



FIRST SESSION - TWENTY-FIFTH LEGISLATURE

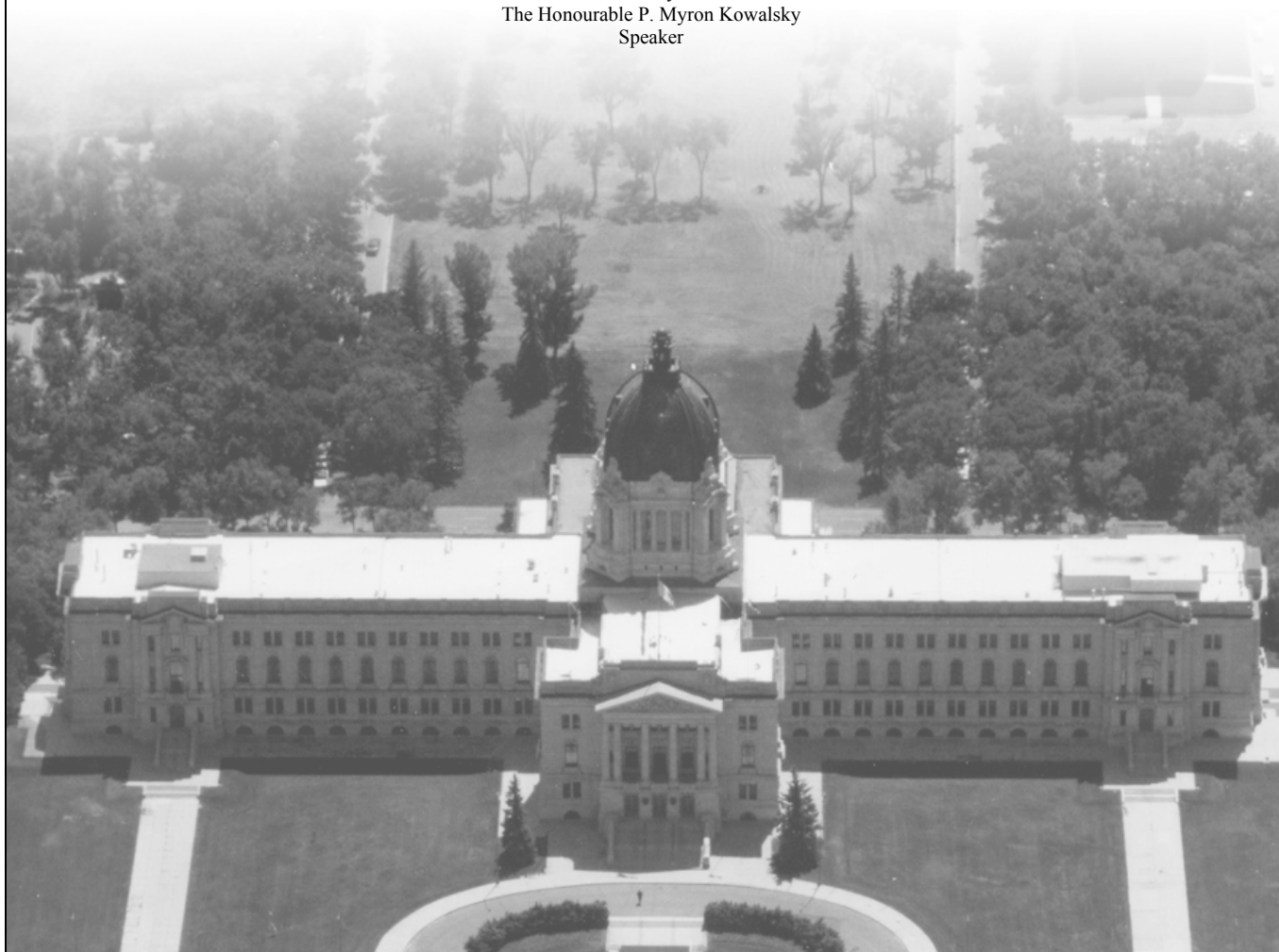
of the

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 Lackey, 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: — The Chair recognizes the member for Cypress Hills.

Mr. Elhard: — Mr. Speaker, I stand today to present petitions on behalf of constituents in the region of Highway 32 concerned about its condition. 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 32 in order to address safety and economic concerns.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

Mr. Speaker, these several pages of petitions are signed by constituents from the communities of Prelate, Sceptre, Leader, Mendham, and Liebenthal. I so present.

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the member for Kelvington-Wadena.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise again today on behalf of people who are concerned about the drug problem, crystal meth:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause this government to take the necessary action to pass a law that will give Saskatchewan parents the ability to place their children into involuntary drug treatment.

The people who have signed this petition are from Rose Valley and Naicam.

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the member for Rosetown-Elrose.

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition from people concerned about the turnover rate of employees who work with people with disabilities. The petition is on behalf of the staff, participants, and families of the Wheatland Regional Centre, Inc. and other like centres across the province that provide services for individuals with disabilities. Mr. Speaker, the prayer of the petition reads:

Wherefore your petitioners will humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly will please consider implementing the minimum compensation recommendations for staff members who support people with disabilities as outlined in SARC's human resources plan.

Mr. Speaker, a number of signatures on this petition come from the communities of Delisle, Zealandia, Harris, and Rosetown, Saskatchewan. I am pleased to present this petition on their

behalf.

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the member for Indian Head-Milestone.

Mr. McMorris: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I present a petition on behalf of citizens of the province regarding methamphetamine. 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 pass a law that will give Saskatchewan parents the ability to place their children into involuntary drug treatment.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

Mr. Speaker, this petition is signed by people from Rose Valley, Archerwill, and Fossten. I so present.

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the member for Estevan.

Ms. Eagles: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present a petition on behalf of constituents of mine who have concerns about the assistance to autism-affected families. 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 improve access to resources for families who desperately need help for their autistic children.

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

And, Mr. Speaker, this is signed by residents of Estevan. I so present.

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the member for Melfort.

Mr. Gantfoer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise on behalf of citizens concerned about the deplorable condition of Highway 368. 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 368 in order to address safety and economic concern.

Signatures on this petition today, Mr. Speaker, are from the communities of Naicam, Melfort, Watson, Humboldt, Lake Lenore. And I so present on their behalf.

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the member for Humboldt.

Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too have a petition with citizens concerned about the deplorable state of Highway No. 368. 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 368 in order to address safety and economic concern.

And the signatures, Mr. Speaker, are from Humboldt, Lake Lenore, Annaheim, and Saskatoon. I so present.

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the member for Saskatoon Silver Springs.

Mr. Cheveldayoff: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to present another petition on behalf of 600 children under six years of age and their parents in the Saskatoon Silver Springs constituency regarding a much-needed elementary school in the Arbor Creek area of Saskatoon. The prayer of 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 implement an allocation of financial resources to build an elementary school in Arbor Creek.

The petitioners today live on Chotem Crescent, Hinit Place, and Mulcaster Crescent in northeast Saskatoon. I so present, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the member for Arm River-Watrous.

Mr. Brkich: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition here that the citizens that want to halt crop insurance premium hikes and coverage reductions:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the provincial government to take all the necessary actions to reverse the increase in crop insurance premiums and the reduction in coverage.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

This is signed by the good citizens from Hanley. I so present.

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the member for Biggar.

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to present another petition from constituents opposed to reductions of health care services in Wilkie. 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 Wilkie health centre and special care home maintain at the very least their current level of services.

As in duty bound your petitioners will ever pray.

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

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the member for Carrot River Valley.

Mr. Kerpan: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today on behalf of citizens of Saskatchewan who are concerned with the effect that the TransGas Asquith natural gas storage project will have on the quantity as well as the quality of their water, Mr. Speaker. And the prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to immediately address the concerns of all individuals affected by this project, pay 100 per cent of the costs involved to rectify disruptions to water supplies, produce an environment assessment study encompassing a larger area outside the scope of the project, disclose the project's long-term effects on these areas, and consider alternative sources of water for the project.

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

Mr. Speaker, signed by citizens of Saskatoon.

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the member for Saskatoon Northwest.

Mr. Merriman: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today with a petition that our children are our most precious resource and that the current legislation does not provide adequate protection for the most vulnerable in our society. 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 pass a law that will give Saskatchewan parents the ability to place their children into involuntary drug treatment.

And as in duty bound, your petitioners ever pray.

From the good people of Saskatoon.

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the member for Last Mountain-Touchwood.

Mr. Hart: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker I'm pleased to be able to present a petition on behalf of citizens of this province who are very disappointed with this government's reluctance to implement the SARC [Saskatchewan Association of Rehabilitation Centres] human resources plan. The prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly will please consider implementing the recommendations as outlined in SARC's human resources plan.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

Signatures to this petition, Mr. Speaker, come from the communities of Ituna, Kelliher, and Melville. I so present.

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the member for Batoche.

Mr. Kirsch: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I rise to bring forth a petition to deal with Highway 368. 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 368 in order to address safety and economic concerns.

As is duty bound your petitioners will ever pray.

It is signed by the good people of Middle Lake, Lake Lenore, Bruno, Muenster, Annaheim, Naicam, St. Brieux. I so present.

READING AND RECEIVING PETITIONS

Clerk Assistant: — According to order the following petitions have been reviewed and pursuant to rule 14(7) they are hereby read and received: addendums to sessional paper nos. 640, 666, 715, 716, 720, 798, and 800.

PRESENTING REPORTS BY STANDING AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES

The Speaker: — The Chair of the Standing Committee on the Economy is recognized.

Standing Committee on the Economy

Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Speaker, I am instructed by the Standing Committee on the Economy to report Bill 87, The Trade Union Amendment Act, 2004 without amendment.

The Speaker: — When shall this Bill be referred to Committee of the Whole?

Mr. Lautermilch: — I'm sorry, Mr. Speaker, I misread my document here. It's with amendment.

The Speaker: — Once again then, when shall this Bill be considered in Committee of the Whole? The Chair recognizes the Minister of Labour.

Hon. Ms. Higgins: — I request leave to waive consideration in Committee of the Whole on this Bill.

The Speaker: — The Minister of Labour has requested leave to waive consideration of Committee of the Whole of Bill 87. Is leave granted?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — Leave has been granted. When shall this amendment be read a first time? The Chair recognizes the minister.

FIRST AND SECOND READING OF AMENDMENTS

Bill No. 87 — The Trade Union Amendment Act, 2004

Hon. Ms. Higgins: — I move that the amendments now be read a first and second time.

The Speaker: — Moved by the Minister of Labour that the amendments be now read a first and second time. Is it the

pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — The motion is carried. When shall the Bill be read a third time?

Clerk Assistant: — First and second reading of the amendments.

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the Minister of Labour.

THIRD READINGS

Bill No. 87 — The Trade Union Amendment Act, 2004

Hon. Ms. Higgins: — By leave I move that this Bill be now read the third time and passed under its title.

The Speaker: — By leave the Chair has moved that this Bill be now read a third time and passed under its title. Is the Assembly ready for the question?

Some Hon. Members: — Question.

The Speaker: — Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — The motion is carried. Why is the member on her feet?

Ms. Morin: — To speak to this Bill, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: — I must advise the member that the Bill has been voted upon and her opportunity to speak on this Bill is passed. The motion is carried and the Bill is passed.

PRESENTING REPORTS BY STANDING AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES

The Speaker: — The Chair of the Standing Committee on the Economy is recognized.

Standing Committee on the Economy

Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Speaker, I'm instructed by the Standing Committee on the Economy to report Bill No. 86, The Labour Standards Amendment Act, 2004 (No. 2) without amendment.

The Speaker: — When shall this Bill be considered in Committee of the Whole? The Chair recognizes the Minister of Labour.

Hon. Ms. Higgins: — I request leave to waive consideration in Committee of the Whole on this Bill.

The Speaker: — Order please. Order please. The Minister of Labour has requested leave to waive consideration of Committee of the Whole for Bill 86. Is leave granted?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — Leave has been granted. When shall this Bill be read a third time? I recognize the minister.

THIRD READINGS

Bill No. 86 — The Labour Standards Amendment Act, 2004 (No. 2)

Hon. Ms. Higgins: — I move that this Bill be now read a third time and passed under its title.

The Speaker: — It has been moved by the Minister of Labour that this Bill be now read a third time and passed under its title. Is the Assembly ready for the question?

Some Hon. Members: — Question.

The Speaker: — Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — Motion is carried.

Clerk: — Third reading of this Bill.

PRESENTING REPORTS BY STANDING AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES

The Speaker: — The Chair of the Standing Committee on the Economy is recognized.

Standing Committee on the Economy

Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Speaker, I'm instructed by the Standing Committee on the Economy to report Bill No. 122, The Miscellaneous Labour Statutes Amendment Act, 2005, without amendment.

The Speaker: — When shall this Bill be considered in Committee of the Whole? The Chair recognizes the minister.

Hon. Ms. Higgins: — I request leave to waive consideration in Committee of the Whole on this Bill.

The Speaker: — The Minister of Labour has requested leave to waive consideration in Committee of the Whole for Bill 122. Is leave granted?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — Leave has been granted. When shall this Bill be read a third time? I recognize the minister. We need a . . . The Chair recognizes the minister.

THIRD READINGS

Bill No. 122 — The Miscellaneous Labour Statutes Amendment Act, 2005

Hon. Ms. Higgins: — I move that this Bill be now read a third

time and passed under its title.

The Speaker: — It has been moved by the Minister of Labour that Bill 122 be now moved a third time and passed under its title. Is the Assembly ready for the question?

Some Hon. Members: — Question.

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the member for Regina Walsh Acres.

Ms. Morin: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to rise today to speak to Bill No. 122. And I also would like to talk about a book I recently read which is by Princeton University Press, written by Harry G. Frankfurt. It is available at the Book & Brier Patch. And I hope it's not offensive to the House. This is not and may not have been my choice of title, but nevertheless, it is entitled *On Bullshit*. Once again, I state that this may not have been my choice but it was . . .

[13:45]

The Speaker: — Order please. Order please. I would ask the member to use language which is parliamentary and to withdraw the offensive word.

Ms. Morin: — Mr. Speaker, it is the title of the book. I withdraw the word bullshit and will refer to it as BS from here on in, if that pleases the Speaker.

The Speaker: — Order please. Order please. I would ask the member not to equivocate. Simply withdraw the statement and make the appropriate adjustments. Members ought not to do something — Order please — indirectly that they are not allowed to do directly. The member may continue.

Ms. Morin: — With apologies to the Speaker and to the author, I will withdraw the previous statement.

So I rise today to speak to Bill No. 122 which, along with other amendments to The Labour Standards Act, repeals the legislation more commonly referred to as most additional hours.

Mr. Speaker, I personally and profoundly disappointed with the behaviour of the Conservative Sask Party opposition with respect to this and any other piece of labour legislation. It has become difficult, if not impossible in this province, to have an honest discussion about the issues facing working people in Saskatchewan. The opposition has embarked on an agenda of fear tactics and propaganda that would make Dick Cheney blush with shame.

Mr. Speaker, more than 10 years ago, the concept of most additional hours was introduced into The Labour Standards Act by this Hon. Assembly following thoughtful consultation with the stakeholders. It was recognized then that in order to make the intention of law a reality, careful consideration would have to be given to the implementation of workable and effective regulations. I supported that initiative in 1994 as I saw this as a reasonable approach to providing some workplace balance for part-time workers.

Mr. Speaker, prior to becoming a member of this Assembly, I

was classified as a part-time worker in the retail sector. And, Mr. Speaker, I have first-hand experience in the vagaries of part-time employment. Mr. Speaker, I speak to this Bill because I feel very strongly about the issues facing vulnerable workers in our society. And I speak to the hope that this Assembly would have the courage of conviction to rise up to the challenges facing them in the 21st century.

Unfortunately, the opposition's gift to the great people of Saskatchewan is a return to the last century, Mr. Speaker. In fact if you look at the rhetoric that is spouted from the opposition, you would think that we were having the debate about the 8-hour day or prohibitions against child labour — debates, Mr. Speaker, that took place over 100 years ago — the same fire-and-brimstone-riden bluster, the same cries of killing the economy, closing businesses, and putting workers on the street, unemployed and without hope.

Well, Mr. Speaker, none of the fearmongering came to pass 100 years ago, and I know that it would not have come to pass at this juncture either. Mr. Speaker, I place the blame for this firmly in the hands of the opposition. Having said that, you may wonder why I'm speaking to this legislation . . .

The Speaker: — Order please. Order please. Order please. The member for Regina Walsh Acres.

Ms. Morin: — Having said that, you may wonder why I'm speaking to this legislation, legislation that repeals the very provisions that I support. Mr. Speaker, this was by no means a simple decision. I wrestled with this for many great hours, consulted with many friends and colleagues, and searched my soul. I cannot change who I am, however, and so I will move forward with the optimism that is a great characteristic of so many people of this great province.

I take heart, Mr. Speaker, in the creation of the part-time work commission and the good works that will come from that. This commission will undertake to carefully examine the work life of part-time employees and other vulnerable workers. Without the opposition derailing this initiative, the commission will be an open public dialogue that even the opposition should be satisfied with. The commission will be structured to ensure that part-time employees will have protection and anonymity so they can come freely forward to share their experiences in a way that is meaningful.

Mr. Speaker, as representatives of the people of this great province, how can we appeal to young people to stay here, to build their lives here, to start and raise families here, to grow old and prosper here, if we can't embrace and sustain even a modest improvement to the minimum labour standards of this province to provide for a living wage?

Mr. Speaker, we are at a fork in the road. If we take the path advocated by the Conservative Party opposite, then we are abandoning the option of choice for part-time workers to regularize their employment. However, Mr. Speaker, if we take a path more favourable to vulnerable workers, we will have begun to speak to and for the young worker, the single parent, the working poor, and to those who want and deserve a reasonable chance to get a sense of optimism for a better future.

It is so important, Mr. Speaker, that this process be open and far-reaching in its scope. I hope that the process is allowed to complete this important work without the fearmongering and rhetoric that characterizes every single initiative that involves working people in this province.

The reaction of the opposition is predictable but their motivation, Mr. Speaker, is unclear. Is it because they don't acknowledge the plight of the vulnerable workers or is it because they simply don't care?

Perhaps they should walk a day in the shoes of a single mom struggling to earn enough money so she could stop using income supplements. Or perhaps they should experience the lack of quality family time a father has with his young family because he's dashing from one part-time job to another seven days a week in order to earn enough money to simply feed and clothe his family and put a roof over their heads. Or perhaps they should feel the uncertainty that a young worker has from week to week not knowing what level of hours he or she may have; whether he or she may be penalized by his employer for raising a concern over occupational health and safety issues.

