.

In the first week of operation at the knowledge centre, we handled 486 calls — 96 on Monday, 81 Tuesday, 92 on Wednesday, 101 on Thursday, and 98 on Friday. Of these 468 calls, 166 were handled completely by the resource agents and 302 were transferred to departmental specialists or other program areas within the department. We also handled 13 e-mail requests during the week.

So there's been detail on all of these. But we think that to this point, the knowledge centre is serving the purpose quite well.

**Mr. Hart:** — Minister, you mentioned that the managers and agrologists, and you have eight agrologists on staff. Is eight the number that you will have or will you be adding more agrologists later on?

And if you could perhaps give us an indication as to what the background of these agrologists are. Are they some of the former extension agrologists, people who have broad experience in answering inquiries and finding appropriate information for those people that call?

And also, I guess, there is a bit of concern in that the service reps or non-professional people that are there that are answering the phones that they are not answering questions that they're not trained and educated for. I believe there is a requirement under the Saskatchewan Institute of Agrologists Act where it is agrologists that need to be the people that answer the questions that deal with agricultural issues, whereas the service people can certainly refer individuals to a Web site or provide a very basic answer to various questions that really anyone could answer.

So if you can just expand on the question as to whether you will have . . . is eight the number of agrologists and what type of background and training they have.

**Hon. Mr. Wartman:** — Again, thank you for the question. We are . . . there is still currently a competition. We expect that some of the agrologists formally employed by extension will be coming into the system.

The eight areas that we will have agrologists covering completely are: beef forage specialist, forage conversion specialist, ruminant nutrition specialist, production economics specialist, integrated cropping management systems specialist, soil nutrient management specialist, cropping management specialist, and bio-processing specialist.

And as I mentioned previously the manager of the centre will also be an agrologist and the service people who would be the front-line people will also have the departmental listing since we have a significant number of agrologists employed in the department and they will also — if there is a specific need —

they will be able to connect the people to the agrologists in the department as well.

**Mr. Hart:** — In the, I believe it was the department or the extension branch, there was a position of a farm management or business management specialists. Now have those positions been also eliminated? Because when I look down the list of specialists and areas that you have at your call centre, that's one area that isn't covered.

And I am wondering what is happening in that whole area of business and farm management specialist and the extension information that those individuals have in the past provided to farm operators in this province.

**Hon. Mr. Wartman:** — You'll know that we have nine regional agribusiness development offices that are being structured, and currently we have six agribusiness development officers. We had six previously in the extension program, and we have retained those six and they are currently focused on renewal. So they'll be directing people into the federal programs that fit in with the APF (agricultural policy framework).

And I think that it's an area that we want to monitor, see how much direct use there is of the six. If there's need for some restructuring we have the flexibility to be able to do that as well.

**Mr. Hart:** — So, Minister, then what you're saying is that if a call is received at the call centre in Moose Jaw that deals with farm business matters, that inquiry would be directed to these specialists at these other regional centres, and they would be dealt by those individuals from those regional centres then. Is that . . . You're nodding, so I would indicate that my statement's correct.

I guess when we look at the elimination of the extension service, a service that's been around for a long period of time and has provided a valuable service to the producers of this province, and to see these type of changes . . . I guess time will tell whether we, how great the loss is going to be.

And the area that I think is going to suffer . . . I mean a lot of, as you indicated, that there are a number of agrologists that a producer can consult, supplied by crop input suppliers and those sorts of things — I know as a producer myself, I certainly do use these private consultants a lot of times because they're there, they're handy, they know their stuff—but every once in a while, you want an independent opinion and I think that's where we're going to perhaps see a bit of a shortfall, and that sort of thing.

And another area that I would suggest that we are going to see a loss is in the area of new initiatives and helping rural groups and farm groups, groups like marketing clubs and production clubs and so on, that want to pursue a new venture and that sort of thing. The extension agrologists played a vital role in that area.

And I know, speaking from personal experience, I spent a number of years way back when, when the board advising the ag rep, as they were called at that time, was called the district

board, and then there was a change and the ag rep became the extension agrologist, and then there was the ag board that went along as an advisory board to the extension agrologist.

And I know that I was also part of a marketing club that wanted to . . . saw a need for a fairly major seminar in our area and I can say that the extension agrologist at that time was playing a very vital role. That individual was the person that went and contacted the guest speakers, suggested guest speakers for various topics and so on. And I don't really see anybody doing that now and in the future. And I think this is an area where perhaps this change is going to have a negative impact, Minister.

But I guess time will tell and we will have to see. The world does move on and so on, but there is still that need out there when there is a group that has, would like to pursue some new initiatives, some new idea. You know, quite often the agrologists attached to private businesses, it's not their areas and so on. So I wonder if you would care to comment on that, Minister.

**Hon. Mr. Wartman:** — Thank you. There is two things. First of all, I would ask the Page to pick up brochures so that we can pass that over to the member opposite. This will be in a mailout to all the farmers so they will have a better understanding of the programs available as well.

But I do want to say that in the regional offices we expect that our agrologists there will not be behind the desks there. The knowledge centre people will be handling the calls, but we do expect the agrologists in the regional centres to be out in the community actually working with those groups who are developing businesses, who want to move in some new directions. And they will have the expertise that is needed to help them.

I think the significant change that people will see — and we do believe that to a large extent it is covered by the private sector agrologists or the company agrologists — but the diminished area will be the direct one-to-one, on-farm visits which did happen to some extent. And outside of that we expect them to be out there engaged in the communities, working with groups and helping to provide information and support for new agribusiness development.

**Mr. Hart:** — Well thank you, Minister, it's certainly encouraging to hear that the specialists in the regional offices will be filling some of that void.

It's my understanding that the extension agrologists played a role — in fact a fairly major role — in the department's forecasting for, particularly for pests for the new year. Things like the grasshopper forecast, the wheat midge forecast — how does your department plan on handling that?

(19:15)

It's important that producers have a early warning system for these pests and they, producers themselves can through their own experience and observance of infestation in their local area get a sense of that, but it's very . . . Like as a producer myself I can tell you that it's very helpful to have these provincial

forecasts, so you have a sense of how big that problem is, how big are the . . . how great a portion of the province it covers.

And so if the extension agrologists were gathering a lot of that information and they're no longer there, how is your department going to handle those forecasts?

**Hon. Mr. Wartman:** — The funding for the surveys came from Crop Insurance previously. It'd been a very vital, important piece of the knowledge that they needed in order to do their work. And so we want the forecasting to continue.

Crop Insurance will continue to provide the funding, and the department will provide the staff resources that are necessary to enable us to get that kind of forecasting because it's vital not only for each of the producers but it's very vital for Crop Insurance to have that information as well.

**Mr. Hart:** — Thank you, Minister. I'm glad to hear that those forecasts will continue in the future because as I have indicated they are valuable tools, and I can well imagine they'd be very valuable to the Crop Insurance Corporation.

And speaking of crop insurance, there are a whole number of things that I guess we could talk about tonight, but I will just zero in on an area. I don't really want to get started on what I feel is wrong with our crop insurance program. We could be here for a while, and I know I have a number of colleagues that would like to ask some questions in estimates.

But this is something that was brought to my attention I guess shortly after the information packages were mailed to producers, and it has to do with father-son situations where a father wants to bring a son or daughter, a family member into a farming operation. And the information I was given — and I believe that in most cases, in fact perhaps maybe all cases — it's a joint contract, or the family member is covered, his part of the operation is usually covered by the father's contract. I know crop insurance in the past has had some problems with . . . they felt it wasn't a wise way to go to have too many contracts within a family.

