



SECOND SESSION - TWENTY-FIFTH LEGISLATURE

of the

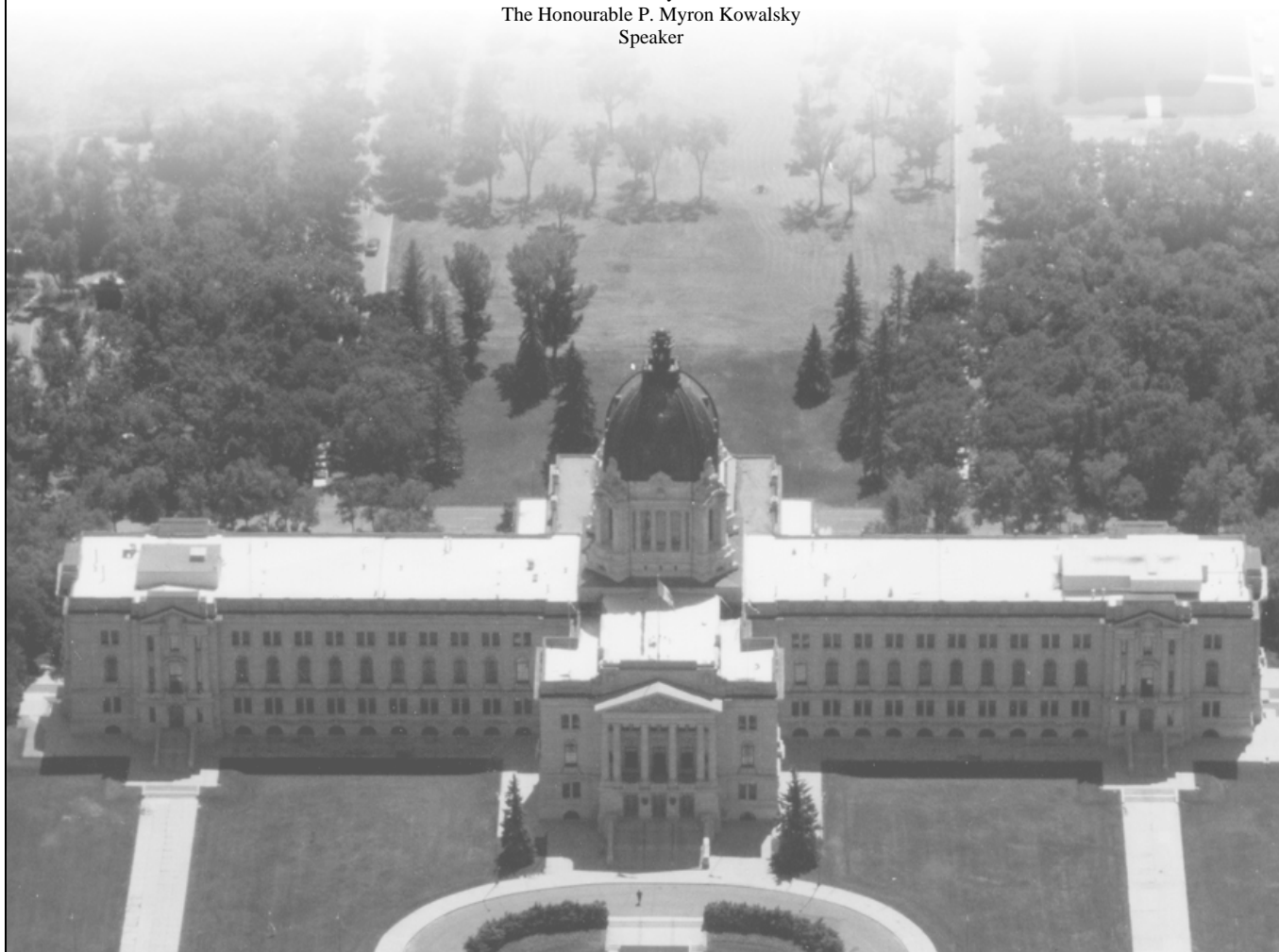
Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan

**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, Hon. Graham	NDP	Saskatoon Sutherland
Allchurch, Denis	SP	Rosthern-Shellbrook
Atkinson, Hon. Pat	NDP	Saskatoon Nutana
Beatty, Hon. Joan	NDP	Cumberland
Belanger, Hon. Buckley	NDP	Athabasca
Bjornrud, Bob	SP	Melville-Saltcoats
Borgerson, Lon	NDP	Saskatchewan Rivers
Brkich, Greg	SP	Arm River-Watrous
Calvert, Hon. Lorne	NDP	Saskatoon Riversdale
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Chisholm, Michael	SP	Cut Knife-Turtleford
Cline, Hon. Eric	NDP	Saskatoon Massey Place
Crofford, 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
Gantefoer, Rod	SP	Melfort
Hagel, Hon. 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, Hon. 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, 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, Hon. Kevin	NDP	Regina Dewdney
Vacant		Weyburn-Big Muddy

[The Assembly met at 13:30.]