Mr. Speaker, I have walked in those shoes and I stand in this House today challenging each and every member of this Assembly to say the same. I believe that I'm the only elected member of this House that came to this House as a part-time worker. Mr. Speaker, I believe the part-time commission will address many of these issues, perhaps eclipsing the initiative that was passed in 1994.

In addition, Mr. Speaker, the amendments that are being put forward for the other provisions of The Labour Standards Act are necessary to clarify the Act. The Act is one of the most important pieces of legislation for the working people of this province. The average worker should be able to refer to the Act and have an understanding of how that legislation applies to him or her. These housekeeping amendments will do exactly that.

Mr. Speaker, there are inherent differences between the New Democratic Party government and the Conservative Saskatchewan Party opposition. We govern by and for the people and will always look at innovative and meaningful solutions to the plight of vulnerable workers in our society. We do not simply pay lip service to the audience in attendance on any particular day. Our government is committed . . .

The Speaker: — Order please, members. Order. The member does have the right to be heard. Order. The Chair recognizes . . . order. The Chair recognizes the member for Regina Walsh Acres.

Ms. Morin: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our government is committed to the process of the part-time work commission and is looking forward to the recommendations. Mr. Speaker, if the opposition is sincere in its so-called concern for the best solutions to address the acknowledge problems with part-time work in Saskatchewan, we should be able to look forward to their support in the implementation of the recommendations of the part-time work commission.

Mr. Speaker, let us not mark the 100th anniversary of

Saskatchewan by falling prey to arguments and prejudice reminiscent of the late days of the 19th century, but rather let our actions fulfill our claim to be thoroughly modern people of the 21st century. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the member for Cannington.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, Mr. Speaker, it's a pleasure to rise on third reading of Bill 122. And I have to admit, Mr. Speaker, that this is the first time that I have risen from my seat to speak on third reading of any Bill in 14 years.

In fact is, Mr. Speaker, today is only the second time in those 14 years that I have seen someone take the opportunity to speak on third reading. The other time that it happened was back in the mid-'90s, Mr. Speaker, when the individual was not present in the Assembly at the time of second reading and didn't have the opportunity to speak.

Yet when I look at Bill 122 in *Hansard*, this Bill went through the House on second reading with only one government member speaking to the Bill, and that member spoke for one paragraph, one very short paragraph, Mr. Speaker. So I guess the question is, is why didn't the members opposite that wanted to speak on 122 take the opportunity during second reading debate, Mr. Speaker, when there's an opportunity for the member's statements to have an impact on the determination of whether the legislation would pass and whether there would be any changes made in committee, Mr. Speaker? So I'm surprised that the member opposite didn't take that opportunity to represent her point of view at that particular time, Mr. Speaker.

I do note though, Mr. Speaker, that the member who just spoke also voted on May 12, 2005, in favour of Bill 122.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Mr. D'Autremont: — In fact, Mr. Speaker, this is a Bill introduced by her government and which passed unanimously in this House. So I'm not sure what the member is rising about today to speak on that she couldn't have spoke on in second reading debate, Mr. Speaker.

The member made some comments about the Saskatchewan Party in relationship to Bill 122 and most available hours. Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm very happy with our association with various interest groups around the province on this particular piece of legislation. Some of those interest groups, Mr. Speaker, were both of the universities, university students, Mr. Speaker, the co-ops of this province, the cities of this province, Mr. Speaker, First Nations, the credit union system, Mr. Speaker. So, Mr. Speaker, I think we're in very good company on this particular piece of legislation that the government introduced, Mr. Speaker.

The member opposite talked about part-time workers. Well, Mr. Speaker, we have been pushing this government for years to hire full-time nurses rather than populating our system with part-time nurses, Mr. Speaker. I think we have been very clear,

Mr. Speaker, on the need for regular and full-time employment in various sectors especially the health care system which this government and that member that spoke previously have ignored and done nothing about, Mr. Speaker. This is a good piece of legislation, Mr. Speaker, and needs to pass.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — The question before the Assembly is the motion moved by the Minister of Labour that Bill 122, The Miscellaneous Labour Statutes Amendment Act, 2005 be now read the third time and passed under its title. Is the Assembly ready for the question?

Some Hon. Members: — Question.

The Speaker: — Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — The motion is carried. Call in the members for a standing vote.

[The division bells rang from 13:58 until 14:02.]

The Speaker: — The question before the Assembly is the motion moved by the Minister of Labour that Bill No. 122, The Miscellaneous Labour Statutes Amendment Act, 2005 be now read a third time. Those in favour of the motion please rise.

[Yeas — 53]

Calvert	Addley	Lautermilch
Hagel	Van Mulligen	Serby
Atkinson	Cline	Sonntag
Crofford	Prebble	Forbes
Wartman	Belanger	Higgins
Thomson	Nilson	Beatty
Hamilton	Junor	Harper
Iwanchuk	McCall	Quennell
Trew	Yates	Taylor
Morin	Borgerson	Elhard
Heppner	D'Autremont	Krawetz
Draude	Hermanson	Bjornerud
Stewart	Wakefield	Chisholm
McMorris	Eagles	Gantefoer
Harpauer	Cheveldayoff	Huyghebaert
Allchurch	Brkich	Weekes
Kerpan	Merriman	Morgan
Hart	Kirsch	

The Speaker: — Those opposed to the motion please rise.

[Nays — nil]

Clerk: — Mr. Speaker, those in favour of the motion, 53; those opposed, zero.

The Speaker: — I declare the motion carried.

Clerk: — Third reading of this Bill.

**PRESENTING REPORTS BY STANDING AND
SPECIAL COMMITTEES**

The Speaker: — The Chair of the Standing Committee on the Economy is recognized.

Standing Committee on the Economy

Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Speaker, I'm instructed by the Standing Committee on the Economy to report Bill No. 120, The Fuel Tax Amendment Act, 2005 without amendment.

The Speaker: — When shall this Bill be considered in Committee of the Whole? The Chair recognizes the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen: — Mr. Speaker, I request leave to waive consideration in Committee of the Whole on this Bill.

The Speaker: — The minister has requested leave to waive consideration in Committee of the Whole for Bill 120. Is leave granted?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — Leave has been granted. When shall this Bill be read a third time? The Chair recognizes the Minister of Finance.

THIRD READINGS

Bill No. 120 — The Fuel Tax Amendment Act, 2005

Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen: — Mr. Speaker, I move this Bill be now read a third time and passed under its title.

The Speaker: — It has been moved by the Minister of Finance that Bill 120, The Fuel Tax Amendment Act, 2005 be now read a third time and passed under its title. Is the Assembly ready for the question?

Some Hon. Members: — Question.

The Speaker: — Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — Motion is carried.

Clerk: — Third reading of this Bill.

**PRESENTING REPORTS BY STANDING AND
SPECIAL COMMITTEES**

The Speaker: — The Chair of the Standing Committee on the Economy is recognized.

Standing Committee on the Economy

Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Speaker, I'm instructed by the Standing Committee on the Economy to report Bill No. 125, The Corporation Capital Tax Amendment Act, 2005 without

amendment.

The Speaker: — When shall this Bill be considered in Committee of the Whole? The Chair recognizes the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen: — Mr. Speaker, I request leave to waive consideration in Committee of the Whole on this Bill.

The Speaker: — The Minister of Finance has requested leave to waive consideration of Committee of the Whole for Bill 125. Is leave granted?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — Leave has been granted. When shall this Bill be read a third time? The Chair recognizes the Minister of Finance.

THIRD READINGS

**Bill No. 125 — The Corporation Capital Tax
Amendment Act, 2005**

Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen: — Mr. Speaker, I move this Bill be now read a third time and passed under its title.

The Speaker: — It has been moved by the Minister of Finance that Bill 125, The Corporation Capital Tax Amendment Act, 2005 be now read a third time and passed under its title. Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — Motion is carried. Call in the members for a standing vote.

[The division bells rang from 14:07 until 14:10.]

The Speaker: — Order, please. The question before the Assembly is the motion moved by the Minister of Finance that Bill No. 125, The Corporation Capital Tax Amendment Act, 2005 be now read a third time. Those in favour of the motion, please rise.

[Yeas — 29]

Calvert	Addley	Lautermilch
Hagel	Van Mulligen	Serby

The Speaker: — Order, please members. Order. I would ask for complete order during the taking of the vote.

Atkinson	Cline	Sonntag
Crofford	Prebble	Forbes
Wartman	Belanger	Higgins
Thomson	Nilson	Beatty
Hamilton	Junor	Harper
Iwanchuk	McCall	Quennell
Trew	Yates	Taylor
Morin	Borgerson	

The Speaker: — Those opposed to the motion, please rise.

[Nays — 24]

Elhard

The Speaker: — Order, please. As debate is over, we are now taking the vote. The Clerk will proceed.

Hepner	D'Autremont	Krawetz
Draude	Hermanson	Bjornerud
Stewart	Wakefield	Chisholm
McMorris	Eagles	Gantfoer
Harpauer	Cheveldayoff	Huyghebaert
Allchurch	Brkich	Weekes
Kerpan	Merriman	Morgan
Hart	Kirsch	

Clerk Assistant (Committees): — Mr. Speaker, those in favour of the motion, 29; those opposed, 24.

The Speaker: — I declare the motion carried.

Clerk: — Third reading of this Bill.

PRESENTING REPORTS BY STANDING AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES

The Speaker: — The Chair of the Standing Committee on the Economy is recognized.

Standing Committee on the Economy

Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Speaker, I'm instructed by the Standing Committee on the Economy to report Bill No. 94, The Apiaries Act, 2005 without amendment.

The Speaker: — When shall Bill No. 94 be presented in Committee of the Whole? The Chair recognizes the Minister of Ag.

Hon. Mr. Wartman: — Mr. Speaker, I request leave to waive consideration in Committee of the Whole on this Bill.

The Speaker: — The Minister of Agriculture has requested leave to waive consideration of Committee of the Whole of Bill 94. Is leave granted?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — Leave has been granted. When shall this Bill be read the third time?

THIRD READINGS

Bill No. 94 — The Apiaries Act, 2005

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

The Speaker: — It has been moved by the Minister of Agriculture and Food that Bill 94, The Apiaries Act, 2005 be now read a third time and passed under its title. Is the Assembly ready for the question?

Some Hon. Members: — Question.

The Speaker: — Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — Motion is carried.

Clerk: — Third reading of this Bill.

PRESENTING REPORTS BY STANDING AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES

The Speaker: — The Chair of the Standing Committee on the Economy is recognized.

Standing Committee on the Economy

Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Speaker, I'm instructed by the Standing Committee on the Economy to report Bill No. 121, The Farm Financial Stability Amendment Act, 2005 without amendment.

The Speaker: — When shall Bill 121 be considered in Committee of the Whole? The Chair recognizes the Minister of Agriculture.

Hon. Mr. Wartman: — Mr. Speaker, I request leave to waive consideration in Committee of the Whole on this Bill.

The Speaker: — The minister has requested leave to waive consideration of Committee of the Whole on Bill 121. Is leave granted?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — Leave has been granted. When shall this Bill be read a third time? The Chair recognizes the Minister of Agriculture.

THIRD READINGS

Bill No. 121 — The Farm Financial Stability Amendment Act, 2005

Hon. Mr. Wartman: — I move that this Bill be now read a third time and passed under its title.

The Speaker: — It has been moved by the Minister of Agriculture and Food that Bill 121, the farm family stability amendment Act, 2005 be now read a third time and passed under its title. Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — The motion is carried.

Clerk: — Third reading of this Bill.

[14:15]

**PRESENTING REPORTS BY STANDING AND
SPECIAL COMMITTEES**

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the Chair of the Standing Committee on the Economy.

Standing Committee on the Economy

Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Speaker, I'm instructed by the Standing Committee on the Economy to report Bill No. 118, The Saskatchewan Watershed Authority Act, 2005 with amendment.

The Speaker: — When shall Bill 118 be considered in Committee of the Whole? The Chair recognizes the Minister of the Environment.

Hon. Mr. Forbes: — I request leave to waive consideration in Committee of the Whole on this Bill.

The Speaker: — The Minister of Environment has requested leave to waive consideration of Committee of the Whole for Bill 118. Is leave granted?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — Leave has been granted. When shall this amendment be read a first time. The Chair recognizes the Minister of the Environment.

FIRST AND SECOND READING OF AMENDMENTS

**Bill No. 118 — The Saskatchewan Watershed
Authority Act, 2005**

Hon. Mr. Forbes: — I move that the amendments now be read a first and second time.

The Speaker: — It has been moved by the Minister of the Environment the amendments be now read a first and second time. Is the Assembly ready for the question?

Some Hon. Members: — Question.

The Speaker: — Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — The motion is carried.

Clerk: — First and second reading of the amendments.

The Speaker: — When shall the Bill be read a third time? The Chair recognizes the Minister of the Environment.

THIRD READINGS

**Bill No. 118 — The Saskatchewan Watershed
Authority Act, 2005**

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

The Speaker: — It has been moved by leave by the Minister of Environment that Bill 118, The Saskatchewan Watershed Authority Act, 2005, be now read a third time and passed under its title. Is the Assembly ready for the question?

Some Hon. Members: — Question.

The Speaker: — Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — The motion is carried.

Clerk: — Third reading of this Bill.

**PRESENTING REPORTS BY STANDING AND
SPECIAL COMMITTEES**

The Speaker: — The Chair of the Standing Committee on the Economy is recognized.

Standing Committee on the Economy

Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Speaker, I'm instructed by the Standing Committee on the Economy to report Bill No. 123, The Wildlife Habitat Protection Amendment Act, 2005 without amendment.

The Speaker: — When shall Bill 123 be considered in Committee of the Whole? The Chair recognizes the Minister of the Environment.

Hon. Mr. Forbes: — I request leave to waive consideration in Committee of the Whole on this Bill.

The Speaker: — Minister of the Environment has requested leave to waive consideration of Committee of the Whole for Bill 123. Is leave granted?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — Leave has been granted. When shall this Bill be read a third time? The Minister of Environment.

THIRD READINGS

**Bill No. 123 — The Wildlife Habitat Protection
Amendment Act, 2005**

Hon. Mr. Forbes: — I move that this Bill be now read a third time and passed under its title.

The Speaker: — It has been moved by the Minister of the Environment that Bill 123, The Wildlife Habitat Protection Amendment Act, 2005, be now read a third time and passed under its title. Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — The motion is carried.

Clerk: — Third reading of this Bill.

PRESENTING REPORTS BY STANDING AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES

The Speaker: — The Chair of the Standing Committee on the Economy is recognized.

Standing Committee on the Economy

Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Speaker, I'm instructed by the Standing Committee on the Economy to report that it has considered certain estimates and to present its third report. I move, seconded by the member for Biggar:

That the third report of the Standing Committee on the Economy be now concurred in.

The Speaker: — It has been moved by the member for Prince Albert Northcote, seconded by the member for Biggar, that the third report of the Standing Committee on the Economy be now concurred in. Is the Assembly ready for the question?

Some Hon. Members: — Question.

The Speaker: — Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — Motion is carried.

PRESENTING REPORTS BY STANDING AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES

The Speaker: — The Chair of the Standing Committee on Human Services is recognized.

Standing Committee on Human Services

Ms. Junor: — Mr. Speaker, I'm instructed by the Standing Committee on Human Services to report that it has considered certain estimates and to present its third report. I move, seconded by the member for Cypress Hills:

That the third report of the Standing Committee on Human Services be now concurred in.

The Speaker: — It has been moved by the member for Saskatoon Eastview, seconded by the member for Cypress Hills, that the third report of the Standing Committee on Human Services be now concurred in. Is the Assembly ready for the question?

Some Hon. Members: — Question.

The Speaker: — Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — Motion is carried.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the member for Batoche.

Mr. Kirsch: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it's a pleasure to introduce the guests in the gallery. It looks like my wife is sitting there but it's actually her twin sister. And I'd like to introduce Victoria Jurgens and her husband, Allan. And I'd like the Assembly to welcome them here. Thank you.

Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the member for Cumberland.

Hon. Ms. Beatty: — Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased to introduce a group of grade 8 students who are visiting here with us today from Stanley Mission. They're in grade 8. And that's the home of the oldest church in Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker. And . . .

[The hon. member spoke for a time in Cree.]

Thank you.

Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the member for Martensville.

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to take this opportunity to introduce to you and through you to members of this legislative council, the member . . . individual sitting in the east gallery — I had to get my directions straight — the pastor of my church, Robert Koop. And he's watched the proceedings here for the last little while and I'm sure he's understanding that there's much need for prayer in these chambers, Mr. Speaker. Would you please join me in welcoming him.

Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the member for Regina Coronation Park.

Mr. Trew: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my great pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly, a friend of this Assembly, a friend of mine, a personal friend of many of us, former Deputy Speaker, the former member for Last Mountain-Touchwood, Dale Flavel, who is seated behind me, behind the bar here. I invite all members to give Dale a warm welcome back to the Legislative Assembly.

Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the member for Estevan.

Ms. Eagles: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, to you and through you to all members of this legislature I'd like to introduce two people that are very special to me. Seated in the east gallery are two of my four sisters — Edna Irwin and

Audrey Thompson. So they're up here to watch the proceedings. I'm very surprised to see them; I didn't know they were coming.

So I'd just ask all members to join me in welcoming them. Thank you.

Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the member for Regina Qu'Appelle Valley.

Salute to HMCS *Regina*

Hon. Mr. Wartman: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, 2005 marks the 10th anniversary of the commissioning of Her Majesty's Canadian Ship *Regina*, one of twelve Halifax-class patrol frigates in the Canadian Navy.

Whenever and wherever *Regina* sails she carries a little bit of her namesake city with her: the main passageways are Albert Street and Victoria Avenue; the ship's canteen is located on Scarth Street Mall. They display two murals of Regina landscapes by renowned Regina artist David Butt. The murals are framed with old banisters from Regina's Central Collegiate. They proudly display an official Mountie silhouette on the bridge wing. Mr. Speaker, you can even buy a Bushwacker beer in the junior ranks' mess. And one of the proudest members of the crew is their mascot, Able Seaman Gunner Gopher, Gainer's seagoing cousin.

Last week I had the privilege of meeting the captain of HMCS *Regina*, Commander Joe Sipos, and several members of his crew who were making a namesake-city visit to our capital. While they were here they visited seven schools, the veteran's ward of the Wascana hospital, and the children's ward of the Regina General Hospital. They presented a \$3,000 cheque to the Hospitals of Regina Foundation to support pediatric medicine. They also visited several local businesses, addressed Regina City Council, and reported on the activities of the ship since their last visit to Regina in November 2003.