But the concerns that were raised are centred around a situation where, after a few years perhaps, the family member was going to set off on their own in their own farm business, and the contract would have to be split. And the father would have a . . . It would be to his disadvantage to have a family member start with him because if that contract was to be split in the future, there would be a reduction in the experience discount and coverage levels and so on.

And I'm wondering . . . Perhaps maybe some of my facts aren't completely correct, but I'm relaying the information that I've gotten from constituents, and I believe they're fairly accurate. I'm wondering what the reasoning is and why should the father or father and mother — the main farm as such — be penalized just because they want to start a family member into the farming industry?

**Hon. Mr. Wartman:** — With regard to the transfer for credits, the rules have tightened up a little bit, and we'll see some limits on the ability to transfer the father's credits to the child who is taking over.

We want to . . . I mean there was some contract splitting going on. We were seeing the contracts going up and yet not broadening the coverage. So I think that overall what we're seeing is that there was, there certainly was some concerns there, and so we want to monitor it. But it just limits the amount of credits that can be transferred; it's not cutting them out altogether.

**Mr. Hart:** — Minister, do the same rules apply to farm operations, to existing farm operations that are perhaps operating under a joint venture and if they should . . . or joint operation as such? And if they should at some time down the road decide that they would like to just split their business and go back to the way they operated originally, would those two parties involved in that type of an arrangement, would they fall under these rules?

**Hon. Mr. Wartman:** — Yes, the answer is that it would apply to a joint operation as well. And basically what I think people were finding that they might join together for a while and then split the contract, and one would continue on at the preferred rates that had built up over the years, and the other would have to take a bit of a reduction now under the new rules because they were both tending to go for the higher rates. We think this is probably a more equitable way to do it in that one of them would have been building up the credits previously.

**Mr. Hart:** — Minister, these penalties apply regardless of whether that contract actually ever experienced or was ever in a claim position? I can understand if a contract has been in a claim position and the parties involved in this contract decide for whatever reason to split the contract, that perhaps there may be some logic and rationale into penalizing the parties that are of that contract. But if the contract and the contract holders have never been in a claim position, I don't really see the rationale, and I'm wondering what the corporation's rationale is to impose these penalties.

**Hon. Mr. Wartman:** — This is the . . . the difference is not really seen as a penalty, but it's really trying to make sure that the premium that is paid and the coverage that any producer can have actually reflects that producer's . . . what their experience is, what they have shown that they are capable of doing. And ultimately what we're hoping is that this will make a more experienced-based program, and we won't see some of the slippages that we have seen in the past.

**Mr. Hart:** — Minister . . .

**Hon. Mr. Wartman:** — One other . . . Sorry, sorry, Member. There is one other piece that I did want to mention, and that is if, when the applications are made, if the producer feels that they're not getting . . . you know, that the split shouldn't be changed, they can speak to the representative and ask for a review. And in fact if they feel that their production ability is demonstrated, they may have a review and in fact may get the premium on their yields as well.

**Mr. Hart:** — Minister, I think probably for myself and other members to get a clearer picture of how you're . . . this new system is set up, let's assume that we have the home farm — let's call it that — where the father and mother and other family members are operating. And there is a young individual, a

young family member that goes out and either buys or rents some land with the idea of establishing their own farm. And they need to have crop insurance and have this young individual added to the crop insurance contract because I know if I was the father and I have a son that is farming I'd like to get him involved in the business aspect, not merely in the production end of things.

And so this farm goes along, and it grows and so on. And let's say a period of five years transpires, and the family member decides that perhaps he would like to strike out on his own. He now has a viable unit and there is, you know, there's families that just feel that's better that way.

So what are the implications to both parties in this case? Say the father was at a 30 per cent experience discount and yield levels were, you know, 15 per cent above area average yield or whatever would be normal with that type of a yield or experience discount, and the farm had some reasonably decent production years so that there was no claims ever on that total farm unit.

Now when these two parties decide that we're going to split, the son's going to take . . . you know, have a contract in his own name and carry . . . he is independent of his father's farm. How does this scenario unwind from that joint venture, and what penalties apply? I understand that the father is penalized if that contract splits. If that in fact is the case, what's the rationale because that certainly doesn't give families extra incentive to bring family members into their operation if they know sometime upon dissolution of the joint contract that they're going to be penalized?

(19:30)

**Hon. Mr. Wartman:** — The major emphasis is to make sure that people pay the right price and get the right coverage based on their experience. That's what the focus is, and in the 2004 crop insurance guide there are tables available.

Let's just say for example that the father had a 50 per cent discount. They've gone 10, 13 years without concern, so they've accumulated credits over that period. Then the child who was . . . And they were coming to the point of splitting. Then the child who had taken on land as well and shared credits would then move three steps down. In this case, if the father was at a 50 per cent discount, three steps down would be 26 per cent then for the young person. So they would get a 26 per cent discount, and then over the next period of years would then by their own production have the opportunity to improve their credits.

So it isn't that they start out at zero, but when the change comes they go three steps down according to the chart. I'll just give you one other example. If the father had — say, over six years of accumulated credits — got a 20 per cent discount, then three steps down from that in the chart would be 8 per cent. So the child would get an 8 per cent discount.

**Mr. Hart:** — Minister, just for clarification in the situation you described, does the father also step down, or is it just the son that steps down three . . . loses three credits?

**Hon. Mr. Wartman:** — It would be just the person who had not had the proven crop experience. So the father would retain whatever their original credits were.

**The Deputy Chair:** — I recognize the member from Humboldt.

**Ms. Harpauer:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, the question that I have for the minister is a follow-up on a written question that I had asked earlier in session, and it had to do with the number of extension agrologists that were employed by the government prior to April 1 and how many are employed after May 1.

The minister chose to ignore the word, extension, and I don't think I need to define that for him. Could he please answer the question this time? Because he said there were 157 agrologist positions, but the question was, how many extension agrologists. So would he mind answering that tonight, please?

**Hon. Mr. Wartman:** — Well I think the reason why the written question was answered as it was is because the extension agrologist program is finished. There are zero extension agrologists available.

And what the written question was attempting, or the answer to the written question was attempting to do is to give you a clear sense of what we were dealing with in terms of available staff within the department. And April 2004 we had 157 agrologist positions within the department. And we expect that we will have approximately 141 agrologist positions as of May 1. So extension agrologists — zero, and it's because of the transitioning of the program.

**Ms. Harpauer:** — I want to thank the minister for answering the second part of the question that I had asked earlier in session. The first part of the question was how many extension agrologists were there prior to the terminating of the program. So now it's zero. What was it prior to terminating the program?

In addition I would like to know the cost savings that the minister incurred in his department by closing a great number of rural service centres and firing all of these employees.

**Hon. Mr. Wartman:** — There were 32 agrologists previous to the changes — extension agrologists, pardon me.

**Ms. Harpauer:** — And the second question that I had for the minister was, what was the cost savings of closing the number of rural service centres and firing the employees?

**Hon. Mr. Wartman:** — With this change in service we are saving \$2 million.

**Ms. Harpauer:** — Of that \$2 million, how much is the minister going to have to spend on severance packages?

**Hon. Mr. Wartman:** — Under the collective bargaining agreement, the employees have choices. They have opportunities to bump; there will be some who will get early retirement; there will be some who will go into the new positions, and some who will go onto the recall list. And so we know that there will be some costs involved in that. That's ongoing right

now. And over the period, we do expect to have savings of \$2 million.