[Prayers]

TABLING OF REPORTS

The Speaker: — Before routine proceedings, members, it's my pleasure to table the 2005 annual report from the Saskatchewan Children's Advocate office, titled *The Right Balance: Theory & Practice*.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRESENTING PETITIONS

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the member for Cypress Hills.

Mr. Elhard: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise to present a petition on behalf of constituents of Cypress Hills and other communities in the Southwest concerned about the government's failure to fund the drug Avastin. The prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to take the necessary action to fully fund the cancer drug Avastin.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

As indicated, Mr. Speaker, these two pages of petitions are signed by individuals from the communities of Shaunavon, Webb, Wymark, Stewart Valley, and Swift Current. I so present.

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

Mr. McMorris: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too have a petition to present on behalf of citizens of the province regarding the drug Avastin. 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 fully fund the cancer drug Avastin.

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

Mr. Speaker, this petition is signed by people from Saskatoon, Wynyard, Rose Valley, Foam Lake. I so present.

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

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also have petitions to present. In fact, it's interesting to note that I recognize some of the names even. 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 fully fund the cancer drug Avastin.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

These petitions, Mr. Speaker, come from the Swift Current area. I so present.

The Speaker: — The member for Kelvington-Wadena.

Ms. Draude: — Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased today to rise on behalf of people from the Swift Current area who are very concerned about the government's decision not to fund the cancer drug Avastin. The prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause this government to take the necessary action to fully fund the cancer drug Avastin.

I so present.

The Speaker: — The member for Rosetown-Elrose.

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too have a petition to fund Avastin. Mr. Speaker, the signatures on this petition are concerned that forcing patients to pay for this drug is an example of two tiered health care. Mr. Speaker, the prayer of the petition reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to take the necessary action to fully fund the cancer drug Avastin.

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

A number of signatures on this petition come primarily from the community of Swift Current, although I also see Stewart Valley and Edmonton as locations. I'm pleased to present this petition on their behalf.

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the member for Melville-Saltcoats.

Mr. Bjonerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also have a petition to do with the drug Avastin. 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 fully fund the cancer drug Avastin.

The signators, Mr. Speaker, on this petition are from the communities of Warman, Saskatoon, and Martensville.

The Speaker: — The member for Thunder Creek.

Mr. Stewart: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to present a petition signed by citizens concerned with the lack of provincial funding for the cancer drug Avastin. 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 fully fund the cancer drug Avastin.

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

Mr. Speaker, this petition appears to be signed by individuals all from the community of Swift Current. I so present.

The Speaker: — The member for Lloydminster.

Mr. Wakefield: — Mr. Speaker, I have a petition with concerns about the funding of the drug Avastin. 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 fully fund the cancer drug Avastin.

The signatures on this petition are from Martensville, Saskatoon. And I am pleased to present it on their behalf.

The Speaker: — The member for Cut Knife-Turtleford.

Mr. Chisholm: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also rise to present a petition regarding the cancer drug Avastin. The prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to take the necessary action to fully fund the cancer drug Avastin.

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

Mr. Speaker, the signatures on this petition are from Swift Current.

The Speaker: — The member for Melfort.

Mr. Gantfoer: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise with my colleagues this afternoon expressing the concern of citizens about the lack of funding for the cancer-fighting drug Avastin. The prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to take the necessary action to fully fund the cancer drug Avastin.

Signatures on this petition this afternoon, Mr. Speaker, are from Saskatoon. And I notice as well two signatures from the city of Edmonton. I'm pleased to present on their behalf.

The Speaker: — The member for Biggar.

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to present a petition from citizens of Saskatchewan who are concerned about the lack of government funding for Avastin:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to take the necessary action to fully fund the cancer drug Avastin.

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

The Speaker: — The member for Wood River.

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also want to rise with a petition from people that are very concerned about the NDP's [New Democratic Party] two tiered health system in

reference to the drug Avastin. If you have the money, you can get it; if not, it's not paid for. And the prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to take the necessary action to fully fund the cancer drug Avastin.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

Mr. Speaker, this is signed by the good citizens of Swift Current and Herbert. I so present.