In her home port, Esquimalt, BC [British Columbia] and everywhere *Regina* has gone, she has conducted tours showcasing the ship, her namesake city, and the province of Saskatchewan to thousands of Canadians and non-Canadians in ports like Tokyo, Shanghai, and Inchon.

Regina of course is not the only part of Saskatchewan's naval family. Commander Sipos would also want me to acknowledge the important work of HMCS *Saskatoon*, one of twelve Kingston-class coastal defence vessels and the contributions of Saskatchewan's two naval reserve divisions HM Ships Queen in Regina and Unicorn in Saskatoon.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all members to join me in wishing fair winds and following seas to the officers and sailors of the members of Canada's navy. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the member for Saskatoon Northwest.

14th Annual Green Ribbon of Hope Campaign

Mr. Merriman: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, today is National Missing Child Day, a day to raise public awareness about the children here in Saskatchewan and across Canada who go missing each year.

In Saskatchewan, Child Find Saskatchewan is marking today as the 14th annual Green Ribbon of Hope Campaign. The Green Ribbon of Hope is recognized as a symbol to remember missing children and to seek their safe return. It is also a symbol of the thoughts and prayers we extend to the families and friends of missing children.

Proceeds from the Green Ribbon Campaign will enable Child Find to continue the work that they have done since 1984 in locating our missing children, providing educational programs on personal safety, and raising awareness about this issue.

I know that throughout Saskatchewan many of us will be thinking of Tamara Keepness and join Tamara's family and friends in maintaining hope that Tamara will be found.

I ask all members to join me in marking this very important day. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the member for Regina Walsh Acres.

Child Care Week

Ms. Morin: — Mr. Speaker, May 22 to 28 is Child Care Week in Saskatchewan, a time set aside to recognize the importance of high quality, accessible, and affordable child care and the thousands of dedicated people who provide that care in communities throughout our province.

Mr. Speaker, on any given day parents entrust the care, safety, and nurturing of their children to others. These trusted others may be called childhood educators, caregivers, child care providers, or babysitters. Whatever they choose to be called, Mr. Speaker, they have a tremendous impact on the health, happiness, and safety of our children now and into the future, and for this they deserve our thanks and recognition.

Mr. Speaker, two years ago, our Premier announced Child Care Saskatchewan, a four-year initiative to develop 1,200 licensed child care spaces. This announcement represented the largest investment in child care in the history of this province. And I am pleased to say that about 700 of those spaces, half of which are subsidized, are now available to Saskatchewan parents.

The beginning of a new provincial strategy for early learning and child care announced April 7 includes development of 500 more child care spaces, including 250 previously announced as part of Child Care Saskatchewan. Mr. Speaker, we are extremely pleased to be working with child care providers in this province to ensure that all children are well cared for.

I ask all members to join me in expressing appreciation to all the dedicated individuals who each day work to shape and nurture our children in providing them with high-quality child care. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the member for Humboldt.

Lanigan Captures 2005 Pepsi Cup

Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I hope that the member from Carrot River Valley is paying close attention, and soon he'll know why. A group of small-town girls have proven that they've got what it takes to play in the big leagues. On the morning of May 16 to the surprise of some powerful teams from larger city centres, the Lanigan Blue Volleyball Team captured the 2005 Women's Pepsi Juvenile Cup at Calgary, Alberta.

The girls who come from a school of only 168 students played a lot of challenging games, and their final match was against the Kodiaks from Prince George, BC. They lost the first set and tensions were high, but for the next two sets their feisty spirit, team co-operation, and never-say-die attitude prevailed. The Lanigan Blues demonstrated that small-town Saskatchewan determination is something to be contended with.

I would like to congratulate all the players. Carlie Anderson, Kyla Hendry, Alissa Hoehn, Amy Schmidt, Chelsea Cain, Janessa Attfield, Janelle Ewen, Charisa Innes, Bethany Ediger, and Caitlan Jantz. And we mustn't forget their capable and dedicated coaches, Edie Conly and Lindi Stroeder.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the member for Regina Elphinstone.

Cathedral Village Arts Festival 2005

Mr. McCall: — Mr. Speaker, this week one of the largest community events in Canada, the Cathedral Village Arts Festival, is under way in the heart of Regina. This is the 14th annual Cathedral Village Arts Festival, a six-day celebration of arts, culture, and community. This year's theme, Faces and Places, pays particular tribute to the diverse people in our neighbourhoods.

Mr. Speaker, more than 35,000 people of all ages and backgrounds come out every year to take part in the festival. One of the highlights is a six and a half block long street fair with 258 craft and food booths, the largest craft sale of its kind in Saskatchewan. Mr. Speaker, there is something going on for everyone every night this week. There'll be local musicians, traditional buskers, First Nations dancing and storytelling, theatre performances, orchestras, fire dancers, poetry, and much, much more.

Mr. Speaker, it takes a tight-knit community to organize and host the festival. This community truly does have the virtues of a village — diverse neighbourhoods, small-business people,

workers, artists, musicians, and schoolchildren. Anyone walking down 13th Avenue these days can just feel the sense of fun and co-operation.

Mr. Speaker, the arts festival is always a great success and much credit goes to the organizing committee, the sponsors, and all the volunteers for their dedication, hard work, and support. I encourage everyone to come on down to Cathedral Village this week for a good time and some great faces and places. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

[14:30]

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the member from Estevan.

McHappy Day in Canada

Ms. Eagles: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, Wednesday, May 18 was McHappy Day across Canada. All McDonald's restaurants across the nation participated in this effort to support Ronald McDonald House.

I, along with many dignitaries and business people, had the pleasure of working at the McDonald's restaurants in Estevan. We had a lot of fun and we now realize how important their work as a team is.

Mr. Speaker, the McDonald's restaurants in Estevan raised \$3,750 and across Canada a total of \$2.5 million was raised for Ronald McDonald House. And we all know how worthwhile these houses are as they are support for families of sick children. And, Mr. Speaker, all too often we forget the tremendous struggles families face when they have a sick child and we should be very grateful for the initiative that the McDonald's restaurant chain has taken to meet the needs in their communities. And this is certainly a true example of giving back.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank Estevan managers, Tim and Chris Jenish, their staff, and especially Cheryl Irvine who I worked with. I ask all members to join me in congratulating and thanking McDonald's restaurants and all their customers for their generosity. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the member for Meadow Lake.

Meadow Lake Author on Jury for Giller Prize

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Giller Prize is one of the most prestigious literary honours in Canada. Founded in 1994 by Jack Rabinovitch with the assistance from such notable figures in Canadian letters as Mordecai Richler and Alice Munro, the prize is dedicated to recognizing excellence in Canadian literature.

Each year the Giller Prize awards \$25,000 to the author of the best Canadian novel or short story collection published in

English. Mr. Speaker, I'm extremely pleased to say that the author Warren Cariou, who was born and raised in Meadow Lake and whose writing is very much informed by connection to his community, has been named as one of the jurists for this year's Giller Prize.

Mr. Speaker, Warren Cariou received his undergraduate degree from the University of Saskatchewan and went on to earn his Ph.D. [Doctor of Philosophy] from the University of Toronto. He has published two books: a collection of novellas called *The Exalted Company of Roadside Martyrs*, and a memoir entitled *Lake of the Prairies* that won the 2002 Drainie-Taylor Prize for biography and was short listed for the 2004 Charles Taylor Prize.

Mr. Speaker, being asked to sit on the jury of the very prestigious Giller Prize speaks directly to Mr. Cariou's own skills as a writer, and to the respect other members of the Canadian writing community have for his literary judgment and of course for his work. I congratulate Warren Cariou on all his achievements and I know the community of Meadow Lake congratulates him and wishes him every success into the future, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

ORAL QUESTIONS

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the member for Last Mountain-Touchwood.

Misuse of Funds in Environment Department

Mr. Hart: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Provincial Auditor issued a scathing report identifying up to a half a million dollars in fraudulent payments in the Department of Environment. His report detailed hundreds of unauthorized payments without proper documentation, to fictitious businesses for good and services that were never received. This went undetected, Mr. Speaker, for some six years.

Mr. Speaker, to the minister: how on earth did that happen?

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the Minister of the Environment.

Hon. Mr. Forbes: — Mr. Speaker, we take this matter very seriously in the department too. We've worked very hard to ensure this kind of thing has stopped. It has stopped. We've put instruments in place, actions into place, to make sure this kind of thing doesn't happen again. We've worked with the auditor. Since our department discovered the misuse of public funds in early December of last year we have acted, Mr. Speaker, and we will continue to act to improve our accountability.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the member for Last Mountain-Touchwood.

Mr. Hart: — Mr. Speaker, the auditor found 200 payments totalling \$260,000 for goods and services that were never

received — things like meeting rooms, equipment rentals, catering, training, travel, and translation service. Six years and \$260,000 lost, Mr. Speaker. The department never received any of these services.

How does the minister and his officials miss something like that? How can the department spend \$260,000 of taxpayers' hard-earned dollars and not receive any services, Mr. Speaker? How did that minister allow that to happen for such a length of time?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the Minister of the Environment.

Hon. Mr. Forbes: — Well, Mr. Speaker, we take it seriously that we take public money and invest it to make sure our environment is protected. To that end, over the last two years we've worked very hard to ensure that services are provided to meet our mandate. Mr. Speaker, we reorganized our department last year to ensure accountability. To that end, Mr. Speaker, this was discovered by our department in December. Then we approached the comptroller, the auditor, about this suspicious misuse of funding. And so we can assure the public and the citizens of Saskatchewan that we are taking all steps necessary to make sure this does not happen again.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the member for Last Mountain-Touchwood.

Mr. Hart: — Mr. Speaker, the auditor raised some very serious questions about how payments were authorized in the first place, Mr. Speaker. And he said in his report, and I quote:

Employees at Environment routinely instructed the Department of Finance to send signed cheques to Environment without documenting the . . .

The Speaker: — Order. Order please. Order please. Order please. Order please. The member for Last Mountain . . . Order please. The member for Last Mountain-Touchwood.

Mr. Hart: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The auditor said in his report, and I quote:

Employees at Environment routinely instructed the Department of Finance to send signed cheques to Environment without documenting the reasons for such requests. Accounting staff at Environment gave these cheques to employees . . . [who] had . . . [initially requested the cheques, Mr. Speaker].

Why did the minister and his department authorize payment without documentation? And why were these cheques given back to department employees instead of being sent directly to the suppliers, Mr. Speaker?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the Minister of the

Environment.

Hon. Mr. Forbes: — While we appreciate the good work of the auditor, we are working on implementing all the recommendations. It is important to get the facts straight, and that's what the auditor has done. There is a criminal investigation taking place.

But what's more important, Mr. Speaker, and for the people of Saskatchewan, that we assure that those who are responsible are held accountable and that this kind of thing doesn't happen again. And to that end, Mr. Speaker, we have taken action. We will continue to improve the accountability processes in our department.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the member for Last Mountain-Touchwood.

Mr. Hart: — Mr. Speaker, the auditor identified problems within the Department of Environment as far back as 1998, Mr. Speaker. And nothing was done to correct those inadequacies in their departmental functions, Mr. Speaker. The auditor identified such practices as poor segregation of duties and expense monitoring, employees approving their own purchases, Mr. Speaker, employees knowing their supervisors' passwords, cheques being issued without proper documentation, and worst of all, Mr. Speaker, cheques being sent to department employees instead of to the suppliers of the goods and services, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, as I said, the auditor has been warning about these problems for quite a number of years. But his recommendations were ignored. I would like that minister to answer why they didn't act on the auditor's recommendations sooner.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the Minister of the Environment.

Hon. Mr. Forbes: — Mr. Speaker, let's get the facts straight. The recommendations were not ignored. We've been working with the auditor. We take his work very seriously and we work to support his findings. They were not ignored. To that end, the five recommendations, we are acting to put them into place. Last year we reorganized our department to make sure this kind of thing doesn't happen. We are on top of this. We take this very seriously, and we will make sure this kind of thing stops now.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the member for Last Mountain-Touchwood.

Mr. Hart: — Mr. Speaker, the minister said that corrective actions were taken and proper financial reporting policies were put in place. What the problem was, Mr. Speaker, that those policies were not followed. And the department had no mechanism to follow up and see if the policies were being properly followed, Mr. Speaker. And the auditor says that in his

report, and I quote,

... employees did not always follow these policies ... [and] Senior management has not established practices to assess how well employees ... [followed the] established policies.

Mr. Speaker, so the minister may say that there was changes made, but the employees were not instructed and there was no provision made to see that employees would follow those changes, Mr. Speaker. Why didn't the minister and his officials follow up on those recommendations of the auditor?

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the Minister of the Environment.

Hon. Mr. Forbes: — Well, Mr. Speaker, we have followed up on those recommendations. And it's key to the success of our department that accountability is there. And we see that and we know that.

To that end, Mr. Speaker, we've taken several steps. As I mentioned, last year we reorganized the department. We have a new delegated signing authority that was in place last June, 2004. Now to approve new vendors, support staff can no longer initiate these activities. Branch head approval is required. We have put into place, we've hired a new person in terms of our internal audit.

Mr. Speaker, these are just a few examples of the kind of things we've done to make sure this kind of thing does not happen again. Mr. Speaker, we have acted. We take this very seriously, and we will continue to work to make sure this stops.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the member for Last Mountain-Touchwood.

Criminal Reference Checks for the Public Service's Employment Screening

Mr. Hart: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the auditor says that criminal background checks would be helpful when hiring certain employees. However, the Public Service Commission has not implemented this policy. Back on February 1, Mr. Speaker, the Saskatchewan Party called for retroactive background checks for any government employees who handle money or are responsible for children. What is this government doing in this regard, Mr. Speaker? Will the NDP [New Democratic Party] implement criminal background checks for positions responsible for money and children?

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the Minister Responsible for the Public Service Commission.

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. First of all, I want to indicate to the public that the vast, vast majority of public servants in this province complete their work with a great deal of integrity, honesty, and diligence, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Secondly I want to say to the public that we take the auditor's report and his findings extremely seriously.

Mr. Speaker, the opposition asked me this question on April 6 of this year and I indicated at the time that the Public Service Commission, along with officials from government departments, are reviewing this matter. And I expect to receive a report with recommendations on this matter in June.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the member for Saskatoon Silver Springs.

Payment Verification Procedures in Department of Finance

Mr. Cheveldayoff: — Mr. Speaker, the auditor's report also includes a scathing indictment of lax financial practices in the Department of Finance. The auditor says that Finance officials routinely approved payment requests without any documentation of the reasons for the request. Cheques are then issued and returned directly to the employee who requested them — not to the supplier. The auditor says, and I quote, Mr. Speaker:

... [returned] signed cheques to those who initiated ...
cheque requests increased the ... [risks] of [the] loss of
public money.

This practice was responsible for the fraudulent payments identified by the Provincial Auditor. Mr. Speaker, that's an astounding statement. According to the Provincial Auditor, the Department of Finance, their financial approval process actually led to the loss of taxpayers' money. Can the minister explain how he allowed this to happen under his watch?

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank the member for the question and state at the outset that no misappropriation of funds, no fraud, is acceptable in our society. Fraud avoidance is a serious challenge — not just for government organizations but also for businesses and for private organizations, Mr. Speaker. We always have to be on guard.

The cases that have been identified in government I believe are isolated cases; they are not connected. Nevertheless we should be concerned and on guard. And I think that the Finance department has taken steps towards that end, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the member for Saskatoon Silver Springs.

Mr. Cheveldayoff: — Mr. Speaker, I'm sure everyone in the province would want a machine that spits out money with no accountability. I'm sure Saskatchewan farmers would like access to the Finance department's centralized payment system. I'm sure most people in Saskatchewan ...

The Speaker: — Order please, members. Order. The member for Saskatoon Silver Springs.

Mr. Cheveldayoff: — Mr. Speaker, I'm sure most people in Saskatchewan would like to benefit from this minister and this government's Midas touch.

Mr. Speaker, the auditor says cheques were given to the Department of Environment without documenting the reasons for the cheques. Mr. Speaker, why is the Department of Finance issuing cheques without proper documentation and is this indeed happening in other departments at the present time?

[14:45]

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen: — Mr. Speaker, the process in government is that a branch of government and a department identifies a need to issue a cheque to a supplier or some other payee. That then is documented within the department. The Department of Finance then issues a cheque. In most cases those cheques are sent directly to the payees or the supplier and that's the way it works.

Now there may be instances where the department seeks to attach the cheque to some other documentation that is to be provided to the person who provided the invoice in the first place. And that is the system and we allow for that. I might point out that over the course of the last seven years, I believe there have been something like 5 million transactions by the Department of Finance. I think there's questions with respect to about 550 of those.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the member for Saskatoon Silver Springs.

Mr. Cheveldayoff: — Mr. Speaker, we all know how the system is supposed to work but in this particular instance suppliers were not even identified. Mr. Speaker, with the Finance minister's centralized payment system, employees can approve their own purchases online without detection. There is no checking of authority and no checking of approval, and the money is sent to the employee who requested the payment instead of to the supplier. Mr. Speaker, this just may be the tip of the iceberg. This may be happening in Environment and in other departments.

Mr. Speaker, this system creates all kinds of opportunities for abuse and at least one employee has abused the system to the tune of one-half of a million taxpayers' dollars. Mr. Speaker, what is the minister doing to stop this from happening again and what is the minister doing to restore the public confidence in this government and in this Department of Finance?

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen: — Mr. Speaker, the issue of cheques to payees in Saskatchewan was decentralized 20 years or so ago as I understand it. Prior to that time all invoices would have been checked by the Department of Finance. The system we

have now is that the departments are responsible for ensuring that payments are going to go to — for valid reasons — to valid payees. We issue the cheques upon request. That is the system we have. Again during the course of the last year or the last seven years we had about 5 million transactions. There's about 550 that are in question.

Having said that, Mr. Speaker, the Department of Finance has a system of internal audits to check through departments. We also have the Provincial Auditor, also has responsibilities to report to the Legislative Assembly. And that is the system that we have, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the member for Wood River.

Property Tax for Businesses

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, business owners in my constituency have long-standing and serious concerns with the assessment system used to calculate property taxes.

Recent studies support the conclusion that gross inequities exist between what businesses pay for similar properties in various parts of this province. A big part of the problem is the assessment system. Mr. Speaker, what has the minister done to address these inequities that have identified?

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the Minister for Government Relations.