**Ms. Harpauer:** — The minister can't have a savings of \$2 million ongoing if there is severance packages and other settlements that need to be made. It's going to eat away at the \$2 million. So when will the minister know how much it's going to cost for the firing of the employees?

**Hon. Mr. Wartman:** — By the end of June we will have a pretty clear handle on what costs there may be applied. But as the department has looked at this, the determination is that the ongoing savings will be in the range of \$2 million per year.

**Ms. Harpauer:** — I thank the minister for that answer. How much of that ongoing savings of \$2 million is going to be eaten away by honouring the lease agreements that they have for the offices that they've closed?

**Hon. Mr. Wartman:** — All but six of the lease agreements will be due by 2005 and they are covered outside of the \$2 million. And so we cannot . . . Until we find out what happens in terms of re-leasing — and SPMC (Saskatchewan Property Management Corporation) is working on that — we will not be able to give a figure. But it is our estimation that, with only six remaining after 2005, that we will certainly have very, very little added expense at the end of that period.

**Ms. Harpauer:** — I thank the minister. It would be very interesting if the minister would provide for us — I'm not asking him to do that tonight — but if he would provide for us then a breakdown of what this actually was in savings. And he's saying that it's \$2 million in savings but that's after the leases are paid, that's after the severance packages are paid. So what was the savings and then what was the expenses of those savings? Because it seems like he's going to wrap everything up and still come out saying, well we still saved \$2 million even though there's a number or quite a list of costs that come with this.

So could the minister also tell me if the farmer is going to be able to walk into these remaining offices and personally bring their issues to an expert within these offices that will discuss these issues or if he is now bound to phone, fax, or e-mail?

**Hon. Mr. Wartman:** — For '04-05, I think we had indicated in the release, and I'll say again that for '04-05 we have budgeted in for lease costs \$574,000, and then at the end of '05 there are only six leases that will be left and we do anticipate that SPMC will find renters for many if not all of those. We hope that they will.

And you are asking for a greater breakdown in terms of the savings. That, with regard to salaries, the figure would be 1.723 million ongoing savings in salaries, and in operating about 277,000 which brings us to the 2 million.

Now you are also asking about whether or not a farmer could just walk into one of the agribusiness development offices to seek some information. If it were technical information with regard to crops, etc., we would anticipate and expect that they would call the call centre, that they would be getting that information from the agrologists who would be there with

corporations or private sector. But if they have those kinds of technical concerns, they could phone into the knowledge centre for support.

If they were looking at new initiatives, new business initiatives, then indeed the right place to go would be to the agribusiness development offices.

(19:45)

**Ms. Harpauer:** — I would take it from the minister's answer that basically no, that it will no longer be an office that the farmer could walk in and bring his weed that he could not identify or to bring a concern that it's . . . of something that's happening in his field to have addressed or looked at. So I would assume from the minister's answer that that service is completed.

The next question that I have for the minister is in a different area. I wrote a letter dated April 20 and I began the letter by highlighting a shift that I had noticed in the Crop Insurance office, that I had found prior to that very helpful in helping me with constituent issues but no longer seemed to want to help with any specific constituent's issues.

And then I brought that to the minister's attention in the first page, but I also wrote an extended detailed issue of a specific constituent and the difficulties that he was having. And I wanted to bring them to the minister's attention so that he could address them personally.

I received a letter back from the minister that was dated March 31, but my office didn't receive it till April 7. And the minister spent his entire bulk of his letter basically reprimanding me for daring to approach the Crop Insurance office directly, that if I had any concerns with crop insurance or other issues that I should direct them through his office and his office only.

The final sentence of his letter said:

I would also request in the future you direct your questions to my office and I will provide you with the response.

Well the letter that I wrote to the minister, Mr. Chair, had a page and a half describing this particular producer's issues. It was a crop insurance issue. The producer's name was Jack Zenert. It told the minister where his farm was located; it gave the minister Mr. Zenert's crop insurance contract number; it gave details of Mr. Zenert's concern.

But the minister's concern was only that I dared to contact the Crop Insurance office directly. He has yet to address the issue of Mr. Zenert. So this constituent has been left high and dry with his issue being unanswered or unaddressed by the minister because the minister was too interested in the fact that I dared to contact the Crop Insurance office directly.

When will Mr. Zenert get a reply to his issue that I brought to the minister's attention in a letter dated February 20? Perhaps he should check his garbage can and see if he can find it because the only thing he was interested in was reprimanding me.

**Hon. Mr. Wartman:** — The first question that you asked at the beginning was again with regard to someone coming into the agribiz development office, and you're correct — the answer is no. It's not like the old offices operated. It is my understanding that if there was something that was quite significantly new, something like the diamond back moth infestation or something that . . . of course they could bring that in and they would be concerned for the area and would be dealt with.

Now with regard to the issue around an MLA (Member of the Legislative Assembly) writing with particular information about any client of Crop Insurance, the issue that Crop Insurance raises is around privacy of information. And when MLAs do refer those concerns about any of their constituents, then the issue would be dealt with. It could be raised, it could be . . . We could recommend that the Crop Insurance re-look at it, contact the particular person. But in terms of the ability of my office to get back to any third party, and that includes MLAs, with direct information about somebody's file, unless they have provided clear written permission we cannot do that. And so that's the issue.

But certainly if you . . . In terms of writing to my office, we will carry those concerns forward, and it will be the responsibility then of the Crop Insurance to deal directly with the individuals involved.

**Ms. Harpauer:** — Perhaps the minister didn't hear me, but I said previously that I wrote the letter on February 20. The response that I got, beyond saying that basically I'm not entitled to talk to Crop Insurance office directly, was:

I would also request in the future that you direct your questions to my office and I will provide you with the response.

The question was, this was February 20, the date today I believe is May 10. When will the minister respond to Mr. Zenert?

**Hon. Mr. Wartman:** — Generally it is the practice of my office and the department to, once the information comes forward, to immediately pass that to Crop Insurance, and they respond directly to the customer, not to the MLA. And if this particular case the customer has not been responded to, certainly I am concerned about that, and we will follow up on that immediately.

**The Deputy Chair:** — I recognize the member from Kelvington-Wadena.

**Ms. Draude:** — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair. To the minister and to his officials, thank you for the opportunity to bring forth some issues from people from the Kelvington-Wadena constituency.

The first case I have is . . . again this is a crop insurance world, and this is from a couple of women who are farming in the Kelvington-Wadena constituency. They've applied for crop insurance coverage, and they received a call from the office at Preeceville saying that the women and their partners would have to meet with Crop Insurance officials. Actually it's tomorrow they're supposed to meet, and the women have to prove that they are farmers. They have to prove that they are

making the decisions, and they have to prove they are doing the farm work. And, Mr. Minister, there are lots of women in this province who are actually are farmers. And at that time they are . . . they do all the work on the farm. They can make the same decisions that men make, and they are quite capable of being farmers. I have never yet heard any man having to come in and prove that he is the farmer in this province, but the women are expected to do that.

I had a discussion with the minister with the Status of Women, and she said that this government was fully behind women in all walks of life. Well this . . . the women that are in my constituency that are concerned in this case are very upset with the fact that they have to prove that they do the farm work and that they have to prove that they are the sole decision makers. They own the land. They have permit books, and the land's in their name, and they file income tax. They do work with their partners, as many farm women do, and the decisions are made in a group, as in most farm operations they are.