The Speaker: — The member for Rosthern-Shellbrook.

Mr. Allchurch: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I rise in the Assembly today to bring forth a petition signed by citizens of Saskatchewan that are concerned with the government's two-tier health care system in regards to the cancer drug Avastin:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to take the necessary action to fully fund the cancer drug Avastin.

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

Mr. Speaker, the signatures to this petition are from Saskatoon and Hepburn. I so present.

The Speaker: — The member for Batoche.

Mr. Kirsch: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I too rise to present a petition from concerned citizens that are very concerned with the fact that the government is not funding the cancer drug Avastin. And the prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to take the necessary action to fully fund the cancer drug Avastin.

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

And, Mr. Speaker, this is signed by the good people of Saskatoon. I so present.

The Speaker: — The member for Arm River.

Mr. Brkich: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm also pleased to join my colleagues in petitioning the government on the drug Avastin:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to take the necessary action to fully fund the cancer drug Avastin.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

This particular petition is signed by the good citizens from Saskatoon and Dundurn. I so present.

The Speaker: — The member for Saskatoon Northwest.

Mr. Merriman: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege

and an honour to rise today to present a petition that this is the first time in the province's history that the government has denied coverage of a cancer drug recommended by the Saskatchewan Cancer Agency. The prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that the Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to take the necessary action to fully fund the cancer drug Avastin.

And as in duty bound, your petitioners ever pray.

From the good people of Swift Current, Mr. Speaker. I so present.

READING AND RECEIVING PETITIONS

Deputy Clerk: — According to order the following petitions have been reviewed and pursuant to rule 14 are hereby read and received as additions to previously tabled petitions being addendums to sessional paper nos. 5, 7, 27, 42, 65, 67, 638, and 639.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the member for Canora-Pelly.

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Leader of the Official Opposition, the member for Swift Current, I'd like to introduce a group of 14 people seated in the east gallery. These are people that have travelled from Swift Current, and most of them, I understand, represent the Pioneer Kiwanis Club of Swift Current.

I'd like to acknowledge President Elmer Meyer, if he would just give us a wave. There's Elmer. Welcome, Elmer. And another member up there that many people will recognize of that Kiwanis Club is Mr. John Wall, former MLA [Member of the Legislative Assembly] for Swift Current. And I'd like everyone to join with me in recognizing the people from the Prairie Pioneers Kiwanis Club of Swift Current. Welcome to your legislature.

Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

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

Hon. Mr. Forbes: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. To you and through you, I'd like to introduce 38 grade 10 students from Mount Royal Collegiate in Saskatoon. They are in the west gallery. They're here to do a tour of the Legislative Building.

They're here with their teachers, Pat Barry, Kristi Janzen, Chris Roy, and Julie Helps. This is a great school, and I hope they have a wonderful time here today. Thank you very much.

Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the member for Saskatoon Massey Place.

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Well thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to join with the member for Saskatoon Centre in welcoming the students from Mount Royal Collegiate. My colleague is certainly right that it's a great school. I attended Mount Royal Collegiate. And many of the students are from areas that I represent in the legislature, including Dundonald, Westview, Massey Place where I live, Hudson Bay Park, Westmount, and Caswell. And I certainly would like to join the member in welcoming the students, teachers, and chaperones from Mount Royal today.

Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — The member for Athabasca.

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the Minister Responsible for Community Resources, I attended a press event this morning with the Saskatchewan Foster Families Association and I'd like today to take this opportunity to introduce some fine folks to you and through you. And joining us today in your gallery, Mr. Speaker, is Deb Davies, who is the executive director of the foster families association. With Deb is Paul Bunz, who is the president of the Saskatchewan Foster Families Association, and Larry Evans, who's also with the Saskatchewan Foster Families Association. Say that three times fast, Mr. Speaker.

But I just wanted to point out that I'm very delighted to have them here today and to also commend them for the excellent and hard work that they're doing on behalf of the association. Welcome today. Thanks.

Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — The member for Saskatoon Northwest.

Mr. Merriman: — Mr. Speaker, along with the minister I'd like to welcome Deb, Paul, and Larry to their Legislative Assembly. We know the great work they do for foster families across the province. And I just want to assure them that we will continue the support from this side of the House. Thank you.

Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — The Minister Responsible for the Public Service Commission, the member for Nutana.