Hon. Mr. Taylor: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I think as the members opposite know, we have an assessment system that's run by an arm's-length, independent operation, an agency called the Saskatchewan Assessment Management Agency. It runs with a board of directors, Mr. Speaker — a board of directors that's accountable to municipalities, to rural municipalities, and also to the commercial sector, Mr. Speaker.

And in answer to that very specific question, I think the member opposite is aware that just a few weeks ago my final appointment to the board of the Saskatchewan Assessment Management Agency was a member of the commercial sector.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the member for Wood River.

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Well, Mr. Speaker, it may be arm's length but there's four government members on the board, so I'm sure there's some influence from the government side of the House into the SAMA [Saskatchewan Assessment Management Agency] agency.

Mr. Speaker, recently I met with several business owners from my constituency and they find it extremely strange that apartment properties owned privately in Assiniboia and Gravelbourg are assessed at a much higher value than those owned by the province of Saskatchewan's Housing

Corporation. This means that the government-owned buildings have the ability to charge significantly lower rents due to the difference in assessments.

Mr. Speaker, it's bad enough that the private sector has to compete with the NDP. To the minister, why is the assessment system being used to force unfair competition between government and the private sector? This is basically a two-tiered system, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the Minister of Government Relations.

Hon. Mr. Taylor: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I think the question indicates a fundamental lack of knowledge of how an assessment is done in the province of Saskatchewan.

SAMA is indeed an independent agency. It's established by legislation of this Chamber. SAMA establishes the rules and principles used in determining assessment values. These rules and principles are set out in an assessment manual adopted by the SAMA Board of Directors and discussed at an annual meeting of stakeholders, including municipal leaders — urban and rural — and, Mr. Speaker, the independent assessors in the province.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the member for Wood River.

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Well, Mr. Speaker, to the minister, you should know that SAMA works within the framework of the legislation which is passed by the NDP government. Mr. Speaker, over one year ago the Canadian Federation of Independent Business highlighted the gap between business and residential property tax rates. It also highlighted the wide variation in taxes paid for properties of similar value across Saskatchewan. The federation called for more stable, market-based assessment methodology.

Mr. Speaker, in the interest of fairness what steps have been taken to develop a better property assessment system in this province?

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the Minister of Government Relations.

Hon. Mr. Taylor: — And again thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm just amazed when he talks about the legislation established by this government. We will admit that we've amended the system to make it better, but the Assessment Management Agency was created in 1986 by a government other than this one, Mr. Speaker.

The amendments that we've made over the years have indeed improved the system, Mr. Speaker. And it should be pointed out that the board of SAMA has been working very hard to implement the income approach for the next round of revaluation, an approach that's been asked for by the business community, municipalities, and others throughout the province, Mr. Speaker.

We are reviewing a new quality assurance process. We're moving to a shorter revaluation cycle and we're moving to improve the appeal process, Mr. Speaker. We are taking great steps to ensure fairness and equity in the assessment system in the province.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the member for Cannington.

Security Measures for Provincial Parks

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I don't know how you can do a reassessment by government when it's supposed to be at arm's length.

Mr. Speaker, we have all heard about the rowdiness that occurred over the long weekend in some of our provincial parks. Yesterday's call-in shows were jammed with horror stories of violence, vandalism, and assaults on police officers. Some 213 charges were laid and damages at one site are estimated to be as much as \$20,000.

In the wake of all this destruction, Moose Mountain Provincial Park was relatively quiet this year, Mr. Speaker, because of new enforcement measures. And you would think the Environment minister would be more than happy to extend some of these measures to the other parks. But apparently not, Mr. Speaker.

Why won't the Environment minister be extending these enforcement measures to the other provincial parks to prevent such incidents in the future?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the Minister of the Environment.

Hon. Mr. Forbes: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We did have a great success in Moose Mountain Park this past May long weekend. And it was a, you know, a combination of a community working together, business people — in fact we had students working on how we make the plan — a combination of enforcement. Some simple rules like no glass containers, that type of thing, a volleyball tournament — some really good things for young people to be involved in. So this is a good plan but not all plans fit all parks.

And so what we have to do is make sure what's appropriate for the park will fit. And so we're taking a look at that. It was a pilot project. It seemed to work really well in Moose Mountain. We're very happy about it. We are concerned about what happened in some of the other parks, but we'll take the lessons learned from that.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the member for Cannington.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm sure that a good many of the people in Moose Mountain were really

interested in the night volleyball, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, in one case RCMP [Royal Canadian Mounted Police] officers were pelted with bottles. In another case RCMP officers were pushed into the lake. At other campgrounds, bathroom doors were kicked in and the facilities were literally ripped apart.

In Moose Mountain Provincial Park, an enforcement . . . a pilot project of sorts did its job in reducing this kind of behaviour. And as the minister mentioned, it included a ban on glass bottles. It also included limiting the number of campers at a site to four, identifying campers with a wristband, and requiring those renting a site to be a minimum of 18 years of age or older. If these measures worked at Moose Mountain Provincial Park this year, Mr. Speaker, why is the Minister of the Environment so reluctant to extend this to the other parks in the province?

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the Minister of the Environment.

Hon. Mr. Forbes: — You know, Mr. Speaker, I find this interesting. We've got to get the facts straight too. They're saying some things worked, some things didn't. We'll take a look. We'll evaluate it, but we want to evaluate it with the people who set up the initiative, the changes, and what fits there. We'll take a look at Emma Lake or Echo Lake, but, you know, it's really important that many people got out, had a good, good weekend.

And I also want to say, and I want to say to the employees that worked hard to make sure the May long weekend was a good, a good time for many of the park visitors who were there, they did a good job along with the RCMP. This is a tough thing. This is a shared responsibility as well, Mr. Speaker. And this is why we need to take a look at the individual campgrounds, parks. What will work best in that area? We've learned a lot of good lessons, and we'll take it from there.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the member for Cannington.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It would be much more impressive if the minister would stand up and say what worked in Moose Mountain was good and we'll take a serious look at implementing it in other areas instead of saying well, Mr. Speaker, we have to look at this; we have to give considerations. Something worked here, Mr. Speaker.

One of the other things that's happening at Moose Mountain Provincial Park, Mr. Speaker, is that the local bars and hotels are providing transportation service from their establishments back to the park campsites, Mr. Speaker. But unfortunately the Minister of Environment and his department will not allow those transportation, the vans, into the campsites to drop people off so that it keeps the people who may be drinking and driving off the roads, Mr. Speaker, and provides a safer environment. Why doesn't the minister allow those specific vans that are transporting people back to their campsites into the campsites instead of forcing them to drop them off at the park gates, Mr. Speaker?

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the Minister of the Environment.

Hon. Mr. Forbes: — Well, Mr. Speaker, let's get the facts straight and maybe the member opposite should get off his script there and listen to what I'm saying. I'm saying what will work, we will put into place. This is going to be a phenomenal year in our parks, Mr. Speaker. The centennial's here. The parks will be a centrepiece of our centennial celebration and we're going to make sure everyone has a safe, enjoyable time in Saskatchewan in our parks. Thank you very much.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

ORDERS OF THE DAY

WRITTEN QUESTIONS

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the Government Whip.

Mr. Yates: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm extremely pleased once again to stand on behalf of the government and table responses to written question no. 1,279.

The Speaker: — The response to 1,279 has been tabled.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

Clerk Assistant (Committees): — Committee of Finance.

The Speaker: — I do now leave the Chair for the Assembly to go into Committee of Finance.

COMMITTEE OF FINANCE

General Revenue Fund Government Relations Vote 30

Subvote (GR01)

The Chair: — Order. I call to order the Committee of Finance. The first item before the committee is the consideration of estimates for the Department of Government Relations starting on page 71 of the Estimates book. And I would recognize the Minister of Government Relations to introduce his officials.

Hon. Mr. Taylor: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. I am very pleased to be back again in front of Committee of Finance. I have with me today the deputy minister of Government Relations, Harvey Brooks. I have the assistant deputy minister of municipal relations, Maryellen Carlson; executive director of policy development, John Edwards; executive director, grants administration, provincial-municipal relations, Russ Krywulak. I have the executive director, finance and management services, Wanda Lamberti. I also have, sitting behind the bar, director of grants administration, Doug Morcom, and the acting executive director, community planning, Ralph Leibel.

The Chair: — Thank you, Minister. Central Management and Services, (GR01). I recognize the member for Wood River.

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Welcome,

Minister and officials.

Before I get started on the current stuff that we were addressing earlier on in question period, Mr. Minister, in our last meeting or the meeting prior to that there was some questions around the forest fringe area that my colleague from Rosthern-Shellbrook was addressing and it had to do with taxes being collected by RMs [rural municipality] on provincial Crown land. And as I recall your answer to that, you had stated — and this is why I'm asking the question — that some of the municipalities were given authority to collect taxes on provincial Crown land. Is that correct?

Hon. Mr. Taylor: — Thank you very much for the question. I'll be very specific about the way the system works for the member opposite. All rural municipalities have the authority to tax land that is permitted or leased from the Crown. The legislation that provides for municipal tax powers on permit or leased land also provides local municipalities to exempt from taxation that tax or to pro-rate it. So the RMs in question do have the ability to pro-rate the tax on that permitted land based on, should they wish to, the number of days or weeks or months that that land is used.

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Well my concern was, as you could tell, we were talking about forest fringe area at the time. And I just wanted to make sure that it was equal throughout the whole province. And from your answer it's equal for all RMs throughout the province.

Now, Mr. Minister, I want to go back into what we discussed briefly in question period is the assessment system. And I think all of us are getting quite a number of calls on assessments and the fairness of how the assessment is being done in various areas. And I know that your statement earlier is that SAMA is an arm's-length organization. But looking at the 2004 annual report, in the report it gives the board of directors, a nine-member board of directors. Two members are nominated by the Minister of Government Relations to the board.

And then in addition, in 2004 there were two more members from the provincial government that were assigned to the board — which comes to a total of four government members — but the way it's stated in the annual report, two more members from the provincial government. I'd like the minister to explain the four members from the government and who they are, for the record.

Hon. Mr. Taylor: — Thank you again for the question. It does give me an opportunity to discuss the governance of SAMA which is indeed an arm's-length agency of government. As the member is probably aware, in the last time we were together in this Chamber we amended the legislation, and the board now currently operating is 11 board members. That was changed in the last sitting of the Chamber.

Of those 11 board members, six are appointed by local taxing authorities. Two are directly appointed by SUMA [Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association]. Two are directly appointed by SARM [Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities], and two are directly appointed by the Saskatchewan School Boards Association. The province appoints five members to the board. One of those members, by

legislation, is the chairperson, and the minister appoints only after consultation with SUMA, SARM, and the SSBA [Saskatchewan School Boards Association] for that specific position.

The new legislation allows for the Minister of Learning to appoint one member to the board. That's in recognition of the additional dollars that are now being provided for the operation of the agency, dollars available to the agency from the Department of Learning. And then the Minister of Government Relations has two other appointments to make.

And I just want to indicate, as I did during question period, one of those appointments was to appoint a representative of the commercial sector as suggested by the business community, in particular the Saskatchewan Chamber of Commerce. That diversifies the interests of the board because there were no business or commercial representatives on the board prior to that appointment. And secondly, the other appointment that I've made was a former executive member of the Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities — he just left the board last year — and I appointed him to the executive, to the board.

So that would mean that the board is pretty evenly balanced in favour . . . I guess I could say that the board is balanced in favour of the local taxing authorities, and there is considerable consultation with the municipal and school board associations prior to any of these appointments.

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Well thank you, Mr. Minister. I have that in the annual report, all of the governance and the board members. I guess my concern is, if we have what you stated, five members appointed by the Minister of Government Relations, my concern is how much influence that creates in decision making within SAMA.

I mean it's pretty obvious to an awful lot of people, if you overload a board . . . although you can state that it's equal as far as urban, rural, and whatnot, but when you've got government members that are appointed in the board, how much influence that it would have on the decision-making process of the board. And I'm wondering . . . it's very easy to say it's an arm's-length organization. But when you have five members appointed by yourself, my concern is how much influence actually is coming from the government side of the House into the SAMA board, and I wonder if you'd comment on that.

Hon. Mr. Taylor: — I'm more than happy to comment on that particular question. And to a certain extent, I'm sorry that members of the opposition would even consider that, given the independence of the board, that there would be some suspicion that this government would try to influence it.

The SAMA board was specifically created to operate at arm's length. When we look at the individuals who are appointed to the board, let's make sure that we recognize that each and every one of them comes from a sector or a part of the community that's not associated with government. These are not MLAs [Member of the Legislative Assembly]. They are not government workers.

There was at one point a representative of the assessment services, almost always an employee of the board. The last

amendments that we made specifically removed the employee of the board from the board in order to ensure that there was greater independence and independence of the operation of the board.

I think that it is very clear — given the fact that the chairperson is appointed only after consultation with the SUMA, SARM, and SSBA representatives and the fact that I went to great lengths in my most recent appointments to ensure that there was consultation with both the municipal sector and the business community prior to those appointments — that there should be no suspicion whatsoever that this board is doing anything other than acting completely at arm's length.

I also might add that, as I had indicated in an answer to a question from one of the other opposition members last time about did I have confidence in the board, I believe that the work of the board — which is at the end of the day simply to provide fair and equitable assessments across the province, to ensure that there's a system in place to provide fair and equitable assessments across the province — I have complete confidence in the board and the staff at SAMA in doing the job that they've been asked to do.

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Well, Mr. Minister, I have a couple of concerns when you say, consulted. We do know that there's a track record of your side of the House in consultations and also where suspicions arise when you appoint two more members from the provincial government. That's the exact wording stated within the annual report. So I'm sure that you can see where suspicions arise if you're overloading a board with government appointed individuals.

And also you've stated numerous times that SAMA is an arm's-length board. But in question period, you alluded to the fact that how you are making many changes in SAMA. Well if you're arm's length, how can you be making changes to SAMA?

[15:15]

Hon. Mr. Taylor: — If the member opposite remembers what his question was, it was directly to the Minister of Government Relations implying that within my responsibilities, I wasn't doing anything. I wanted to indicate that the SAMA board has made some great steps forward and, in fact, very supportive by this government in what's being done.

But also, if I could take the member through some of the responsibilities that exist by the board itself, let me just indicate two things before I answer the question more directly. First of all, there's a relationship here between the independent board, SAMA and Government Relations. Each of us have responsibilities in carrying out our duties.

Number one, SAMA is an independent assessment agency established by legislation under the direction of a board of directors. That board meets regularly. They have an annual general meeting with their stakeholders. That is, representatives of municipalities and school divisions attend and question the work that SAMA has done and provides advice to the board. Again I repeat from my previous question, the goal is to provide fair and equitable assessments across the province.

Government Relations' responsibilities include examining the funding requests that are made in relation to four key points about what their job is. And I'll spell those out in a moment. Government Relations exists in this relationship to ensure financial accountability. Government Relations will review the five-year plans to ensure sustainability of the agency.

And most importantly — and this goes directly to the point that the member opposite raises — Government Relations works with the board on any legislative amendments discussed by the board. In other words, annual general meetings provides advice to the board, reviews the process, and they report back to government on what to go forward with.

There have been . . . And my question said we, meaning that this team of SAMA, the independent agency, and Government Relations responsible for the agency have been proceeding with implementation of the income approach for the year 2009 revaluation, reviewing the new quality assurance process which SAMA board is putting in place, moving to a shorter revaluation cycle — this will indeed require some amendments to the legislation — improving the appeal process which we've been asked to do both on the political side and within the board. And of course in addition to that, we are also reviewing the funding of SAMA, and we're reviewing the impacts of the most recent 2005 revaluation.

So when I talk about . . . When the member asks the question about what is government doing about this arm's-length relationship, I'm indicating to the member that we are assuming the role that we play, the responsibility that we have in terms of the oversight of SAMA, not in the legal sense of the word but in terms of the jurisdictional sense of the word. And secondly to ensure that there's some accountability in this place for the work of this arm's-length board established by legislation.

So I need to know what they're doing. I need to provide some input when they ask me for legislative changes. And I believe that we have established a go-forward position that the business community, the municipal sector, and the education sector are in support of.

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Well, Mr. Minister, you talked about fairness, and that's what caused this whole issue to come to the forefront now. The group that I met with the other day . . . And this is from the assessment documentation, and I just want to give you some figures.

This is in the town of Gravelbourg. There's a 12-suite, privately owned facility that the value per suite, value per suite assessment is \$20,316. That's the valued assessment. It's rated as above average. Construction is wood.

Now the Housing Corporation's building there is single level. It has a garage, and it's assessed at — it's above average; it's made of wood — and it's assessed at \$14,088.

Now surely, Mr. Minister, you can see that there's quite a discrepancy between a government Housing Corporation assessed value than there is in the privately assessed value of a private facility. How can you stand there and say that this is fair?

Hon. Mr. Taylor: — Thank you again very much for the question. I want to indicate in answering the question that of course in every community and in every instance of course the information that the assessors carry on isn't brought forward to the minister's desk.

SAMA operates both as a regulator, an assessor, and it works in partnership with independent assessors across the province in various communities. What SAMA does primarily is provide the guidelines for the assessors to go out and assess. Government property and private sector property should not be assessed at different rates or under different circumstances. The manual exists to support an assessor's evaluation of an individual piece of property.

There is an established appeal process that property owners can use if they are not satisfied with their assessments. The appeal process will include comparative data. And I certainly encourage any member of the public that feels that their assessment is not fair and has not been done on an equitable basis with other property to use the appeal process that's in place.

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Well, Mr. Minister, I know the interested parties will be appealing. But that wasn't an isolated situation either in the town of Assiniboia.

I'll give you another example. Condition ratings are good on this building. The privately owned assessment is 22,375 per suite, and a comparable suite owned by the government housing association is assessed at \$17,056. My concern is that there's a little bit of a trend. And that's just in two towns within my constituency.

And that's what precipitated the question of . . . is there something happening that we do not know about? Why would these assessments, why would the assessment of government-owned Housing Corporation buildings be assessed so dramatically much lower when in fact some of them are better buildings. And I'm really concerned that there's a two-tiered system here.

Now you have to look at what's happening in communities such as Assiniboia and Gravelbourg. When the assessment goes up for these privately owned dwellings, the taxes are obviously going to go up because the assessment's going up, so if that happens the rent is going to have to go up.

Now people are going to be moving out of privately owned dwellings to go into government dwellings who don't have a high assessment and the rental rates can be lower. And I know in some cases, the actual rental rates are lower in the privately owned dwellings in these towns. But because of the status of the government buildings — like single-level entry is great for seniors — the rent is actually more in it, but you pay for the convenience — but yet it's assessed by \$8,000 per unit less, and that's the concern of the people out there that own these private buildings. And so I would hope that something can be done.