Why in the world would this minister and this government decide that the women had to prove they were the farmers in Saskatchewan?

**Hon. Mr. Wartman:** — What is key for eligibility for crop insurance is that there are three areas of independence that anyone, regardless of gender, must be able to prove. That is financial, legal, and operational independence.

And it makes no difference whether the applicant is male or female. They all have to fill out the same forms. If the supervisor has any concerns or questions — and it doesn't matter again whether it's male or female — then they must come in and go through the process, look at the questions in detail. And it truly . . . the process is set up so that there is no person or gender bias in it at all.

**Ms. Draude:** — Mr. Minister, I had indicated to you just a couple of minutes ago that these women own the land. It is in their name, not only with the bank, but with the RM (rural municipality). They have a permit book. It is in their name. And they file income tax saying they are farmers. So they fit all three of those criteria.

So why do they have to have their husbands in tow with them tomorrow when they meet with the crop insurance officials in Preeceville? Tell me why.

**Hon. Mr. Wartman:** — As I indicated very clearly that the system is set up so that there is no gender bias in it. And it is our expectation, of any of the managers operating in the system, that they will operate with it in that way. And if there are particular concerns that are raised with individuals, I would certainly like to know that through my office, and we will deal with it if there are things that are not legitimate.

That said, it is our expectation that this would not make a difference, whether they were male or female applicants, but that the manager is simply seeking confirmation, affirmation, of the items that were brought forward. And we will follow up if the member would like. Please feel free to give us the names and we will follow up on that immediately.



**Ms. Draude:** — Mr. Minister, I will be pleased to do that because tomorrow morning these women have to be at the Crop Insurance office in Preeceville. So they're going to bring along their permit book. They're going to bring along their income tax files. They're going to bring along the title that says they have the land, probably in ownership with a bank, but they're not going to bring their husbands.

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

**Ms. Draude:** — They are not going to have somebody towing along behind them saying, yes, I'm a farmer. So I would like to hear the minister say, so that tomorrow morning they can take the minister's words right out of the Assembly and say it's okay that I didn't bring hubby along today because he's busy doing something else.

**Hon. Mr. Wartman:** — Excuse me. I would like to just get some clarity because I'm not sure, but did you say that either in written form or in some verbal communication that the manager said that the husbands had to come along?

**Ms. Draude:** — Yes, verbal communications. It was said that their husbands were supposed to be there.

**Hon. Mr. Wartman:** — It is absolutely clear to this minister and this department that the women who are seeking this coverage are quite free to go to this meeting without husbands present. They are . . . What is necessary is that they establish the three levels of independence, and they don't have to have anybody there with them in order to prove that.

**Ms. Draude:** — Thank you, Mr. Minister. I'm sure that these women are going to be pleased that tomorrow they can just take the handwritten note, that you'll probably provide me tonight, along to the office to show that it's okay that they just bring this information and apply for their crop insurance by themselves.

The next issue that I have, Mr. Minister, is regarding big game. And I'm wondering, just to start with, if you can give me an idea of how much money the province . . . what the province gets from the federal government for big game money each year. I understand that it's a separate chunk of money, separate from crop insurance, and it's paid directly from the federal government.

(20:00)

**Hon. Mr. Wartman:** — In terms of your previous question and your concerns about the office — in Preeceville, is it? — having the correct information, the manager of Crop Insurance is sitting one door over, one desk over from me, and we'll make sure that that is well understood. Thank you.

And with regard to big game, with the signing of the APF we are now in a 60/40 arrangement with the federal government. This is demand driven around big game, so in terms of the claims and the needs, then that determines the amount of money that will be coming in from the federal government on a 60 per cent basis from them, 40 per cent from the province.

**Ms. Draude:** — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Is this new? Did the federal government at one time pay all of the big game

insurance claims that came forward?

**Hon. Mr. Wartman:** — At one time all of the coverage for big game was funded by the province. Over years we negotiated a 50/50 arrangement with the federal government. And now under the APF it's getting a little bit better; we're now at a 60/40 arrangement.

**Ms. Draude:** — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Minister, I have some constituents who are concerned about a crop insurance claim that took place in 2002. They had felt . . . They actually received some money through crop insurance, and then later on they were told that they felt that it wasn't a crop insurance claim, and they've been asked to pay back the money. And I'm just wondering, can you tell me, is there really an appeal process in the legislation for crop insurance?

**Hon. Mr. Wartman:** — Yes, the crop insurance board of directors has appointed a producer board of independent members, and they are the crop insurance appeal board. And they will hear any appeals — a jury of their peers, so to speak.

**Ms. Draude:** — Mr. Minister, I understand that there really isn't appeal process as such; it's sort of a reappraisal. And I understand that it's given a number of, I believe, five days in which you can determine that you want to have your claim reappraised. And at that time there would be three members on a panel that would have an opportunity to look at this application. Is that correct?

**Hon. Mr. Wartman:** — The five days that the member asked about I understand was with regard to program under hail insurance, and that no longer is being handled by crop insurance and doesn't apply to this particular area.

So if somebody is, somebody feels that they did not get the correct amount or it's determined that they didn't get paid enough or that they were overpaid and they are concerned about that, then they would first of all go to their office and they would say, look this isn't right, we want it done.

They can ask for a second adjustment. The second adjuster would check it out. If it still is not resolved according to their needs and their determination, then it would go to the service manager in their area and then to the regional manager. And if that, really if that is not able to solve the problem satisfactorily, then they would go to the independent appeal panel. And that would be, that is the final mechanism for dealing with these appeals.

**Ms. Draude:** — Mr. Minister, I guess I have just have time for one final question. So I understand after that appeal process there actually is an arbitration, and the disputes arising out of these adjustments of losses should be settled by an arbitrator. Can you give me an idea of who is on this arbitration board and if the person involved in the crop insurance claim has an opportunity to determine who is on that arbitration panel?

**Hon. Mr. Wartman:** — The five days and the arbitration process do not apply to anything other than the hail in terms of crop insurance. The hail was a different program. The five days and the arbitration doesn't apply to the other aspects of crop insurance.

**The Chair:** — I would invite the minister to move that the committee report progress on the consideration of . . . I recognize the member.

**Ms. Draude:** — I would like to thank the minister and his officials for their answers this evening.

**Hon. Mr. Wartman:** — And just a note for the member — if she feels it's not clear yet — the manager has agreed to meet you in the hallway to help clarify that. Okay?

And so therefore I would move that we report progress at this point. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** — The minister has moved that the committee report progress on the consideration of estimates for the Department of Agriculture. Is that agreed? That is carried.

The next item before the committee is the consideration of estimates for Learning. We'll take a brief recess while the minister takes his seat.

**General Revenue Fund  
Learning  
Vote 5**

**Subvote (LR01)**

**The Chair:** — Order. The next item before the committee is the consideration of estimates for the Department of Learning, which is Vote 5 found on page 107 of the Estimates book. And I would invite the Minister of Learning to introduce his officials and make a brief statement if he chooses.

**Hon. Mr. Thomson:** — Good evening, Mr. Chair. Thank you very much.

I am pleased tonight to be joined by a number of officials. Seated to my left is the deputy minister of Learning, Neil Yeates. Seated directly behind him is the assistant deputy minister of Learning, Wayne McElree. Directly behind me is Dr. John Biss, the executive director of university services. And seated next to the deputy minister is Kevin Hoyt, the director of corporate services.