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Today joining us in your gallery are a number of public servants from various government departments. There's 25 in total and they're from Agriculture and Food, Community Resources, Corrections and Public Safety, Environment, Government Relations, Health, Highways, Justice, the Legislative Assembly, and the Public Service Commission.

Mr. Speaker, they've spent much of the morning at the legislature. They've received some in-depth briefings about our legislative history and also briefings around the building, including the Legislative Library, the Legislative Assembly Clerk's office, Executive Council, and now they're observing the House and then they will meet with members from both sides of the House this afternoon before they go back to their departments.

So I would ask all members of the legislature to welcome these public servants to the Legislative Assembly.

Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — The member for Melfort.

Mr. Gantefoer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to join with the minister in welcoming the 25 public service employees that are here in their Assembly.

It's a wonderful experience and program, I think, to have these professional people attend in a day of how the legislature works and to meet with various members of the Legislative Assembly. I think, Mr. Speaker, it's important to realize that the laws of this province may originate in this Chamber, but our public servants are the ones who give it life and breath every day of the year to our citizens.

So in thanking them we introduce them to the Assembly and welcome them here. Thank you very much.

Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

[13:45]

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

Hon. Mr. Wartman: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, today I would like to introduce to you and through you to the rest of the Assembly 21 grade 12 students from Winston Knoll Collegiate who are in the west gallery. They are accompanied by their teacher, Tana Mitchell, who regularly brings her class here. And I'm looking forward to meeting with them later for a good discussion about what they observe here and about the political structure in our province at this time.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I ask all to join in welcoming them.

Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — It is my pleasure, members, at this time to introduce to you our Children's Advocate, Mr. Marvin Bernstein, who is here with Rick Jorgensen, the director of communications.

The Children's Advocate of course is an independent officer who acts as a voice for children and is committed to ensuring that the interests and well-being of Saskatchewan children and youth is respected and valued in our community, in government practice, in policy, and in legislation.

Would the members please welcome Mr. Bernstein and Mr. Jorgensen to the Assembly.

Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the member for Regina Wascana Plains.

Regina Volunteer Receives Kinsmen Award

Ms. Hamilton: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently a constituent of mine received a very prestigious award from the Regina Queen City Kinsmen. Mr. Rick Van Beselaere was presented with the Life Member Award in honour of his dedication and voluntary service.

Mr. Speaker, in the past I've had the pleasure of working with Rick on the Wascana Centre Authority board and know him to be a very generous person with a true thirst for serving his community. Of course Rick's vigorous volunteer schedule is only manageable with the dedication and support of his spouse, Donna.

As the Chair of the Premier's Voluntary Sector Initiative I'm especially pleased to have this opportunity to recognize Mr. Van Beselaere. Volunteers are truly integral to our society. As the people of Saskatchewan know, more than 42 per cent of the people of our great province volunteer — the highest percentage of any province or territory in Canada.

Mr. Speaker, for almost 80 years the Regina Queen City Kinsmen have lived up to their motto of "serving the community's greatest needs." From sporting events to seniors complexes, from food banks to clubs for youth and those differently abled, the Kinsmen of Regina open their arms to people in need.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to invite all members to join with me in congratulating Mr. Rick Van Beselaere, the deserving recipient of the Life Member Award for countless hours of services to his community, and the Queen City Kinsmen for their tireless devotion to volunteerism in our great province of Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Member for Saskatoon Northwest.

National Police Week

Mr. Merriman: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, today marks the beginning of National Police Week. This week is dedicated to increasing community awareness and recognition of the vital role police officers play in the safety of both rural and urban Saskatchewan. This week provides us with an opportunity to show our appreciation for the outstanding men and women who make our communities more safe and secure.

All Saskatchewan police officers put their safety at risk by just going to work each day. We saw recently in Ontario some officers are killed in the line of duty serving the public. For this ultimate sacrifice, all of Saskatchewan is truly grateful. Police officers also play an integral role within our communities, often donating their time for numerous charities and events. Effective law enforcement is a crucial element to maintaining our quality of life. And we must continue to ensure that our police have the financial, technical, and civil support necessary to carry out their responsibilities.

I hope that this NDP government will live up to their

seven-year-old election promise to hire 200 more police officers to help keep our streets safe. I would like to ask all members of the Assembly to honour and recognize all police officers and the difference they make to our communities. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — The member for Meadow Lake.

Prairie to Pine Awards Banquet

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I recently had the opportunity to attend the Prairie to Pine Awards Banquet. For the seventh consecutive year the Prairie to Pine REDA [regional economic development authority] presented Excellence Awards open to all businesses and organizations operating in the villages and towns of the Prairie to Pine region.