And also I talked to them about the appeal process, and right in the appeal book it states that phrases such as, assessment too high, are not sufficient. I don't know what else you can appeal it on other than the assessment is too high. And so I don't know

if you have a comment on that, but here you can see a trend going; government Housing Corporation facilities are being assessed at a much, much lower rate than privately owned housing facilities. And yet even in the assessment appeal process, it says just because it's too high it's not sufficient grounds to appeal.

I'm not sure how and what else they can use to appeal other than hey, we're not being dealt a level playing field here. I don't know if you'd comment on that.

Hon. Mr. Taylor: — Thank you very much for that question and sorry for the delay in responding. I was just trying to get some additional information about the manual and to confirm of course that to the best of my knowledge the SAMA manual does not contain a two-tier system. I think it should be very clear that the legislation establishing SAMA does not provide any role for the minister in determining property assessments except through recommendations on property classes and percentage of value used to calculate taxable assessments.

For all intents and purposes, the types of questions that the member opposite is asking are indeed best directed at the members of the SAMA board, or directed from the floor at an annual general meeting of SAMA. As I indicated, I have no knowledge that the tool that SAMA provides to the assessors — which is the manual — would prescribe a different set of rules for public property versus private property. The assessment manual should provide for equitable and fair assessments across the piece.

At the same time I wanted to indicate, to help those preparing appeals, a couple of things. The member opposite asked about, the person applying for an appeal can't just use too high an assessment as a reason for appeal. The whole purpose of this is to establish whether it is fair and equitable. Too high an assessment doesn't mean it's not fair or equitable; too high can mean any number of things. But when there is additional information, such as the member has already provided in this forum, i.e., there's comparable data, that is indeed information that can be brought forward in an appeal.

I have with me the *Appealing Your Property Assessment* booklet and it simply states that the grounds for the appeal must be detailed. This is what the member opposite is indicating. Phrases such as assessment too high or assessment too low are not sufficient. It is the responsibility of the person making the appeal to make a case to the board of revision. And it may be as simple as proving the dimensions or measurements are wrong, or that a classification is not correct, or as complex as proving that the value of the property is not fairly assessed compared to another property that is similar in nature.

So the onus is on the person making the appeal to convince the board, the appeal board, that they have a case. And it's clearly specified in the material that's provided to anyone contemplating an appeal.

[15:30]

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Well, Mr. Minister, I'm sure the residents and the owners of these businesses will be pleased to hear that, because we've gone through the appeal process with

them. And to me it's pretty plain that there's cause for appeal when you look at the housing corporation facilities that are assessed 8,000 in one case and 5,000 in another case lower, lower than the private dwellings of a comparable structure.

So, Mr. Minister, I would hope that there's not a two-tiered system, which you said that there was not. But it's not of much satisfaction to the people that are in competition with the government housing corporation facilities there, when there's that much of a variance in the assessment. So I'm encouraging them to appeal.

But when you're competing against the government, sometimes it's a little difficult for an organization to come and compete against the government. And using them as an example, say well that's just the way it is. And I don't think that that's acceptable to these individuals. So I'll be giving them all of your answers and inviting them to appeal.

Hon. Mr. Taylor: — Thank you very much. And I do encourage any member . . . any individual in the province of Saskatchewan who feels that their assessment was not fair, equitable to indeed appeal.

I want to stress two things. Number one, that direction to appeal is handled by a local board of revision. It is members of that particular community that hear that appeal first. Should there be further concerns or further problems, it will come to a provincial board. But first and foremost, it's a local board of revision that will hear the appeal. Therefore it is people who understand the property values within a community that are going to make the first decision with regards to that.

And secondly, again I come back to what I had said earlier in that the board that develops and creates the manual that assessors use is composed of primarily representatives from the urban and rural municipal associations and the school board association which are the taxing authorities. They do meet annually with their stakeholders, and issues that indicate that the manual that has been prepared to advise assessors in the field, if there are problems with that, there are opportunities to address that directly to the agency itself.

The Deputy Chair: — Recognize the member from Cypress Hills.

Mr. Elhard: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Minister, to you and your officials, welcome this afternoon. I have a few questions that have also arisen as a result of the most recent reassessment by SAMA.

As you no doubt are aware, there have been some issues in various communities that are sort of specific to that community that the most recent assessment has provoked. And I'd like you to address some of the problem areas that have arisen as a result.

I refer in particular to the community of Maple Creek which has experienced a significant increase in assessment in a very specific area, in a very small area I might add, south of the community of Maple Creek. The term used to describe this area is an enhanced neighbourhood. It amounts to half a mile on either side of Highway 21 for 3 miles south of the community.

And the assessment on properties in that area has taken a tremendous leap — in fact I believe as high as three times the previous assessment.

I have a copy of one of the assessment notices that was made available to me and the 2004 assessment for this gentleman's property was \$87,500. In his case the projected 2005 assessment is 145,000. That's not quite double, but his isn't quite as dramatic as some of the others in that particular area. And I'd like to ask you, Mr. Minister, is the concept of the enhanced neighbourhood something new that SAMA is using with this reassessment process in 2005?

Hon. Mr. Taylor: — I thank the member for his question. And maybe to answer what appears to be a line of questioning along that line, that maybe I can help by repeating what I said earlier. The legislation does not provide any role for the minister in determining property assessments except through recommendations on property classes and percentage of value used to calculate taxable assessments. The assessment process is indeed a very technical and complex matter which is why there's an agency with an independent board of directors that has the responsibility to create the manual that guides the assessors throughout the province.

As a result of the authorities and the responsibilities as they're laid out and provided, this is indeed the very type of question that the assessors themselves have to answer on a day-to-day basis consulting the manual and the board itself, dealing with, in preparing the manual.

So I can say I'm not aware of the concept of enhanced neighbourhood. It's not something that comes back to myself as a minister. I will deal with matters relating to property classes. I'll deal with matters relating to percentages of value. We've done that this year. But in terms of the matter that the member raises, it's specific to the decisions made by the board itself.

Mr. Elhard: — Well, Mr. Minister, thank you. I heard your earlier response and the reason I brought this specific case to your attention is that it's representative of the problem that the people that live in the immediate area of Maple Creek are experiencing. This is a very small area. It's, well basically three square miles. And right across the road allowance, right across the fenceline, you have a different enhanced area with a completely different classification and assessment. And then you have a larger enhanced area with a different assessment again.

And the problem, Mr. Minister, is that nobody seems to understand exactly why the properties in that very small area are assessed at such a significantly higher rate than the ones outside of that immediate three square mile area. And yet they might be, you know, in terms of proximity as close to the community of Maple Creek as anybody else. They'll have access to all the same services. They all are in the RM of Maple Creek.

And when the, you know, when these discrepancies, this disparate sort of approach to assessment came to the attention of these various neighbours — they started comparing their assessment notices — it became blatantly obvious that some people were going to be especially hard hit by assessment while

others across the road were not going to be hurt quite so much.

Now as a result of this you know, this problem, there was a large public meeting in the community of Maple Creek last night and there were representatives of SAMA in attendance as well as one of the board members from my constituency who represents the rural area. We had, you know, good representation of civic officials and so forth. But when they were challenged as to why some of these issues might be in play, the response was, well we need your feedback on these matters so we can take it to the government and get changes made.

Now, Mr. Minister, as you can appreciate, this is exceptionally frustrating for people who feel that they're being unfairly assessed and potentially unfairly taxed. They're taking it to the authority that is charged with the responsibility of dealing with the assessment issue, and when those people are confronted with the issues, they're saying, well, we'll take it to the government for a decision. And this is a case of throwing responsibility back and forth. I mean you've said today that SAMA is an arm's-length enterprise, and you don't get involved with those micro decisions. And I'll take you at your word. But somebody has to take responsibility for the way these issues develop in these communities.

Now, Mr. Minister, the reality for these people is that even though the RM might be able to use the mill rate factors to address some of the inequities, the school taxes aren't going to change. And this one gentleman is not going to see any change in the value of his property. He's not going to see any change in the configuration of his property, no new buildings, no improvements, no renovations or anything else. And yet his taxes are going to almost double. And if that is a direct result of one or two properties in that very small area having sold for an exceptionally high value, everybody down the line is paying a price, whether or not they can realize that value if they put their own properties on the market.

So we've got a situation where you're trying to address inequities through the reassessment process, and I'll accept that at face value. But there are anomalies here where people are being hit exceptionally hard.

Now he can go to his appeal board and he can say, you know, my assessment's too high, but all the other material facts are the same as they were under the previous assessment. And his appeal will be denied.

So, Mr. Minister, we need some attention to these very, you know, sort of unique and specific circumstances that have developed. And I'm sure if it's happening in Maple Creek, it's probably happening in other small communities and maybe even larger communities all around the province.

Hon. Mr. Taylor: — Thank you very much for that question and to a certain extent for the direction that you're offering. In answering the question, let me open the umbrella just a little bit wider, first of all, so that we all remember why we have assessment, not just in Saskatchewan but in North America.

The fundamental principle in property taxation across North America is that it's based on the *ad valorem* principle, that is

property is taxed according to its value — okay, property is taxed according to its value. So what governments do, again not just in Saskatchewan but elsewhere, is that you want to ensure that there's a fair and equitable process of determining what that value is.

So SAMA exists to set values, not taxes. Local governments, school boards, provincial governments . . . And again we've got to remember that the provincial government gets no direct financial benefit from property tax per se. Whatever is collected on this *ad valorem* principle of property is taxed at its value is actually at the local level, whether it's municipal or school-based. So that principle of taxed on its value, fairness and equity is critical to ensuring that the pieces fit together.

My role and responsibility is of course to ensure that the agency is sustainable, that it's funded well enough to do the job that it's supposed to do, and that indeed it has the capacity to do the job that it's been given to do.

I meet with the Chair of the board and with the board on occasion to discuss matters of what they're doing, and indeed how's their financing fitting, and indeed are there further legislative changes that the board wishes me to make. I also attend their annual meeting and I hear the concerns that are raised from the various stakeholders.

The member opposite does raise an interesting case. I'm not aware of the circumstances. I am as curious as the member is as to why this circumstance might exist. And I will use the next opportunity that I have with either the Chair of the board or with the board as a whole to make some inquiries along this line.

But it is the board, indeed, that sets the policy to ensure fair and equitable assessments because we do know that local governments will use that assessments to collect taxes. And that's a whole other kettle of fish.

Mr. Elhard: — Mr. Minister, the question of fair and equitable assessment in this particular case would be addressed more adequately and more properly if there wasn't that very narrow and small piece of land set out as an enhanced neighbourhood. If the line of concentric circle around Maple Creek was at 10 miles and every acreage within that 10 miles was assessed the same way, people would understand that. People at 11 miles might get a bit of a break. But when you have two, maybe two properties within that 3-square mile area immediately south of Maple Creek influencing the assessed value, the fair market value of every property there, whether it's realistic or not, it creates too much of a burden for the remaining property owners.

[15:45]

If that had been spread over the entire group in that 10-mile circle, there would have been a lot more equity associated with that kind of a finding. And I think that that's what the local property owners are suggesting — that they're unfairly penalized because of the fact that there were one or two high-priced sales in this very small area, and it impacted all the properties in that small area.

I'd like to move to another topic just briefly. The community of Consul, 99 residents, are paying a substantial amount of money every year for the work and the attendance of an RCMP officer. That detachment, or the sub-detachment, has been unattended, has had no officer there for over a year now. There seems to be no willingness on the part of anybody to consider rebating them some of the money or reducing some of the costs of policing for that community.

If you are aware of where Consul is located, it's in the middle of nowhere. And it's just absolutely essential that it have police services there. It's the only police outpost that can look after the border crossing at Willow Creek, and yet they have been unrepresented there by the RCMP for over a year but their costs have remained static. And I think the community deserves some attention to this — either have a policeman posted there or cut their costs.

Hon. Mr. Taylor: — Thank you very much for this question. I think the member opposite knows I've attended quite a number of — in my short period of time as Minister of Government Relations — meetings of SARM members and SUMA's towns and villages group. I've attended regional meetings. I've attended the provincial meetings. And of course there's considerable discussion about the costs of providing policing services both to small towns and villages and to rural municipalities across the province.

I can say that while I remain somewhat sympathetic to the circumstances that you are alluding to in terms of the community of Consul, I am fully aware that the administration of the program to which he refers is completely within the jurisdiction of the Minister of Justice. I have been involved in the consultation process with communities, and we are fully supportive of a funding formula that actually has passed both SUMA and SARM conventions with regards to changes in the way communities are funded by Justice. Not everyone agrees with the new funding formula, but the representative organizations understand and recognize that the formula that's currently in place is fairer, or more fair, than the one that was previous in place.

But the specific matter that the member raises, I will give notice to provide the information to the Minister of Justice. And with regards to member's previous question about assessment, I also give notice that I will forward the member's comments to the board of SAMA so that they have the description of the circumstances in his words, the community's words, to respond to.

Mr. Elhard: — Mr. Minister, I appreciate your undertaking. I accept it at face value and we will look forward to some movement on these particular issues.

I just want to state once more for the record, you know, if a community loses one member of a multi-member detachment or they have no member but they're 20 miles away from an active detachment, that's one thing. But the community of Consul is probably at least 60 miles from Maple Creek. And it's the only detachment between Maple Creek and the Willow Creek US [United States] border crossing. And they really need the attention of no less than one police officer, and it's absolutely urgent that they have that as soon as possible. The fact of the

matter is 99 people in a community can't pay for a policeman very long when he or she isn't there, and they just simply cannot afford that. Thank you, Mr. Minister.

The Deputy Chair: — I recognize the member from Moosomin.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Chair, Mr. Minister, and to your officials. Mr. Minister, I'm coming back to assessment for a moment.

This morning I had the privilege of being able to attend a southeast regional SUMA meeting and . . . But also to raise the question of this value. A moment ago you talked about property assessed according to its value. And ever since the assessment notices have been coming out, I've been getting calls, whether it's from agriculture producers . . . And as I mentioned at SUMA this morning and the comments were made, all SAMA has to do is write a cheque. If that's what my property is valued at, write a cheque because there's nothing in the area that is even close to that value.

I would like to know, Mr. Minister, and the question I've been asked is, how does SAMA arrive at this so-called market value that seems to be so much higher than the actual property, or sales even, in the area, and the fact that we can't even get close to that value.

Hon. Mr. Taylor: — Perhaps I could seek a little further clarification. Is the member opposite talking about agriculture land in particular or something else?

Mr. Toth: — Mr. Chair, Mr. Minister, the calls that I've been getting at the office have been agricultural land. But today at SUMA, some of the comments were actually urban, in smaller communities as well.

Hon. Mr. Taylor: — Well let's just go back for a second to some of the background behind assessment. And again, assessment is this *ad valorem* principle that property is taxed according to its value. So we want to ensure that fair value is arrived at. The SAMA Board of Directors is charged with determining how that is calculated. That's their job. That's their role. And indeed members of the board have been very responsive, particularly on agricultural land, in the recent past.

One of the challenges of the 2005 re-evaluation is that agricultural land was previously assessed on the basis of market . . . Okay, agricultural land was previously assessed on the basis of market index. On the request of rural municipalities and SARM, in 2004 SAMA made a change. And that change now will see agricultural land assessed on a production basis, which is similar to what it was assessed at prior to 1987 . . . 1997. So what has taken place is assessed values have in fact shifted as a result of this change in approach requested by SARM — a shift that has lowered values on agricultural land somewhat on the west side of the province and increased them on the east side of the province because of the way in which the calculations occurred. So there's a bit of a complication here in terms of that assessment.

Secondly, in terms of the way in which we view this, we are talking about four-year increments. So 1997 property

assessments were done bringing about . . . It was about a 29-year period when we started the assessment process seriously. So there was considerable amount of disparity between the assessments of 29 years previous and the assessment in 1997.

We now have re-evaluation that took place in 2001, which was based on 1999 values, and the 2005 re-evaluation is taking into account evaluations as of June 2002. These four-year increments do indeed recognize what could be substantive changes in certain areas that aren't necessarily recognized immediately on the assessment notice.

But at the end of the day, when we are looking at what are we doing next, the SAMA board has indicated a desire to move to shorten the cycle so that the impact of the changes would in fact be less immediate. We'd like to, I'm told, move to a two-year from a four-year cycle, and in fact some parts of the country have a one-year cycle. I have no idea whether we will have the capacity to go to that extent.

So the bottom line is there have been substantive changes, particularly on the agriculture side. These are indeed playing out with some increased assessments because of the way the calculations are done. In terms of smaller towns, every circumstance could indeed be different from one community to another depending on the circumstances that are not immediately recognizable.

But SAMA is charged with the responsibility of ensuring that assessments are done on a fair and equitable basis. I have confidence that they are doing that. And if there are concerns, there are local appeal processes. There's a provincial appeal process. And there's also the ability of municipalities to bring these matters before the annual general meeting of SAMA to address the board of directors and the manual itself.

The Deputy Chair: — The Deputy Chair would ask leave to introduce guests. Is leave granted?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

The Deputy Chair: — In the west gallery, I'd like to introduce 34 . . . or to this gallery, to the Chamber, to introduce 34 students from St. Mark School in Saskatoon. They are in the constituency of Saskatoon Riversdale which is the Premier's constituency, but neighbouring right on Saskatoon Fairview next to mine. And the students, just to explain to them, we are in what is called Committee of the Whole and debating or asking questions on Government Relations.

The students are accompanied by their teachers, Mr. James Strasky — just wave — Mrs. Robyn Flaman, and Mr. Regan Sproule. They also are accompanied by chaperones, Sherri Salzsaler — I hope I pronounced that correctly — Tammy Martin, and Sheila Volk.

I'd ask all members to welcome these students to the Assembly.

Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

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

[16:00]

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — To ask leave to introduce guests.

The Deputy Chair: — I recognize the member from Athabasca.

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you very much. I thank the minister and the opposition for the few moments. I just want to join you as well in welcoming the guests from St. Mark. Just to point out that my three daughters when we lived in Saskatoon attended St. Mark. And I wanted to say hello to the students as well and to say that St. Mark is one of the best schools in the city of Saskatoon and one of the best schools in the province. Thank you very much.

Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Deputy Chair: — I recognize the member from Moosomin.

COMMITTEE OF FINANCE

General Revenue Fund Government Relations Vote 30

Subvote (GR01)

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Chair, Mr. Minister. Just to follow up, I think one of the biggest problems we have in regards to assessment and addressing the issue is the lack of SAMA's ability to explain how they arrive at their values.