I have no opening statement tonight. I look forward to the questions and the discussion.

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

**Mr. Cheveldayoff:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. My first occasion of several, I understand, to participate in estimates.

I would like to thank the minister and thank his officials for attending. Welcome to the officials, and welcome to the new deputy, Mr. Yeates — much like myself, I think, learning the ropes of the new department and getting used to a new position. I had a chance to interact with your predecessor quite a bit before I was a member, on the K to 12 (kindergarten to grade 12) side, as I was working towards establishing a new high school for the northeast part of Saskatoon.

I guess estimates in general are a great opportunity for the opposition and for members at large to learn more about the department and to learn more about your vision, the government's vision. I guess it's important to say that we're both really working for the same goals here, to provide the best education possible for Saskatchewan students and to ensure that they choose to stay in Saskatchewan and receive their education and hopefully choose to stay in Saskatchewan and work as well.

I have a series of questions on a number of topics that I'll begin with and then a few of my colleagues will want to ask some questions as well. I would like to begin with the laboratory building at the University of Regina. At what stage of development is the proposed new lab building at the U of R (University of Regina)?

**Hon. Mr. Thomson:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. The initial planning stage is now complete on the laboratory building. We are at the phase of discussion where they have presented us with a capital plan. We are trying to work through the affordability of that plan and to ascertain what changes, if any, may be incorporated to deal with improved affordability.

**Mr. Cheveldayoff:** — Mr. Minister, at what stage of development was the project at when it was announced then?

**Hon. Mr. Thomson:** — Mr. Chairman, it was in the very earliest stages of design. There was in fact no final design plan done as there is now at the time of the announcement. Obviously the announcement preceded the design phase. Of course we would anticipate that we would move into the design phase and then move through that process.

**Mr. Cheveldayoff:** — What is the total investment by the Government of Saskatchewan in the proposed new lab building?

(20:15)

**Hon. Mr. Thomson:** — To date the province has put \$1 million into the planning phase. The project at this stage appears to be in the realm of about 35, 35.5 million in terms of total cost.

**Mr. Cheveldayoff:** — Is the federal government committing anything to this project?

**Hon. Mr. Thomson:** — No, Mr. Chairman.

**Mr. Cheveldayoff:** — So is there any money in this year's budget for the construction of the building?

**Hon. Mr. Thomson:** — No, Mr. Chairman.

**Mr. Cheveldayoff:** — When will the money be allocated to begin construction of the new lab building?

**Hon. Mr. Thomson:** — We will be undertaking this year to finish a review of the project to better ascertain what the scope and overall costs should be. I would anticipate that this may be a component in next year's budget.

**Mr. Cheveldayoff:** — So where would the actual project be on the priority list of the department? Where would it rank

vis-à-vis other projects?

**Hon. Mr. Thomson:** — We use a somewhat different process in the determination of post-secondary capital than what the member would be familiar of in terms of the K to 12 sector. But it would be fair to say that both the laboratory building and health sciences building at the U of S (University of Saskatchewan) — the lab building at the U or R and the health sciences at the U of S — would be at the top of the priority list.

Obviously there's other issues that do take capital money and are budgeted in this year, everything from emergency capital to completion of other projects. But in terms of new projects those two are at the top of the list.

**Mr. Cheveldayoff:** — Thank you. Yes, I do understand that there is a different funding arrangement, funding mechanisms that are used. It just seems that a lot of things are being pushed out into 2006-2007 and I wanted to see where they would rank.

A few questions now, Mr. Chair, to the minister on the SIAST (Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology) strike. What was the final wage settlement in the labour dispute at SIAST?

**Hon. Mr. Thomson:** — Mr. Chairman, I should indicate that the agreement has not yet been ratified by the SIAST board, and as such I will be somewhat circumspect in my comments tonight. I would however indicate that the wage settlement ended up with falling within the mandate as established, with some additional funds to deal with pay equity issues.

**Mr. Cheveldayoff:** — Okay. I'm not sure of all the elements that you can discuss and what you can't. What percentage of the settlement dealt with pension benefits?

**Hon. Mr. Thomson:** — The member is right that there is a component of the settlement which does deal with pension benefits. Once the agreement is ratified I'll be in a better position to speak to the specific details of that.

**Mr. Cheveldayoff:** — Thank you, Mr. Minister. I do have several questions on the SIAST issue, but maybe best to leave them for another time, another session of estimates.

Can you touch on what were the major issues during the contract negotiations?

**Hon. Mr. Thomson:** — Mr. Chairman, one of the things I might offer to the member opposite is if he wanted to provide me with a list of the questions he wants to pursue, that I can endeavour to provide him with an answer at the earliest possible opportunity once we have the agreement ratified. I'd be prepared to do that. I would anticipate this will happen this week, or at least within the next few days.

Specifically to the question that the member asks about major issues, they centred around a number of different items. Certainly extended health benefits was one of those. There was an issue around pension. Hours of work was an issue. And perhaps the most important, or one of the most significant of them, was the issue of how the salary grid itself was structured. These issues were all significant at the table and were all dealt

with in the contract.

**Mr. Cheveldayoff:** — Thank you. Mr. Chair, to the minister: how many students lost class time due to the strike, and how many students lost coursework due to the strike?

**Hon. Mr. Thomson:** — Regrettably, Mr. Chair, all the students were impacted by the strike action and course time was lost. Students and faculty are now working through a process to recoup that time and to move the students forward to the completion of their courses.

**Mr. Cheveldayoff:** — Did the school year have to be extended for lost class time for a number of students?

**Hon. Mr. Thomson:** — SIAST took a flexible approach to trying to deal with making up the course time that was lost. In some cases, yes, the school year was extended, I understand, by up to a week.

**Mr. Cheveldayoff:** — How much will it cost to extend the school year for that week?

**Hon. Mr. Thomson:** — I'm told it would be very difficult to calculate what the cost on that is, but the member can, I guess, assume what he wants in terms of what a week's extension on some programs would be. We don't anticipate that it is a significant amount.

**Mr. Cheveldayoff:** — Thank you, Mr. Minister.

Mr. Chair, I'd like to address my questions on the academic health sciences centre at the University of Saskatchewan. Is there any money allocated in the 2004-2005 budget for the academic health sciences centre at the University of Saskatchewan?

**Hon. Mr. Thomson:** — Mr. Chairman, last year the legislature and the government provided 1.3 million to the university to deal with the planning phase of the academic health science building. That money was not fully expended last year and, as such, it will carry through to this year.

There is, however, no additional money, no incremental money, in this year's budget for the project. It is expected the design phase would be dealt within that 1.3 million.

**Mr. Cheveldayoff:** — When will money be allocated for the actual construction of the academic health sciences centre?

**Hon. Mr. Thomson:** — This is a rather sizable project, and quite complicated. As I understand, once this 1.3 million has been dealt with in the preliminary design phase, the next phase we'll move into is a more detailed design. I would anticipate that there would be a budget demand for that in next year's budget, but that the bulk of the cost will fall into the out years once the detailed plan has been established.

But I think it is worth noting this is a much more complex set of plans that will need to be dealt with than is the case with the laboratory building in Regina.

**Mr. Cheveldayoff:** — Mr. Chair, to the minister, when do you

expect the actual construction to begin on the academic health sciences centre? It's been announced for some time now, and I think it's . . . you know people are wanting to know when the actual construction will take place. With an announcement, people want to know when the construction will take place.

**Hon. Mr. Thomson:** — Mr. Chair, I would anticipate that the project would be in construction in '07.

**Mr. Cheveldayoff:** — Mr. Chair, to the minister, what are the department's plans for capital projects generally at SIAST in the coming year?

**Hon. Mr. Thomson:** — Mr. Chairman, there are no major capital programs planned for SIAST in this budget.

**Mr. Cheveldayoff:** — Are there any capital projects planned for the regional colleges in this budget?

**Hon. Mr. Thomson:** — There are no major projects planned with the regional colleges although there are some small maintenance-orientated projects which are on the schedule.

**Mr. Cheveldayoff:** — Are there any other capital projects planned for the University of Saskatchewan other than the academic health sciences centre that we've talked about?

**Hon. Mr. Thomson:** — Mr. Chairman, there is \$20 million in this budget for ongoing capital maintenance in this budget. I think it is worth noting, in particular with the U of S, that over the last several years the government has provided extensive funding to undertake significant new major capital projects at the university, including of course the Kinesiology Building which is a tremendous new facility. And it was, as I think about it, in the planning phases, in the early planning phases when I was on campus some 15 years ago. Of course we've provided new money to undertake the Thorvaldson renovations, to do the College Building redesign, and to deal with the Education Building expansion.

So there has been quite a flourish of capital projects on the U of S grounds over the last couple of years. And I think as any citizens who drive by and take a look, they'll see certainly a new and very exciting campus that has been funded in part by this administration.

**Mr. Cheveldayoff:** — Same question, Mr. Minister, for the University of Regina — what new capital projects do you foresee in the coming year?

**Hon. Mr. Thomson:** — I'm always very happy to speak about the University of Regina, part of which falls into my riding of Regina South. It is a source of some pride to see the growth and the expansion at this campus.

We recently had a tour with the vice-president responsible for physical plant, and he made a very interesting comment that in the last eight years the physical plant of the University of Regina has doubled in size, that the actual physical size of that university has doubled as a result of the investments that this government has made.

Certainly the most recent of those were the new Kinesiology

Building at the U of R, which is just in its final stages of construction. I think members opposite, as have we, have toured through that building and are truly impressed by the size and the scope of that project.

Certainly the expansion of the Education Building was a major initiative. We've seen the new residence towers constructed at the U of R. There is the expansion or the creation of the brand new First Nations University college building. And there has of course been a sizable amount of construction around the Research Park here in Regina.

So in terms of the University of Regina, there has been a tremendous amount of work done to its physical plant, to expand student space and research space.

**Mr. Cheveldayoff:** — Yes, the minister is correct; we had a chance also on this side of the House to tour the excellent facility at the University of Regina. And we want to congratulate the administration at both the University of Saskatchewan and the University of Regina for their excellent, their excellent work in providing for that education and planning. And in light of certain budgetary concerns and budgetary constraints, I'm sure the members opposite will agree that they've done an excellent job in that area.

(20:30)

I want to get into nursing education seats and on that topic and talk about the government's efforts in that regard. Is the government on track to reach its goal of 400 nursing students by 2005?

**Hon. Mr. Thomson:** — Yes, Mr. Chairman, I am pleased to report that we are on track to see the 100 additional seats by '05. The Nursing Education Program has been a significant focus of this administration, jointly through Health and the Department of Learning, and is, I believe, a very solid step forward in terms of trying to deal with a shortage of professionals in the nursing profession. The program is on track, and we're pleased to announce that.

**Mr. Cheveldayoff:** — What specific numbers have been achieved to date?

**Hon. Mr. Thomson:** — Mr. Chairman, it might interest the members of the Assembly just to review briefly where we've come from with the Nursing Education Program.

In July '03, the ministers of Learning and Health jointly announced an expansion of NEPS (Nursing Education Program of Saskatchewan) by 100 seats. Seats are going to be added incrementally over three years with an increase of 25 seats that occurred in '03-04, an additional 40 seats in '04-05, and 35 seats in '05-06. In addition 16 licensed practical nurse training spaces have been created through offerings at the regional colleges and the Dumont Technical Institute, DTI.

We anticipate that as a result of this, Saskatchewan will fund approximately 1,630 spaces of nursing programs in '04-05, consisting of 1,500 spaces in all four years of the NEPS program, 350 in each year; and 50 spaces in the two-year accelerated program. One hundred and thirty spaces on average

are provided for the practical nurses at SIAST, DTI, and the regional colleges as part of the Saskatchewan skills extension program.

So as the members opposite can see this has been a significant priority of the administration to deal with a shortage, and we are pleased to provide new funds in those various post-secondary institutions to try and deal with this issue.

**Mr. Cheveldayoff:** — Thank you Mr. Chair, to the minister: how many additional faculty will be hired to accommodate the new nursing education seats? And just generally I guess, how is this paid for? Is additional money allocated to the institution to allow them to hire them when the government asks to provide for a certain number of new seats?

**Hon. Mr. Thomson:** — We do provide for increased funding for faculty. They are brought on by the institutions as the enrolment increases. That's the approach that has been taken and that I would anticipate will continue through this budget year and next.

**Mr. Cheveldayoff:** — How many faculty will be hired?

**Hon. Mr. Thomson:** — That detail resides in the individual departments, but the funding arrangement is in place to provide it. I don't have that detail here. That in fact is something we would need to go back and talk to the institutions about to get that information. It's not something that we would readily have in our stable of information.

**Mr. Cheveldayoff:** — Okay, if you could undertake to get that information for me, I'd appreciate it — also, you know, a breakdown between the U of S and SIAST, the number of faculty members, and a breakdown between the LPNs (licensed practical nurses) and the RNs (registered nurses) as well.

I'd like to turn to the topic of the synchrotron at the U of S. Synchrotron is coming into operation, and certainly residents of Saskatoon and residents of the entire province are very excited about it. And I'd just like to hear a little bit from the department and the minister about what the department's done to increase the commercialization of the synchrotron at the U of S.

**Hon. Mr. Thomson:** — Mr. Chair, of course we are interested in dealing with the synchrotron. It is a significant achievement for the University of Saskatchewan to have achieved a national research project of this scale.

There are a number of different ways that this works. I think it's important that we remember though, that the synchrotron is a national project. It is not one which is simply the responsibility of Saskatchewan or for that matter, interestingly, simply of the University of Saskatchewan. There are a number of different areas where there is a support. Some of these questions may be better addressed to my colleague, the Minister of Industry and Resources, as they have some responsibility there also.

I do want to indicate though that a great . . . I was very pleased to note that there was significant new contribution towards the beamline funding at the U of S at the synchrotron through the Canada Foundation for Innovation funds, and in fact that there were a number of beamlines that were funded both directly

through the U of S and through other institutions, other universities, that will be participating there. This is a significant step forward, and I think does speak to the strength of the . . . to the CLS (Canadian Light Source) synchrotron.

Well there are a number of issues that we can discuss as we look forward as to how the synchrotron will move forward, but it is important to remember that it is a national science project and as such is primarily, first and foremost, a federal responsibility.

**Mr. Cheveldayoff:** — Well I understand it's a national project, but certainly it's in our own backyard, and I think it's incumbent upon the Government of Saskatchewan to ensure that commercialization takes place as soon as possible at the synchrotron, and also that, you know, new partners are attracted to partner with the synchrotron and also with the government.