One of the calls I had was from a gentleman who actually went to a meeting in his community, and the individual that was there couldn't answer the questions as to exactly how they arrived at the value on his property or anybody else's. And it would seem to me, Mr. Minister, there's got to be someone — or if SAMA's going to be holding meetings — that can really take the time, or shouldn't say take the time, that can simplify the process and explain exactly how, and use some references or whatever so that people can follow where they're going when they explain exactly how they arrive at these market values. Because as I said earlier, the market value right now certainly in our area is not reflecting what most people are actually . . . The land that's going up for sale isn't getting the bids anywhere near that. And that kind of annoys people.

So, Mr. Minister, if there's a way of finding a simple way of explaining how the formula is arrived at and how the process is moved along so that people can clearly understand what's being said, I think that would certainly alleviate a number of the problems out there.

Hon. Mr. Taylor: — I think what the member opposite is doing is highlighting what I'd indicated earlier. The current revaluation, 2005, is based on 2002 values. And this is why on pasture land we mitigated some of the concerns in the 2005 revaluation by changing percentage of value to 40 per cent so that there would be some recognition that the value today could be considerably different than it was in 2002.

In some of these communities indeed values could have declined in '03, '04, and now into '05, but the assessment base year is 2002. Now we can't — this is the problem with the four-year cycle — we won't capture that until the 2009 revaluation which will take into account June 2007 values.

So government does have some ability with percentages of value to address some of these concerns. And we did it on pasture land recognizing the impact of BSE [bovine spongiform encephalopathy] and the impact that might have had on the value of pasture land.

But currently percentages of value have not been changed for a number of years. Percentages of value still are 100 per cent for commercial, 70 per cent for residential. And so we do have some mitigating matters over here but they aren't related specifically to the calculations of assessment. There are some concerns out there.

I will again make reference. I will forward the member's comments to the Chair of SAMA which is where they are best expressed, at the SAMA board level as to the explanation of the way in which calculations are made. If that's a concern at the local level, it is the responsibility of the board and the assessors to be able to communicate what it is that they have done. I will forward the member's comments on to the board.

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

Mr. Hart: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Minister, I have a community in my constituency who is facing a fairly serious situation. It's the community of Lipton. They have one water well; they are having problems with it. They have applied under the Canada-Saskatchewan infrastructure program for a grant to replace the well.

They applied on April 11 . . . or April 8, pardon me. On April 11 their application was given a project number I'm told, but since that time they haven't heard anything as to where the process of their grant is, whether in fact they are eligible for a grant. And because of the urgent nature of this situation in Lipton — as I said they only have one well; it's not functioning properly — they are keeping their fingers crossed that they can get funding together in time to replace that well before it discontinues producing any water. I wonder if you could provide that community with some sort of an idea as to when they will be . . . hear some results of their grant application.

Hon. Mr. Taylor: — Thank you very much for the question, not just in terms of this particular application that the member asks about but perhaps to all communities that have applications under the program.

I can indicate to the member opposite that of course first of all those applications are not made to the minister. They're made to the program. There is a project review committee that's in place that receives those applications. There are indeed representatives of the urban and rural municipalities that sit on the project review committee.

I can indicate to the member opposite and to all the communities concerned that the committee is currently, I've been told, is currently reviewing the applications that have been received. They are very close to having completed the review of all of the applications that have been made. I am informed that the committee will be in a position to respond in some way to the communities by mid-June. But it will depend entirely on number of applications received, how much dollar value is available, how all of the applications meet the various criteria, how the committee reviews all of those factors coming in together, how quickly after mid-June we'll be able to have formal announcements.

But I think I could indicate that should the community in question wish to know how they've stacked up against the criteria and whether they're still in the running, that sort of thing, probably a call to the program office sometime mid- to late-June would provide them with some direction.

The Deputy Chair: — I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, with leave to introduce . . . or to welcome some guests.

The Deputy Chair: — Is leave granted?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thanks to members of the committee for the interruption. I want to join with the member of Fairview who I know has already introduced a group from St. Mark School on Pendygrasse. I want to join that member in welcoming all of the students here. I am looking forward to meeting you in a few moments out on the steps. I think we're going to have a photo.

But I want to also as the member of Riversdale extend a very sincere welcome to all of the grade 6 students from St. Mark and I very much look forward to meeting you in a few minutes.

Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Deputy Chair: — I recognize the Minister of Government Relations.

COMMITTEE OF FINANCE

General Revenue Fund Government Relations Vote 30

Subvote (GR01)

Hon. Mr. Taylor: — Yes. I'm wondering if I might ask the committee to report progress.

The Deputy Chair: — The minister has asked to report progress. Is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: — Carried. Do you want to make a statement to thank your officials or . . .

Hon. Mr. Taylor: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. If we are going to report progress, I would like to thank the members of the opposition for their questions and to hold me accountable for the work that I've been asked to do. I also want to take this opportunity to thank my officials for the support that they've provided us here today and for the efforts that they put in all year round on behalf of the people of Saskatchewan.

The Deputy Chair: — The next item of business before the committee is the Department of Learning. Minister, like to introduce his officials.

General Revenue Fund Learning Vote 5

Subvote (LR01)

Hon. Mr. Thomson: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chairman. I decided to shut down the department, bring everybody here today so I have a number of officials joining us. Seated directly beside me is the deputy minister, Bonnie Durnford. Next to her is the executive director of school finance Don Sangster. Directly behind Don is Trina Fallows who is the acting executive director, corporate services. Behind the deputy minister is Wayne McElree, the assistant deputy. Seated directly behind me is Nelson Wagner, the executive director of facilities.

I am joined by a number of other officials who are behind the bar. Perhaps I can just introduce them as they come forward. So with that, I have no opening statement. I look forward to questions this afternoon.

The Deputy Chair: — I recognize the member from Melfort.

Mr. Gantfoer: — Thank you, Mr. Chair, and Minister, and welcome to officials this afternoon. Minister, I want to briefly follow up on a matter that we hadn't touched on in our previous discussions. I provided you with a copy of a letter that was addressed to you so that you'd have it referenced.

The essence of this letter is from a lady — and I don't want to disclose the person's name in fairness and respect to the privacy — but this lady has an autistic child who has required some specialized educational programming. And she writes that she felt that her child actually has had a great success with learning in a home-based environment to the point that he is now academically a year ahead of students of his own age, age 15 and doing grade 11 work.

However with his autism he has some issues in regard to other speech impediments, specifically stuttering. And she is concerned that as he approaches the age where he can acquire university education that this might be a very significant deterrent to his ability to succeed at the university level.

Her concern is, is that there are some programs — although that they are patchworked on the public school level — that when he approaches older years, that these programs may not be

available to him. And with a significant amount of his education coming from a home-based environment she is concerned about this issue.

This issue as well has raised a concern in a general sense about the lack of uniformity and real clear direction in terms of how these programs are going to be provided for people that have special needs from the School Boards Association, who are concerned in section 18 of Bill 114 that there is a change in definition of what the services are. And they're looking, I think as the parent of the child is looking, for the minister to sort of lay out a pretty clear direction about what the roles and responsibilities of the department, of the school system, and of the community are. And I would like you to provide that statement, Mr. Minister.

Hon. Mr. Thomson: — Well thank you very much. This is a . . . This is both a complex issue and obviously an important one.

We are not contemplating under the changes to legislation that have been introduced any significant change in role on how we deal with special needs programming. We still believe very much that while we should have some provincial direction, while boards should be encouraged to have those programs in place, that they are going to need to work on a board-by-board basis to make sure they've got the best services in place to deal with the students within their system.

The legislation the member has referenced largely deals with how we can deal with some of the better, more seamless approach to integration and programming. And I think that that's something we welcome. But I have to admit we are treading lightly on this until we have some better understandings to where the school boards are wanting to go with it.

The system up to now has worked relatively well as the parents have a good relationship for the most part with the individual schools and with their boards. We want to make sure not to be too disruptive in doing that at the same time that we look at making sure we've got provincial access.

I think one of the key pieces here, and one of the key opportunities we have as we look to the larger school divisions and their relative uniformity and border configuration in comparison to the health districts, is the ability to work together with the health divisions in terms of service provision. This is one of the issues that we're looking at.

With specific reference to the case that the member has identified, I'm reluctant to comment in much detail on the floor about it, except to say that this is very much a dispute between the individual parent in this case and the school board as to what may be needed. I'm still encouraged that the board, and the parent may be able to work out a solution, and I'm hopeful that will be the case. But as I understand that process is still working itself through.

[16:15]

The Deputy Chair: — I recognize the member for Lloydminster.

Mr. Wakefield: — Thank you, Deputy Chair. Mr. Minister, welcome to your officials. I just have a quick question, Mr. Minister, mainly for clarification. It's with regards to sending a student to a private school, at Wilcox Notre Dame as an example. Hypothetically I'm a resident of Lloydminster, and I have a son that wants to go to Notre Dame. It's not hypothetical that I live in Lloyd, but it's hypothetical that I have a son who wants to go there. But nonetheless my understanding is that I can transfer my son from the Saskatchewan school system in Lloydminster into the Wilcox environment. Would that be correct?

Hon. Mr. Thomson: — As I understand, the relationship with Notre Dame is that they are a historical high school. There's no difficulty with undertaking the transfer from the Lloydminster division to Notre Dame. The funding that we provide to Notre Dame is the basic rate funding that we provide for, as I understand, all historical high schools. That's part of the funding regime that we have in place.

Mr. Wakefield: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Now I want to add just a little bit of a mix to this. There's a person in Lloydminster that wants to send her son to Notre Dame. She lives in Lloydminster as well. She pays Saskatchewan tax because everything in Lloydminster city, as you know, is administered under the Saskatchewan education Act. However her address is Alberta, Lloydminster. She is paying Saskatchewan tax and has been and continues to. I don't see a great deal of difference because we're living in the same city. That's where I need a clarification from you, Mr. Minister.

Hon. Mr. Thomson: — Can I just get clarification on that? This particular individual is on the Alberta side of the border.

Mr. Wakefield: — Yes, Mr. Minister. The parent of this student, the son going to school in Lloydminster, is actually living on the Alberta side. However everybody on the Lloydminster side — the Alberta side of Lloydminster, sorry — everybody on the Alberta side, as Saskatchewan side, pays into the same tax system for the school system.

Hon. Mr. Thomson: — Well this is a complicated issue unfortunately. As the member will know, the border does cause some issues on this. As I understand, the practice is that residents on the Alberta side would not have that same opportunity. Certainly could send the student to Wilcox, but there would not be the provincial funding provided to it. Alberta would need to do that.

This year I should also identify that Lloydminster has switched over to the Alberta assessment system, and so that is a bit of a change also. If the member wants, I can certainly take down the information afterwards. And we can correspond with the parent just to make sure that she understands the, I guess, the rationale for that and what the process would be for her to approach the Alberta government in terms of them providing some funding. Otherwise I assume it's a normal tuition arrangement they would have in place.

The Deputy Chair: — I recognize the member from Saskatoon Silver Springs.

Mr. Cheveldayoff: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you,

Minister, and your officials for being here this afternoon. Like to ask a few questions about a subject that's very important to me and very important to residents of northeast Saskatoon, and that's the proposal for an elementary school in Arbor Creek.

Every day in the legislature here, or almost every day, I've had the opportunity to present petitions on behalf of families and indeed on behalf of children in northeast Saskatoon about the need for an elementary school. I think the minister will be aware of those petitions, and I'm sure that he takes them very seriously when they are brought up in the House.

The minister will be aware of the presentation that was put together by the Arbor Creek School Initiative Group. It's a presentation that was done entirely by volunteers and was done very well. Fifty families from Arbor Creek took it upon themselves to survey the entire area, to survey every house and find out the exact number of children by specific age in the area. And the numbers are quite staggering, Mr. Chair. Under the age of five years old in Arbor Creek alone, 567 students presently, and that's great because it's a growing area. There's young people who have decided to stay here, to make their careers, to have a family and to indeed share in the joy of living in Saskatchewan.

I know that the minister is familiar with this presentation that was put together, and certainly his officials will be. I would like to see if the minister or his officials would they concur with the results that have been shown by the study.

You know, another thing that it talks about is approximately 120 students will be entering kindergarten this year, entering kindergarten in the existing schools: Cardinal Leger, College Park, Dr. John G. Egnatoff, and Father Robinson, schools for the most part who are very large. Certainly Dr. John G. Egnatoff Elementary School and Father Robinson have enrolments of over 600 students each, two of the largest elementary schools in the province.

So, Mr. Minister, if I could begin by asking you your comments on the presentation by the Arbor Creek School Initiative Group and if indeed, if the facts presented, if you see fit to challenge them in any way.

Hon. Mr. Thomson: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciated very much the correspondence that I have received from parents in the Arbor Creek area. Certainly it is a positive sign as we see our communities growing and prospering. And with that, the growth of our neighbourhoods, obviously we need to look at bringing in new services.

Currently we are undergoing a reassessment of these enrolment numbers and the potential enrolment numbers that we're looking at. We should know, hopefully by middle of June, end of June, end of June as to how that matches up with the survey that the parents have done.

Once that is complete, then we will need to take a look at how this compares with other projects across the province in terms of the priority. I would anticipate, given the discussions we've had with the Saskatoon board and our own internal discussions, that this will likely be a higher priority than it has been in past years, given the information we have in front of us. The

difficulty is sorting that out across all the other capital projects in the province. But I do anticipate that Arbor Creek will move up on the priority list.

Mr. Cheveldayoff: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just wanted to comment on a meeting that took place on March 9 in northeast Saskatoon at the Alice Turner Library. There was approximately 150 to 170 local residents there. Invitations went out to the minister, to myself, to local representatives from across the city and across the different levels of the Department of Learning.

Myself, Ken Muggerridge from the YMCA [Young Men's Christian Association] was able to make a presentation; Don Armstrong; George Rathwell, the superintendent of the public school board; John McAuliffe, the superintendent of the Catholic school board; as well as local representatives, Lisa Lambert and Ron Boechler. Ray Morrison from the . . . trustee with the public school board was there as well. And, Mr. Minister, to your credit and the department's credit, Mr. Nelson Wagner, Sask Learning department facilities branch, executive director; and Crandall Hrynkiw, Sask Learning department regional director.

I just want to say how pleased I was that invitations went out to all players, everyone concerned. And it's unfortunate you weren't able to be there yourself, but certainly you were well represented by your officials. And I think it was a really good meeting — I think the officials will agree — having all players in the room. And I think the meeting went on for two and a half or three hours, where everyone in the room was able to ask every question that had come to mind.

I guess my question now, Mr. Minister, is what has happened since the March 9 meeting? Have there been discussions between your officials and Saskatoon public schools and Saskatoon Catholic schools? And if indeed there has been, which I suspect there was, what information can you share with the House at this time?

Hon. Mr. Thomson: — Mr. Chairman, I should have introduced that Nelson Wagner has joined me on the floor of the Assembly. He is of course the executive director of the facilities branch of the department.

I appreciate the member's comments about the meeting. I felt it was important that the appropriate department officials went to the meeting, so they could explain the process. I think that often citizens are of the view that these decisions are made politically by the cabinet or by the minister, in terms of which schools get funded and which don't. Indeed we have a long-standing tradition in this province, going back many administrations, in terms of a priority-setting exercise. It takes a look at pressures within the enrolment numbers, potential enrolment numbers, looks at funding arrangements, certainly relies a lot on the priority that the individual boards place on these projects.

As a result of the discussions that have been ongoing and the information gathering that's gone on since March as I'd indicated, I believe it will be by the end of June in a better position to assess what priority ranking a new Arbor Creek facility would have within the Saskatoon configuration. We'll need to still balance that out across other provincial priorities: is

there many other schools that are competing for capital dollars? But I do think that the process embarked upon by the neighbourhood association has been helpful in terms of helping to identify the potential need for a school in the area.

Mr. Cheveldayoff: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. I think it's fair to say that the 2005-2009 major capital list that comes out from your department, people in Arbor Creek are waiting with bated breath to see what that report contains. Now you're saying that you will have updated numbers sometime in June. Will you have those numbers in time to incorporate them into the rankings of this list?

Hon. Mr. Thomson: — That is our intention, yes.

Mr. Cheveldayoff: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. And I think you're aware and your officials are aware that Saskatoon public schools and Saskatoon Catholic schools have made this their number one priority as far as new capital funding. Certainly in the priority ranking that the public division does — the B-5 if you like — they've made that the number one priority. So I hope you would take that into consideration.

Also the group and the school divisions have been very open to looking at new concepts, any type of innovative ideas — K to 5 [kindergarten to grade 5] schools, K to 3 schools, middle school, however it fits in. The group has been very open. And they're just looking for any direction or any help from your department or your officials that can help strengthen their bid or their argument, if you like. And I hope that the minister and his officials will take the time to continue communicating with the Arbor Creek group.

And I just want to take a minute — and I'm sure the minister and his officials will indulge with me — to recognize the committee members from the Arbor Creek School Initiative Group: Ajay Chevi, James Hatley, Sarah Horseman, Richard and Rhonda Leakos, Ronalee Pawluk, Sheri Ritchie, Callie Tratch, Bob Wickenberg, Lyle Wiebe, Lori Wiebe, and other supportive families from across northeast Saskatoon.

I think the minister realizes their sincere desire to see the best education possible for their children, and they would see that through the establishment of a new school. And I agree with him that growing areas are the vibrancy of our province. I happen to represent an area that's unlike many other areas in Saskatchewan that is growing. And I would just like the minister's comment, final comments on this issue.

Hon. Mr. Thomson: — Well certainly I want to also say that the work and the presentations that have been pulled together by the parents' group have been welcome, and they have been certainly well done and are appreciated by our officials. It's helpful as we then work through with the school divisions, their priority list.

I think we need to also put this into context in terms of the situation that the Saskatoon boards find themselves in. As the member will know, we are embarking right now on two very significant capital projects within the city of Saskatoon. I'll be turning sod this week on the new Centennial Collegiate, which is an exciting project in Saskatoon, and we are moving forward also with the Tommy Douglas high school project on the west

side. These are both significant capital projects which involve millions of dollars and of course are putting some pressure on the boards as well as the provincial treasury to make sure that we're able to fund that. This is an issue as we take a look at how we sequence out projects. And so I want to make sure that we understand the part of what we do in the province.

[16:30]

And indeed this has nothing to do with me being a New Democrat, the member opposite being Sask Party. Frankly the system will work the same regardless of who's in the administration. This process that serves Liberal, New Democrat, and Conservative administrations for decades is a process which is depoliticized and I think should remain such.

But the issues that we're trying to deal with right now are the ability for the boards to be able to finance the projects. Certainly part of the discussion we're having around Arbor Creek with the public board is the question about what the scope of the school should be. I think that the work that the public board is doing around this idea of new K to 5 facilities tied in with other community development really is a very encouraging one and may be a much more flexible model to look at than the traditional K to 8.

It may in fact deal with us being able to take pressure off of some of these grades where we want to make sure schools are closer to the kids, but at the same time not have to overbuild infrastructure. We can continue to renew existing infrastructure and deal with a more integrated and appropriate usage of existing facilities.

That's the discussion we're into with the public board. We're certainly going to take a look at what the information comes back with this. I have indicated — and the officials have advised me — we expect that Arbor Creek probably will move up on the priority list. How quickly that then moves into a funding cycle is yet to be determined.

We have a large backlog in terms of maintenance issues within existing schools. We spend a great deal on that. That's a particular pressure in rural areas. And we are wanting to make sure that we don't neglect those at the same time we're building new schools in cities like Saskatoon.

The Deputy Chair: — I recognize the member from Cypress Hills.

Mr. Elhard: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Minister, welcome to you and your officials. I'd like to switch gears a little bit now and move to the post-secondary education part of your portfolio and talk about one of the initiatives that was announced in this spring's budget. Frankly I thought it was one of the more significant and exciting elements of the budget. And I would like to congratulate the minister for undertaking this.

You talked about a student loan program review. And I would like if you would take the time, Mr. Minister, to describe for us sort of the parameters of this review, what you anticipate what the terms of reference are, what you hope to achieve with this particular review.

Hon. Mr. Thomson: — I want to thank the member for his comments and his support for this initiative. I have to say this is an initiative that is very important to me personally. Some 15 years ago when I was a student union president, this was exactly what I was pushing for. At that point lobbying, I think the minister was Ray Meiklejohn at the time, consistently that we needed to have a fundamental review of the way student aid worked.

I was reminded of that commitment I had made as a student union president some months ago when I was touring the student union offices in Saskatoon and the current president, Gavin Gardner, pulled me aside and handed me a nice newspaper clipping with a much younger and certainly a much more blow-dried version of me standing there saying that I thought we should have a student loan review.

It did make sense then. I think it makes more sense now. To put it into context, we spend about \$100 million a year on student financial assistance. About 30 million of that is forgivable.

Now over the last number of years, we have made a number of changes to the programs. We brought back in bursaries and forgivable loans. We introduced a number of new programs like centennial merit scholarships. We have continued to work with the federal government to try and deal with some of the pressures that are in the existing program.

At one point, we had decentralized the administration payment out to the Royal Bank. We've now repatriated that. We've tried a number of different things.

What I had said to the student leaders as we got into this discussion about what a potential student loan review would look like is, let's take all of the money that we spend on student financial assistance — us, the universities, other agencies — let's take that and see whether or not the system can be streamlined, whether we can coordinate it, whether it meets our needs, and whether we can redesign it. And if in redesigning it, can we engage the federal government into that process.

Right now what we are working through are the terms of reference with the two student leaders, one of whom is new here at the U of R [University of Regina], Victor Thomas, who has just been elected as the president. And we are working with the university presidents to try and sort out how we might structure.

My hope is that we would have the review complete in time for us to incorporate it into next year's budget cycle. I don't anticipate this is going to take us a long time. It will probably take us another month or two months to get up and running. But I would hope that over the course of the fall we'll be able to actually pull together a workable plan and decide what changes we need to make and how we should move forward.

So I apologize for being somewhat long-winded, but I wanted to put the decision and the issue into some context.

Mr. Elhard: — Well, Mr. Minister, I of all people don't object to long-winded answers because I anticipate my questions will be equally so. The student loan review that you've undertaken is going to be important for a lot of reasons. And having been

PSE [post-secondary education] critic before and now just reassuming it recently, I think that of all the issues that have been brought to my attention the accessibility of students to student loan financing has been one of the strongest irritants, one of the greatest areas of concern for students.

And I would welcome, you know, a thorough look at how that money that is being spent for student assistance now might provide maybe not greater ease, but certainly greater access. One of the issues that has provoked the most concern among constituents certainly is access for young people that come from farm families because of large amounts of, you know, capital in the farming operation but very little cash flow. And because of the way the rules are set out, it's very difficult for young people from a farm environment to access student funding to a level that would be readily accessed possibly by young people from a different set of personal circumstances. So I hope that the review will take that particular anomaly into consideration.

Mr. Minister, when you talked about setting the whole thing into motion in the next few weeks or months, can you indicate for us who will be involved? You've talked about the two student union presidents from the respective universities in the province, but are there going to be additional professional individuals involved with this? Do you expect an internal review, some external participation with this review? Could you elaborate on that.

Hon. Mr. Thomson: — Let me start with the last set of questions first that pertain to the review. The review will be an internal review. I'm not looking at appointing an outside expert to come in and do it as Ontario did with Bob Rae and the planning commission. I think what we need at this point is more of an action committee, a task force internally to try and figure out what is workable, how do we move it forward.

We'll be working with the student unions at the two universities. We'll be working with the student association at SIAST [Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology]. We'll be working with the administrations of each of those organizations, each of those institutions — SIAST, the University of Regina, the University of Saskatchewan — to pull that together. There is also the student scholarship, bursary, and loans committee that we'll be consulting. There'll be a number of people that we'll be working with to do this.

Our interest is really in identifying what those key irritants are. What are the quick wins that we can do to fix the system to deal with those irritants, and then what are the systemic changes we need to make? One of the biggest challenges we have on the systemic side is our participation in the Canada student loan program and our need to make sure that we stay in line with that.

The member has identified in the earlier part of his question a set of issues around accessibility, and certainly I've heard concern also from students in rural areas about access. Now there is a misconception that we take into account the asset base for farm families into that mix. We in fact don't. We take a look at, as I understand, simply the income earned off of that land.

Now there are assumptions made about what that is, and I think what we end up with is people believe that they can't apply

because there's too much money in, and one of the difficulties we certainly have within the farm sector is the fluctuation in income. Some years are good years. Some years are not good years, and that will affect the amount of parental contribution that's expected for dependent children and dependent students. That is an issue.

I would say on the larger issue of accessibility, the biggest challenge that we have is everyone's defining it differently. In some cases it is a question of how do people get access to the appropriate amount of money it costs to go to university. In other cases it's, how do we make sure that we're doing that in a way that's forgivable and that the debt loads are managed? In another case it may be, how do we make sure we've got special targeted assistance for under-represented groups?

Accessibility is getting defined in a lot of different ways by a lot of different groups. Part of what I'm hoping that we'll be able to get through this discussion is a better understanding within that academic community as to what the accessibility challenge really is.

I am regularly asked as to what we're going to do to get more First Nations and Métis students in, and this is a very good question. We know in our labour market review, we need to do more of that. But the universities are actually doing a fairly decent job. We have more students from under-represented groups now in our institutions than at any point before. We have more students in our post-secondary institutions than at any time before. We have more women attending than at any time before.

The institutions are for the most part doing a good job of involving, sorry, I should say, evolving to deal with these different pressures we have within our society, but there are still some real challenges about how we structure the student financial assistance to deal with it.

Anyway, I could go on for some time. And I'm sure that as we get the report back that we can discuss it in more detail.

Mr. Elhard: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. The issue of accessibility as you pointed out is, you know, a different issue for different people under different circumstances. I'm wondering if one of the ways of approaching that might not be to make the money from a student financial program contingent on the certain program or the specific program that a student is participating in that would be . . . you know that would allow a student to draw down as needed, when needed, for that specific program.

I've got some ideas around that and I don't want to take the time to outline that whole program here, but every individual's needs could be met if the money associated with the financial help was directly related to the type of program and the expense of the program that that individual had selected.

You also, Mr. Minister, had talked about a study of a different sort — a program of a different sort or an undertaking to look at the role that our technical institutes and our regional colleges as well as the apprenticeship program would contribute to the economy.

And again I think we agree with the government that these kinds of initiatives, these kinds of undertakings are important to keep our supply of skilled labour up to standards, up to the requirements of the growing economy and the needs in this province. But I'm wondering if you've given some thought to what it is you really want to see this study achieve. I don't think that you would undertake — if I can make this assumption — I don't think you'd undertake a study of this type if you didn't have some objectives or goals that you would hope to see derived from this undertaking.

Hon. Mr. Thomson: — Mr. Chairman, I want to identify that I've been joined directly behind me by Brady Salloum, who is the executive director of student financial assistance.

With respect to the question of the training review there are some objectives that we have identified, not the least of which is how we develop a more seamless system. We need to really think about how it is we get a closer relationship between the educational institutions and the needs of Saskatchewan's economy.

The system today is largely driven by student demand and that is not always reflective of what the economy needs. It ends up with us having in some cases, where we have economic-driven or job-driven programs, long waiting lists. For example where we have oversupply we may end up with a long waiting list on medical lab technologists, is a good example of that. Other areas we have critical shortages like industrial welders.

We've got to get a better relationship within the regional colleges, SIAST system and I would argue the K to 12 system so that we can start to doing better work on career planning to get people lined up for that kind of jobs.

The second issue that we need to try and deal with is one how we . . . simply how do we meet the growing needs of our provincial economy. We're in a fortunate position today that the economy's outpacing our ability to supply it with labour. We've got to figure out how it is we get more people into the right industries quickly, and that's part of what the training review is.

[16:45]

Beyond that I have not really set out any kind of expectation as to what that review's going to come back with. I have suggested it should focus less on governance structure and more on operational initiatives and operational approaches to fixing this. I'm not interested in getting into a big governance review at this point although I understand both regional colleges and SIAST have some interest in us looking at their Acts, and we may do that. But the study for the most part is largely open to what the participants bring forward for ideas.

Mr. Elhard: — Mr. Minister, with apologies to my colleague, the critic for K to 12, I want to also bring in the possibility of the composite high schools that offer trades training. As part of this review process have you decided against including them as part of this consideration, or do you anticipate having that as part of the full review?

Hon. Mr. Thomson: — There is a consultation that'll be undertaken with them, and there's some very interesting things

going on within the K to 12 system, within the comprehensive school system, but also in the high schools within many of the communities.

We have got to, I believe, work first on getting a better understanding on how we're going to tackle the training, and what our training needs are. Doug Elliott's work's been very helpful to us in identifying some of that. We now need to figure out how to operationalize that so we don't trip over ourselves, between regional colleges and the role they can play, and SIAST, and the Apprenticeship and Trade Certification Commission. We are going to take that work and work it back then into the K to 12 system and figure out how do we encourage more young people to look at the trades. How do we deal with that? What is it we need to do in terms of our discussion with the trades themselves, in terms of making that a more welcoming approach to going into apprenticeship?

So there are a number of pieces that I expect will flow out of it. This potentially is one of the most important pieces of economic development work that the government will undertake beyond the tax and business reviews. This is a fundamental piece for us to make sure we've got high skilled, high . . . well-qualified labour available to meet the needs of employers.

Mr. Elhard: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. As a result of the announcement made by yourself, and the newspaper articles that came out of that announcement a couple of weeks ago, I got a call to my office from a gentleman who'd been an instructor at the high school level in the, I believe, Swift Current composite high school. And he indicated to me that, you know, a significant study was undertaken quite some time ago. It was probably 25 years or more ago now, maybe 30, and . . . well it might even be more than that now that I'm thinking back. But nevertheless his concern is that if we don't start addressing the potential for trades training in the high school, we risk the possibility of losing the interest of many young people who might really see that as their opportunity and their future.

I recall in my own family my son, who was at loose ends as to what he wanted to do, spent a number of months working with a local plumber over the summertime. And he was really quite taken by the opportunities that that trade presented for him, especially in a small rural community where the trades are undersupplied as it is and the opportunity to, you know, start and finish a job and contribute to somebody's improved accommodations, or whatever the problem was, appealed to him. He ended up being a photographer, but nevertheless that experience, I think, said pretty clearly to me that young people at that 15, 16, 17 age arena might really benefit from an encouragement, an inducement, to trades if they are given that opportunity at the high school level.

So the call I got from this gentleman that I referred to earlier, his frustration was that there was a big initiative to move in that direction many years ago but, as time passed, there seemed to be less and less emphasis on that — more on academic training. And we had well-equipped shops and facilities sitting there underutilized, in some cases mothballed. So I guess if there is an opportunity to revitalize some of that equipment that's there even now, some of those facilities, and encourage young people

at that high school age to get involved in the trades training area, it might go a long way to solving some of the manpower shortages we're discussing here.

Hon. Mr. Thomson: — In large part I agree what the member has outlined is both the problem and the opportunity that we have. Last year we completed a review and a reform of the practical and applied arts curriculum for the K to 12 system. We believe that that was important as a first step to really bringing back up to, well let's say bringing into focus the issue of trades education. This was important for us to renew that, to put the priority back on that.

I agree that really, in the mid-'80s, things started to drift away from the idea that trades and apprenticeship were the focus of the K to 12 system. I think it was done for the most part in a well-meaning way. It was just a renewed focus on academics. What we now believe though is that we are needing to get back into that, that young people want that relevant experience earlier on. They want exposure to real-life experiences and real-life occupations.

I have long been frustrated by the lack of understanding that young people have about job opportunities in local communities. When I look at the growth and the potential for growth that we have in our rural and northern communities, it is largely fuelled through trades education. It will be fuelled by the trades, by blue-collar work. And I think part of it is, I mean if you had a better definition — blue collar has a certain connotation of being low-skilled, low-quality, but in fact it is not that in today's economy.

We have got to figure out how we get young people reinvigorated and re-interested in that. We've got to figure out how we connect them back with real opportunities in our communities and how it is the school system ties into that.

Frankly I think regional colleges have a huge potential to do that. They've got a good network. They've got a good coordinating group with employer counsel. SIAST does also. We've got a real opportunity to build on this back into the K to 12 system. The training review needs to be part of that. We need to continue to work within the K to 12 system on that. There are a number of different initiatives that we're launching to do it.

Our big challenge right now is scalability. How quickly can we get there? How do we do it in a way that works best and meets the needs of those students? And I would argue that this is important for us in a number of ways. It will be important for us as we deal with literacy to make sure workplace literacy is there. It will be important for us to deal with local employers to make sure capacity is there — that as we get people trained up, then they've got that opportunity to deal with it.

It will be important for us to also deal with students — and particularly male students who are not seeing the same completion rates as female students — to convince them that they need to complete that grade 12 to go on to post-secondary training to get the trades to get the job.

This is a big agenda, but it is an absolutely fundamental one if we're going to be able to continue to feed the economic growth

of our province. And that's what we're going to continue to work on.

Mr. Elhard: — I know this is going to sound, you know, a bit . . . Well it's intended to be facetious, but one of the best motivators to get young people involved in the trades was represented by a situation in my home community. Our plumber was the first guy in town to have a big screen TV, and everybody knew he made too much money, or maybe lots of money. And they took to that opportunity pretty well.

And, you know, I think that we've just, we've just underestimated and under-advised young people about the opportunities in the trades, and especially in small town Saskatchewan.

You know in the community of Eastend, we didn't have an electrician there for a number of years. The closest electrician drove 35 miles to attend to work in our local community. We do have the good fortune of two plumbers. We have a couple of carpenters and contractors. But, you know, if you need some small electrical job done, it's hard to find somebody in a timely fashion. And when they do come, they've driven a long ways and the cost is substantially higher.

So anything we can do to encourage young people to take up the trades and practise it in their own local community is something that would be greeted with a, you know, a considerable appreciation by people who have a tough time finding tradespeople, qualified tradespeople at home.

You alluded to the fact that you had your specialist on student loans, and I want to go back just briefly. There was a question I wanted to ask about student financing and student programs and the cost of default as far as student loans are concerned.

According to the Bob Rae review in Ontario, they were experiencing apparently a 7 per cent default rate for universities and a 16 per cent default rate for colleges. Do we have similar figures in Saskatchewan? And if not, what are they?

Hon. Mr. Thomson: — The numbers are in fact similar, as I understand, to Ontario.

I want to just return to the issue that the member has raised about tradespeople within local communities. One of the biggest things that we need to change if we are going to combat the negative stereotypes around the trades and the issue that it then feeds into — youth out-migration — isn't a change that has to happen in the school system. It has to happen at the kitchen table. We have got to change that attitude. And it's something ingrained in Saskatchewan people. You know it doesn't matter what generation it is, everyone decided their kids were going to do better than them, whatever that hierarchy meant. And for that most part that often meant, you know, they were going to go to the university.

And indeed in this Assembly, we still often have members who stand up and say, I was the first member of my family to ever go to a university. That is a remarkable accomplishment and something we should always celebrate. But that should not be tied in to the social status of the community or necessarily in to the value of the individual. And we really do need to think

about how it is we prioritize that.

I agree. It's just as important for us to have well-trained people in the pure sciences as it is to have well-trained electricians. And within our economy and our local economies, often it's more so important to have the tradespeople in terms of fuelling the economic growth and the social development of our communities, maintaining that tax base. We've got to do more on that, but a lot of that has got to deal with changing our attitude as a people. And we have just got to figure out how it is that we incorporate that.

I notice SIAST has launched a new set of ads to in fact promote the point that you make . . . that the member makes, that the trades are in fact very well paid. I was impressed to see . . . The other night I was watching — I have no idea what it was — some television. I think it was *CSI* was on. And the federal government was sponsoring advertisements about bringing people into the trades. This is all part of what we need to do to change the perception.

The other piece that we've got to figure out is how we work on developing more positive attitudes within young people about the future of rural Saskatchewan.

I was recently in Humboldt and was talking to a group of high school students, asking them — there must have been about 60 of them — and I asked how many were going to go on to post-secondary education. About, probably about 40 of them put up their hands saying that they were going to. With the exception of four, they were all going to university. Now in Humboldt you can get your first two years of university, at Humboldt. Not a single student in that room said that they were prepared to stay in Humboldt to do their post-secondary education.

We really have to think about what that says about what we're telling our kids about life in our rural communities and how it is we encourage them to stay and come back after they've got that education, because even when we're providing the education in the communities or within the regions, they're not necessarily wanting to stay to do it. And we've got to really drive into that and figure out what is causing that because that ties into the problems we run into with student loans. Obviously if you can stay and do your education in a local community it's much cheaper than needing to go and move into the big city.

Now there's a lot of things we all know, being young at one point, that drive that — wanting to move away from the parents, wanting to meet new people, looking for a spouse; whatever it is that, you know, that drives young people. We've got to really understand how that changes things.