I guess, quite frankly, I expected to hear more of a leadership role from the minister when it comes to the synchrotron. I know there's been some changes that have taken place between departments, and the Innovation and Science Fund is now in the Department of Learning. And I understand the Saskatchewan Synchrotron Institute is now wound up, and we're looking at other innovative ways of marketing the synchrotron, if you like. And I'm just wondering if the Department of Learning has any ideas in that regard or is taking any responsibility or showing some leadership in that regard.

**Hon. Mr. Thomson:** — Mr. Chair, we're certainly quite pleased to work with the synchrotron and to work with the U of S as they deal with these issues. I would however note that, as is indicated by the CFI (Canadian Foundation for Innovation) funding in which five additional beamlines have been funded, that a number of these beamlines in fact are dealt with through other partner universities. This, regardless of what parochial interests we may feel over this synchrotron, the fact is that this is a national project. And this is something that will need to be dealt with through partnerships with many different institutions.

And I think it is worth noting in fact that there are numerous partners involved in dealing with the synchrotron and with various beamline components — everybody from the cancer agency through to the Breast Cancer Society, the Royal University Hospital, Alberta Cancer Board. There's a number of different agencies that come together to help pull together support for beamline funding, which is really where the critical investment needs to be made.

**Mr. Cheveldayoff:** — Well correct me if I'm wrong, Mr. Minister, but I understand that Canadian Foundation for Innovation funding, CFI funding, has a provincial component that it asks the provinces to match as far as that goes. I believe that the federal government puts in 60 per cent, and the federal government or the provincial government or a combination of the provincial government and the institution are asked to come up with the other 40 per cent in a lot of areas. Is that correct?

**Hon. Mr. Thomson:** — The province has nothing to do with the selection of projects. But that is correct that there is a 40/40/20 funding arrangement that is in place. This is why the funding of additional beamlines through other institutions is critically important, because it will in fact share that burden

across the national university system and be looking for other support. This would not be something solely supported through the Innovation and Science Fund.

**Mr. Cheveldayoff:** — Thank you, Mr. Minister. I wanted to keep the questions fairly general today, so we'll get into this in a little more detail at some other time. But how much money from the Innovation and Science Fund, if any, will go towards the synchrotron?

**Hon. Mr. Thomson:** — Mr. Chair, if there is in fact a demand for funding for the beamline this year, it would come through the ISF (Innovation and Science Fund). On the one beamline that U of S was granted, we would take a look at that.

The member has in past days of course asked me also about funding for VIDO (Vaccine and Infectious Disease Organization). Funding for VIDO was anticipated it would come through ISF also. So this is part of the trade off that we are trying to work through with the university as to what its capital and research priorities are, so we can make sure the appropriate funding is available — whether that is for beamline research or for support through to VIDO. That is one of the issues which of course is always an issue which is of discussion between us and the administration at the U of S.

**Mr. Cheveldayoff:** — Mr. Chair, I guess that's part of my concern when we talk about numbers less than \$10 million for the whole Innovation and Science Fund for the province. I'm just worried about how that pie is going to get divided up when we do have things like VIDO that need funding and also the synchrotron. This is an area where we can show some leadership, and this is an area where we can really excel, and I guess I'm interested in hearing more about where that \$10 million will be spent.

The next item I wanted to talk about, ask questions on, is the medical college at the University of Saskatchewan, interested in knowing is the medical college at the U of S still on probation? Has the accreditation issue been settled?

**Hon. Mr. Thomson:** — I just want to pick up on the last comment in the last discussion we were into around the Innovation and Science Fund. It is I think important that all of us keep in mind that there is a broad range of projects which can always be funded in terms of research. And of course there are scarce resources. What we need to do is to make sure that we are enabling the appropriate level of funding to deal with the research priorities as identified through peer-reviewed research, and that we need to be careful of that.

(20:45)

I know that the member opposite and I were in a discussion the other day where he was suggesting we need \$3 million for VIDO on an annual basis. It doesn't take long to add that up and add up a couple of other research projects and realize that we could have bought an MRI and funded that for a year.

So what we try and do on this side of the House is to try and balance out the capital requests, try and balance out the advance research requests, to make sure we've got an overall spending. Certainly I could go to the cabinet table purely with the interest

of dealing with issues as the Minister of Learning. But of course when you're part of a cabinet, you try and balance out the overall demands across the table, and that is in fact what we are trying to deal with.

The question, the latter part of the question the member asks, regards the College of Medicine renewal plan. And I'm pleased to report that the accreditation plan is progressing and that it is on track and in fact in this year we have provided \$3.1 million to deal with accreditation issues.

**Mr. Cheveldayoff:** — Is the University of Saskatchewan, though, still on probation?

**Hon. Mr. Thomson:** — The answer, the short answer is yes. And we will have a better understanding as to when it will come off once we move forward with the latter phases of the accreditation plan.

**Mr. Cheveldayoff:** — What requirements, Mr. Chair, what requirements were made and met in order for the U of S to keep its accreditation? What progress have we made so far?

**Hon. Mr. Thomson:** — Mr. Chairman, two of the major issues that were addressed, both needed to be addressed and have been addressed, are the clinical faculty component, which we have made a financial commitment to help cover, and an upgrade to the library which required additional resources, also that the province has been pleased to commit to.

**Mr. Cheveldayoff:** — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Chair, how much money has been allocated to the University of Saskatchewan in order to help solve the accreditation problem specifically?

**Hon. Mr. Thomson:** — Mr. Chairman, we've announced a commitment to funding of \$13 million to address the issues. There's 3.1 million provided in this fiscal year.

**Mr. Cheveldayoff:** — Thank you, Mr. Minister. A few questions regarding the Provincial Library, where is the Provincial Library presently located?

**Hon. Mr. Thomson:** — I'm not sure what to suggest if the member's looking to sign out a few books as to where he would go. But the officials responsible for the program are in Grenfell Towers.

**Mr. Cheveldayoff:** — Is the Provincial Library located in one specific location, the entire operation?

**Hon. Mr. Thomson:** — The majority of the holdings are at the parkway location, and so in fact it would be over several sites. But the majority are at the parkway campus location.

**Mr. Cheveldayoff:** — My understanding is that the entire offices of the Provincial Library were at one location, along with the holdings, and now they have moved to a new location. Is that correct?

**Hon. Mr. Thomson:** — There was panic there for a few seconds. I thought my officials said the member opposite was correct. In fact it was the minister who was correct, and the staff

are at one location. The majority of the holdings are at a different location, and so I'm not sure what else to say on this.

Maybe if the member wants to just broaden out the scope a little bit, I'll be a little better able to answer it. Part of the difficulty we have tonight is I don't have my library officials here, but we're prepared to make bold assertions as we go forward and perhaps correct them as we need to in a future session.

**Mr. Cheveldayoff:** — My understanding was, Mr. Chair, that the Provincial Library was at a permanent location and that has been changed to a new location, and I had some questions regarding the reasons why the change took place.

**Hon. Mr. Thomson:** — Mr. Chairman, a lot of this had to do with us consolidating over the last several years . . . the department from a number of different locations, and I understand there was some seven different locations that we had in the department and across and that we have consolidated those down to four now — three — three. And as a result there has in fact been movement but there are . . . the library officials are at one site. We have the bulk of our holdings at a different location.