But there are a lot of problems that we have got to try and address and a lot of them really do go back to that fundamental, you're going to do better than me, you're going to do something different than me, you're going to move and go to the universities.

The problem is it becomes not that much of a jump to go from Eastend to Swift Current, Swift Current to Saskatoon, Saskatoon to Calgary. And we've got to figure out earlier in that process how it is we arrest that. Or worse yet, Eastend to

Medicine Hat, U of C [University of Calgary], and then you're already there. So that's the piece that we've got to work on and I think the member would know this, obviously would have his own recollections of this from his own communities. But I think that that's a real challenge for us.

Mr. Elhard: — Mr. Minister, I think you've articulated really what my concerns have been in this area for the last number of years. And I've said this, I'll repeat it again. Some of your officials will have heard me say this previously. But what really troubles me the most is when young people come out of high school in southwest Saskatchewan, a large number of them and I would dare say the majority of them, don't even consider post-secondary education of any kind in Saskatchewan. I mean, Medicine Hat College and University of Lethbridge are just like big magnets and they go there without reservation and without hesitation and we don't get them back.

I just want to go back to the importance of introducing high school students to the trades early in life. You know, the opportunities that we have with those young people exercised at an earlier period in life is going to give them an opportunity to make that choice sooner. What I think happens — and maybe this is just my experience anecdotally — but I think what happens, you get students coming to grade 12 and graduating, and they don't know for sure what they want to do. Well that's when they default to a university program, or they might go to SIAST.

[17:00]

But very few of them will default to an apprenticeship program. You know, very few of them will go to the local John Deere dealer or Case dealer — whoever is left. But very few of them will go there . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . John Deere will always be there. But very few of them will go there seeking employment and offering themselves as a trainee in the apprenticeship program. So I think that if we started working that angle younger with the high school crowd, we might in fact encourage a greater response from that group of young people as they graduate.

And we have an excellent apprenticeship program here. I haven't heard anybody complain about it. I've heard, you know, great success stories. And most of my acquaintances who've gone through it are really quite satisfied with the results of that particular program. So the more we can do in that area, the more I would support and encourage the government as it undertakes this kind of effort.

Mr. Minister, I probably have a few more questions but my colleague would like to address some issues right now.

The Deputy Chair: — I recognize the member from Canora-Pelly.

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Chair, and Mr. Minister. Mr. Minister, a couple of questions regarding school division operations. Mr. Minister, have all school divisions in the province set their mill rates, and what was the date by which school divisions had to set that mill rate?

Hon. Mr. Thomson: — With the exception of the

Lloydminster division that was still waiting for Alberta assessment data was . . . all divisions have now set their mill rates. They were all set as of May 1.

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Minister, if a school board was setting its mill rate prior to May 1, would they have based that mill rate on the 2004 assessments, or would they have based that mill rate on estimated 2005 assessments?

Hon. Mr. Thomson: — It was my understanding everyone was basing it on estimated 2005 assessments. It has been pointed out to me that normally the mill rates are set as of April 1. This year, in part because of reassessment, we moved that date to May 1. So they were all set as of May 1. So it's my understanding everyone used the 2005 estimated data.

Mr. Krawetz: — Mr. Minister, do your officials have the mill rates for school divisions on the east side of the province? Have those been submitted? And specifically would you know what the mill rate is of Eastland Lakes?

Hon. Mr. Thomson: — We have received them although we didn't bring it with us tonight. We can endeavour to do that. We've got the list for each of the divisions.

Mr. Krawetz: — Mr. Minister, the point that I want to make is . . . And I'm glad that I heard you say 2005 estimates because in the RM of . . . I'm sorry, in the school division of Eastland Lakes there are 16 rural municipalities that contribute a taxable assessment to that school division, and there are 15 urban communities. And I think you're aware of the switch that has occurred in assessments.

I had to contact three . . . or in fact contacted four RMs today to determine what their taxable assessment was. And that information, to my knowledge, is not at the division office level, at the school division office level. And, Mr. Minister, I'm just going to give you these examples, and I think you'll understand I think the predicament that farmers are finding themselves in today. In the RM of Sliding Hills the taxable assessment has increased by 29.5 per cent. The RM of St. Phillips has increased by 41.5 per cent. The RM of Buchanan by 38.5 per cent and the RM of Preeceville by 41.5. Those are just the four that I've contacted, Mr. Minister. And I don't know what the other 12 will be, but I'm suspecting that on the east side of the province all of the RMs will be affected pretty similarly. We're hearing the complaints of farmers.

Now when I look at the urban component — the town of Canora, which is the largest community, urban community in that school division — that taxable assessment has increased by 2 per cent. And the town of Norquay, which is one of the other urban communities that I called, the taxable assessment has declined by 19.8 per cent.

Mr. Minister, in the Eastland Lakes School Division, the taxable assessment for the entire school division, the rural component is \$5.4 million and the urban component produces a revenue of 2.1 million. So if there is going to be a huge increase on the RM side in the taxable assessment — an average of 30 per cent, 35 per cent; we don't know for sure — and if the urban component has not changed dramatically because the largest community, the town of Canora, has in fact increased by

2 per cent, there would have been tremendous flexibility in the mill rate that the school division would use.

Now as I said, I'm encouraged to hear you say that it was set on the new 2005 assessments. But my question is, if it hasn't been set on those new assessments and was set on the '04 assessments, what system is in place to allow flexibility for the school division after they take a look at the fact that they may have as much as a \$75 million increase in their taxable assessment? Will there be a procedure that you will allow for school divisions to revisit the whole assessment, mill rate component?

Hon. Mr. Thomson: — I'm advised that in the case of Eastland Lakes that they would have used the 2005 assessment data, and so this should not be an issue.

But it will, as the member has indicated, there's been a dramatic shift from the western side of the province to the eastern side of the province in terms of assessed wealth of the land, and this has caused us with some real upward pressure on property taxes on the eastern side of the province. There's no doubt about that. It correspondingly has reduced on some pasture land, and then the western side, the assessment has gone down.

This will need to get sorted out by boards in terms of what the mill rate is that they set. As the assessment goes up, they should be generating more money per mill which should give them some ability to reduce that mill rate then. They will need to take a look at that. We haven't looked at Eastland Lakes specifically as to what they did with the mill rate, to what extent they — for lack of a better term — profit took by keeping the rate higher and to what extent they reduced it to compensate for the shift in assessment. Those are decisions that the individual boards would need to do.

We did however use the 2005 assessment data to set the grants and to do our calculations, and so the grants would be reflective of that. For the most part that will mean on the eastern side, the grants have likely gone down. On the western side, grants have gone up. I think that the number I provided to the member, one of the opposition members yesterday, was that about 35 divisions saw a decrease in their grant. There should be about a corresponding number that will have seen an increase.

But it is one of the I think as all of us know — and certainly from the debate that was going on with Government Relations, all of us know — this is a very imperfect system, and a very difficult one because of the fluctuations it causes.

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. My final question . . . And I would hope that your officials, maybe Mr. Sangster would be able to supply the new assessment for both the rural component and the urban component. Currently the rural component for 2004 had an assessment of 5.436 million and the urban component was 2.115 million, with a total taxable assessment of 7.551. If the '05 numbers are dramatically different, would you be able to supply that in the next couple days? And then subsequently, as you've indicated, there has been a grant change. Could you indicate what the grant changes were from '04 to '05? Thank you for that.

Hon. Mr. Thomson: — Yes we can provide that information.

And I suspect it's probably easiest for us just to provide it across the province.

The Deputy Chair: — I recognize the member from Cypress Hills.

Mr. Elhard: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I just want to spend a few moments in what time we have left today talking about a new program that I understand was instituted under a government directive, sponsored by the Labour department's WorkSafe program, a new occupational health and safety program being offered at SIAST. Now as I understand it, there wouldn't be anything unusual about that except for the fact that my understanding is that type of program was offered at the two universities previously. Can the minister comment on the need for the new program and the purpose of moving it to SIAST from the universities?

Hon. Mr. Thomson: — I think it's very much, as the member would anticipate, as we take a look at where the potential risk is to employees. In many cases it is in the trades and in the technical areas that are under SIAST's purview. That was largely why the decision was to support that being built into the SIAST programming. I think it makes some sense. It doesn't in any way diminish the program. It just brings it closer to the higher risk employer groups, employee groups.

Mr. Elhard: — Were there concessions that were made to the two universities as a result of the transfer of this program to SIAST? And were they involved in the transfer of the program? I guess the question becomes also, did the program as it existed at the two universities move in its entirety to SIAST, or did we start from scratch with a new program at the SIAST location?

Hon. Mr. Thomson: — As I understand what had happened was as they looked at the SIAST program, they simply built on the strength of the university programs and adapted it to meet the needs of SIAST students.

It is however I think a program that all members would want to support. It is a very positive initiative to try and deal with occupational health and safety issues. And it was only a few weeks ago that we all stood in this House to commemorate the . . . I think this year it was 26 of our citizens who had been killed in workplace accidents. This is something that is just completely unacceptable, and I'm very pleased the Department of Labour has done work to try and bring this closer to trades education.

Mr. Elhard: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. I had asked also if there were any concessions offered to the universities for the moving of the program. Thank you.

One last area in the limited time we've got. You and I both attended the announcement at the U of R Faculty of Business Administration where we had the recognition of the gift by Kenneth Levene and the changing of the name of the school there to the Kenneth Levene graduate school of business. And in my understanding that was by far the most significant gift that had been given to the U of R and may be for some time.

I'm just wondering, does the government, does the Department of Learning play any role in the solicitation of those kinds of

undertakings?

Hon. Mr. Thomson: — The universities have over the last several years really moved forward in terms of their program to encourage alumni support for capital projects and ongoing operating support as well as bringing in more corporate donations. Certainly the gift by Kenneth Levene was extremely generous and is . . . I think the member for Cypress Hills, as I was, I'm sure was quite moved by the personal history that Mr. Levene shared with us in terms of his family moving here, starting a business here, and wanting to give back to his community.

The decisions about which donations are accepted, what the size of donations need to be to receive the kind of recognition that may be attached to it, are all decisions made by the universities themselves and are largely without any involvement or consultation with the provincial government.

Mr. Elhard: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. The motivation for giving that large sum, \$4 million, and the story that Mr. Levene told that day as part of his explanation for the gift, and I guess the sheer size of the gift, I think is the kind of thing we want to see more of in this province.

I had just enough of experience personally with the American post-secondary education system to know that they have capitalized on these types of gifts in a very substantive way. And that is why universities seem to flourish there — because their alumni take it as a personal obligation to support those schools to an ever-increasing amount. It almost seems like there's a competition sometimes among alumni to see who can give more.

[17:15]

If we can motivate people in this province where we have produced, you know, literally thousands of brilliant and capable people who have gone on to be very successful, if we can motivate them to give back to their schools from which they have benefited so substantially, I think that that augurs well for the future of schools, for the opportunity for funding scholarships, for all kinds of program development and support. I think it's a good thing. And I think we need to encourage this type of donation, this type of philanthropy, if we can possibly do so.

So having seen what Mr. Levene did for the University of Regina, I know that's been replicated in a couple of instances at the University of Saskatchewan. I think we need to celebrate those kinds of gifts and encourage that type of giving in the future by grads of these various schools.

Mr. Minister, that concludes our questions for today. It certainly doesn't conclude the material that we had to work with. But I have no further questions. Thank you for your time and that of your officials.

Hon. Mr. Thomson: — Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Chair. I appreciated the opportunity to have this discussion. I know that we'll have many more opportunities as we review the annual report for the Department of Learning in committee to have discussion about this.

Let me simply conclude with two comments. First of all, to say that I agree with the member opposite. The support of the alumni of our post-secondary institutions is really critical to seeing them grow and take their place as pre-eminent institutions in this country. I was reminded several days ago as I was making an announcement in the agriculture building at the U of S [University of Saskatchewan] of the tremendous outpouring of support that people had at that point to build that institution, that particular building. I was particularly struck by a marker indicating that the Hutterites of Saskatchewan had donated. The Hutterite population does not actively participate as students in the universities and yet they understood the importance of that institution to their success. That's part of the Saskatchewan spirit and that is something we want to encourage.

Secondly, I want to thank my officials for joining me tonight. I want to say in particular a special thank you to Wayne McElree, who is the assistant deputy minister and will be retiring at the end of June. He has served our department extremely well and the people of Saskatchewan and will be significantly missed. I suspect we'll miss him more than he'll miss us, but nevertheless just on behalf of myself and I would say on behalf of all colleagues in the Assembly I want to thank you, Wayne, for your work. And thank the members opposite for the questions tonight.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Thomson: — I would with that move that we rise, report progress, and ask for leave to sit again, Mr. Deputy Chair.

The Deputy Chair: — The Minister of Learning has asked the committee to report progress and ask for leave to sit again. Is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: — Motion carried.

The Speaker: — The Deputy Chair of committees is recognized.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — The committee has asked me to report progress and ask for leave to sit again.

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

Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen: — With leave later today, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: — Later today. The Chair recognizes the Government House Leader.

MOTION

Hours of Sitting

Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen: — Mr. Speaker, I'd like to move a motion with respect to the sitting hours. By leave I move:

That notwithstanding rule 3(1), the House shall sit from 7 p.m. until 10:30 p.m. on Wednesday, May 25, 2005.

I would move that, seconded by the member from Melfort, assuming there's leave of the Assembly.

The Speaker: — The Government House Leader, the member for Regina Douglas Park, has requested leave to move a motion with respect to hours of sitting. Is leave granted?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — Leave has been granted. It has been moved by the member for Regina Douglas Park, seconded by the member for Melfort:

That notwithstanding rule 3(1), the House shall sit from 7 p.m. until 10:30 p.m. on Wednesday, May 25, 2005.

Is the Assembly ready for the question?

Some Hon. Members: — Question.

The Speaker: — Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — Motion is carried.

Clerk: — Committee of Finance.

The Speaker: — I do now leave the Chair for this Assembly to go into Committee of Finance.

COMMITTEE OF FINANCE

The Deputy Chair: — I recognize the Government House Leader.

Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen: — Mr. Chair, I move that we recess until 7 p.m.

The Deputy Chair: — We will stand recessed until 7 p.m.

[The Assembly recessed until 19:00.]

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRESENTING PETITIONS

Elhard	3143
Draude	3143
Hermanson	3143
McMorris	3143
Eagles	3143
Gantefoer	3143
Harpauer	3143
Cheveldayoff	3144
Brkich	3144
Weekes	3144
Kerpan	3144
Merriman	3144
Hart	3144
Kirsch	3144

READING AND RECEIVING PETITIONS

Clerk Assistant	3145
-----------------------	------

PRESENTING REPORTS BY STANDING AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES

Standing Committee on the Economy

Lautermilch	3145
-------------------	------

Standing Committee on Human Services

Junor	3152
-------------	------

FIRST AND SECOND READING OF AMENDMENTS

Bill No. 87 — The Trade Union Amendment Act, 2004

Higgins	3145
---------------	------

Bill No. 118 — The Saskatchewan Watershed Authority Act, 2005

Forbes	3151
--------------	------

THIRD READINGS

Bill No. 87 — The Trade Union Amendment Act, 2004

Higgins	3145
---------------	------

Bill No. 86 — The Labour Standards Amendment Act, 2004 (No. 2)

Higgins	3146
---------------	------

Bill No. 122 — The Miscellaneous Labour Statutes Amendment Act, 2005

Higgins	3146
---------------	------

Morin	3146
-------------	------

D'Autremont	3148
-------------------	------

Recorded Division	3148
-------------------------	------

Bill No. 120 — The Fuel Tax Amendment Act, 2005

Van Mulligen	3149
--------------------	------

Bill No. 125 — The Corporation Capital Tax Amendment Act, 2005

Van Mulligen	3149
--------------------	------

Recorded Division	3149
-------------------------	------

Bill No. 94 — The Apiaries Act, 2005

Wartman	3150
---------------	------

Bill No. 121 — The Farm Financial Stability Amendment Act, 2005

Wartman	3150
---------------	------

Bill No. 118 — The Saskatchewan Watershed Authority Act, 2005

Forbes	3151
--------------	------

Bill No. 123 — The Wildlife Habitat Protection Amendment Act, 2005

Forbes	3151
--------------	------

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Kirsch	3152
--------------	------

Beatty	3152
--------------	------

Heppner	3152
---------------	------

Trew	3152
------------	------

Eagles	3152
--------------	------

Deputy Chair	3166
--------------------	------

Belanger	3167
----------------	------

Calvert	3168
---------------	------

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Salute to HMCS *Regina*

Wartman	3153
---------------	------

14th Annual Green Ribbon of Hope Campaign	
Merriman	3153
Child Care Week	
Morin	3153
Lanigan Captures 2005 Pepsi Cup	
Harpauer	3154
Cathedral Village Arts Festival 2005	
McCall	3154
McHappy Day in Canada	
Eagles	3154
Meadow Lake Author on Jury for Giller Prize	
Sonntag	3154
ORAL QUESTIONS	
Misuse of Funds in Environment Department	
Hart	3155
Forbes	3155
Criminal Reference Checks for the Public Service's Employment Screening	
Hart	3156
Atkinson	3156
Payment Verification Procedures in Department of Finance	
Cheveldayoff	3157
Van Mulligen	3157
Property Tax for Businesses	
Huyghebaert	3158
Taylor	3158
Security Measures for Provincial Parks	
D'Autremont	3159
Forbes	3159
ORDERS OF THE DAY	
WRITTEN QUESTIONS	
Yates	3160
The Speaker	3160
GOVERNMENT ORDERS	
COMMITTEE OF FINANCE	
General Revenue Fund — Government Relations — Vote 30	
Taylor	3160
Huyghebaert	3160
Elhard	3163
Toth	3166
Hart	3167
General Revenue Fund — Learning — Vote 5	
Thomson	3168
Gantfoer	3168
Wakefield	3169
Cheveldayoff	3169
Elhard	3171, 3177
Krawetz	3176
MOTION	
Hours of Sitting	
Van Mulligen	3178

CABINET MINISTERS

Hon. L. Calvert
Premier

Hon. P. Atkinson
Minister of Crown Management Board
Minister Responsible for Public Service Commission

Hon. J. Beatty
Minister of Culture, Youth and Recreation
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Minister of Highways and Transportation

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Minister of Government Relations

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Minister of Learning
Minister Responsible for Information Technology

Hon. H. Van Mulligen
Minister of Finance

Hon. M. Wartman
Minister of Agriculture and Food