**Mr. Cheveldayoff:** — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Chair, I had several other questions in this area, but I think I will wait until another time to have your officials present because I want to talk about values of the leases of the old locations and the value of the leases for the new locations.

Maybe we can talk about the research parks at the University of Saskatchewan and the University of Regina. I want to talk about Innovation Place to begin with. How many private sector firms are currently operating at Innovation Place at the U of S this year?

**Hon. Mr. Thomson:** — I regret to advise the member that in fact the research parks fall under the purview of the Minister of Industry and Resources, and questions I am sure that he wants to ask could be addressed directly to that minister and would be answered under those estimates.

**Mr. Cheveldayoff:** — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Chair, one of the concerns I have I guess is the Innovation and Science Fund moving over to the Department of Learning. When I asked several questions, people say that it is actually under the Department of Learning, and I guess I am having some trouble distinguishing what remains at the Industry and Resources and what has actually moved over to the Department of Learning.

But I'll take the minister and his word on that, and I would like to then talk about VIDO and the Veterinary Infectious Disease Organization or Vaccine and Infectious Disease Organization. The minister and I had a chance to talk about this over the last few days. I would just like to ask generally what value he sees in VIDO at the University of Saskatchewan.

**Hon. Mr. Thomson:** — On the issue of research and the research parks, I think it's worth differentiating just so members are clear. Innovations and Science Fund is a funding arm of government, a research fund which has moved over from the Department of Industry to the Department of Learning. The rationale behind that is we believe that it was important for us

to strengthen the profile of the Department of Learning being able to deal with research issues.

However the funding of the research parks, the actual physical plant of that still remains with the Department of Industry and Resources. And so that is, I understand, often an issue of perhaps not the clearest way to understand because we assume that the two go together. But in fact the researching funding commitments have moved over to Learning; the research park itself is still under Industry and Resources.

With respect to VIDO, I have to say that it has long been my view that VIDO provides great promise to the province back when it was still dealing with veterinary infectious disease. Certainly now as it has moved into vaccine and infectious disease issues, I think that it has a great opportunity for us to advance knowledge at a national level. It is certainly a good opportunity to build back strength into the University of Saskatchewan's science projects and just really strengthen our understanding of virology. There is a good, I think, a solid set of leaders and innovators there.

I'm very pleased to say that we have been in discussion with them about what the funding needs are and do understand that there is a need for additional funds. We've been pleased in the past to provide additional funds for capital, and now what we are needing to deal with is a sustainable operating budget.

One of the hopes that many of us have is that over time we will see an increased federal presence in the funding of virology. Certainly as we've gone through a number of health — well the word crisis is always overused — but certainly health pressures within the province . . . or sorry within the country, as we look at SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome) and other pressing new issues around virology, that I think there is a good opportunity for VIDO to play a role in that. There is always a question though about where the federal government's interests lie in terms of how it funds its national research agenda. We have been interested in working with the U of S, with VIDO, to try and capture more of that federal funding.

I'm not sure today what to say in terms of the announcement that was made two weeks ago now, or a week ago, by the federal government that they were planning on beefing up their research in Winnipeg. There had long been a view that VIDO and the Winnipeg projects would be able to work together. I'm not in a position today to say why the federal government has opted for a Winnipeg solution as opposed to a co-operative one with VIDO and Manitoba.

But suffice it to say that I do believe that VIDO significantly enhances the research operations at the University of Saskatchewan, and we recognize the strong role it plays, and we are committed to further support of it.

**Mr. Cheveldayoff:** — Thank you, Mr. Minister. That's good news to hear.

Mr. Chair, to the minister, do you foresee a more stable funding mechanism for VIDO — a long-term funding mechanism, if you like? The concerns that the VIDO representatives have been articulating to me is the concern of the ad hoc basis of which this government approaches institutions and companies

like VIDO. So do you see any type of long-term funding, or would that be a place where you would like to put your efforts?

**Hon. Mr. Thomson:** — Certainly we share the view of the director at VIDO and the president of the University of Saskatchewan, who are interested in us seeing a stable level of financing for VIDO into the future. However I think all the parties involved understand that that needs to come from somewhere other than the province.

The discussions that we are in today are taking a look at how we can provide a multi-year funding framework to help deal with VIDO in a transition period, to get it over to a more stable funding basis that takes into account additional resources from other places. And that is a vision that we share with President MacKinnon and the director of VIDO.

**Mr. Cheveldayoff:** — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Chair, the minister has referred to the federal government, and I just wanted to know if any discussions are currently underway between the Department of Learning and the federal government with regards to VIDO. Or the Department of Learning, Department of Industry and Resources, and the Department of Agriculture with regards to Learning — are there bilateral talks taking place right now?

**Hon. Mr. Thomson:** — We are in ongoing discussions with the university about what the multi-year transition funding would look like, what the dollar value is for that. I think it's fair to say that the funding level we are anticipating would be somewhere around the \$1.8 million range. That is not the 3 million that is needed for long-term, stable funding, but that is reasonably what we assume would be a good base over a multi-year period to fund them through transition.

Those discussions are ongoing, but that is where we're at. And in fact discussions will occur this week again about how to move forward with that.

(21:00)

**Mr. Cheveldayoff:** — Well I understand the level of support needed for operating is about \$11 million in total, of which they're asking the province to provide 3.5 million, and the minister talks about 1.8 million. Where would he suggest that the . . . through you, Mr. Chair, where would the minister suggest that VIDO raise the appropriate funding needed to reach the \$3.5 million level?

**Hon. Mr. Thomson:** — VIDO's strength really is in the agricultural sector, and I would anticipate that they would continue to seek funds from the private sector in agriculture and through various federal government initiatives to move forward with sustainable, stable funding into the future.

We are quite pleased to be a partner with them in supporting them in that and, as I have indicated, we are certainly willing to look at some multi-year funding to get them through the transition. We really do believe that VIDO plays an important role within the province and in terms of the research agenda at the University of Saskatchewan and provides an important opportunity for us to move forward in terms of scientifically-based knowledge for applied science around

vaccines.

So we're quite pleased to be supportive of that, but the long-term sustainable, stable funding in a post-transition period will need to come from private sector and federal government sources.

**Mr. Cheveldayoff:** — Mr. Chair, I'd like to thank the minister for his answers, his direct answers today, and I'd also like to thank his officials for coming here to the legislature this evening and helping to support those answers.

I have several other lines of questioning I'd like to further develop at a later time but, Mr. Chair, I'd like to report progress at this time and . . .

**Hon. Mr. Thomson:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. I too would like to thank the officials tonight for their support, not only in the Assembly but certainly for their ongoing support in the department on this. I appreciate the questions asked by the member opposite, and I look forward to having an opportunity again in the coming days and weeks to engage in this discussion around the Department of Learning.

With that, I would move that we rise, report progress, and ask for leave to sit again.

**The Chair:** — The minister has moved that the committee rise, report progress, and ask for leave to sit again. Is that agreed?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

**The Chair:** — That is carried.

**The Speaker:** — I recognize the Chair of committees.

**Mr. Addley:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm instructed by the committee to report progress and ask for leave to sit again.

**The Speaker:** — When shall the committee sit again? I recognize the Government House Leader.

**Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen:** — Next sitting, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** — Government House Leader.

**Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen:** — I move that we now adjourn.

**The Speaker:** — It has been moved by the Government House Leader that this House do now adjourn. Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

**The Speaker:** — The motion's been carried. This House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 1:30 p.m.

The Assembly adjourned at 21:05.



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