Mr. Speaker, awards were presented to exceptional businesses in seven categories. In the category of community involvement, the Excellence Award went to the St. Walburg Chamber of Commerce and the Heritage Award went to the St. Walburg Elks Lodge No. 389.

Excellence Awards went to Bust-A-Butt Enterprises Ltd., and NorSask Liquidations as new businesses. The Paradise Hill & District Chamber of Commerce and the St. Walburg centennial committee won the Community Development Award.

Mr. Speaker, the Prairie to Pine REDA Outstanding Service Excellence Award was presented to Bert Corbeil, Pastor Mike Firlotte, Sharon Funk, Marion Hougham, Gordon Smith, and Randy Domes. In addition, Mr. Speaker, the Award of Merit was presented to Glass Treasures by Bonnie Saunders, and the Prairie to Pine REDA named Boser's Greenhouse, Business of the Year.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to invite all members to join with me in congratulating all of the winners at the seventh annual Prairie to Pine REDA Excellence Awards and in congratulating the Prairie to Pine REDA for all of its diligent work and for organizing such a wonderful event. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the member for Thunder Creek.

Canadian Federation of Independent Business Anniversary

Mr. Stewart: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I would like to extend our congratulations to the Canadian Federation of Independent Business for the celebration of their 35th anniversary.

In Saskatchewan the CFIB [Canadian Federation of Independent Business] represents over 5,000 businessmen and women and works diligently to ensure that the concerns of small business are voiced. The CFIB has lobbied hard to help achieve goals like the scrapping of government-directed hours, raising the tax threshold for small business, and business tax reform in general.

I would ask all members to thank the CFIB for presenting a strong voice for small business in Saskatchewan as businessmen and women are the engines of our province's economy. Congratulations to the CFIB for 35 years of excellent work.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the member for Saskatchewan Rivers.

Saskatchewan Cycling Association Shamrock Tour

Mr. Borgerson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the Saskatchewan Cycling Association is a volunteer, non-profit organization that promotes bicycling for sport, recreation, and transportation. The SCA [Saskatchewan Cycling Association] delivers safe cycling presentations at Saskatchewan schools and also organizes a wide range of cycling events.

For example, Mr. Speaker, last year the association celebrated Saskatchewan's 100 years of heart with an eight-day, border-to-border centennial ride from Lloydminster to Duck Mountain Provincial Park. Cyclists from all over Saskatchewan ranging in age from 12 to 70 took part, covering an average distance of almost 100 kilometres a day. By all accounts it was a great event, Mr. Speaker, so successful that this year the SCA is organizing another eight-day ride called GASP — G-A-S-P — 2006, the Shamrock Tour.

Mr. Speaker, GASP stands for Great Annual Saskatchewan Pedal, and it's the Shamrock Tour because the ride begins and ends in Prince Albert and will make three loops forming the shape of a shamrock. The first loop goes through Blaine Lake and Rosthern. The second is a trip to Prince Albert National Park and back, and the third will go through Nipawin and Melfort.

Mr. Speaker, the Shamrock Tour will travel through the prairie and parkland of north central Saskatchewan, which understandably is my favourite part of the province. Cyclists can enjoy the scenery, visit historic sites and museums, and sample the cuisine of communities along the way.

Mr. Speaker, it promises to be a great trip, and I want to commend the SCA for organizing the Shamrock Tour and providing Saskatchewan cyclists this unique opportunity to experience all Prince Albert and the surrounding area has to offer. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

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

Provincial Awards to Melfort Special Olympians

Mr. Gantfoer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to recognize some very deserving Melfort people who recently received provincial awards.

Rachel Lumberjack was named the Saskatchewan Special Olympic Female Athlete of the Year. Rachel has been an enthusiastic participant and ambassador to the Special Olympics

for five years. She enjoys many of the Special Olympic sport programs, but Rachel's favourite sport is curling because of the many new friends she gets to meet.

Scot Earl was named Saskatchewan Special Olympic Male Athlete of the Year. Scot also enjoys the friendships and experiences Special Olympic programs provide. He plays third for the Special Olympics Saskatchewan Melfort curling team. Scot and his teammates have learned how to overcome communication problems presented by Scot's deafness.

Mr. Speaker, the Special Olympic Saskatchewan Melfort curling team was also presented with the Saskatchewan Special Olympics Team of the Year Award. Rachel Lumberjack, Scot Earl, Daniel Fiedelleck, Rodney Mitchell, and Lorin Bussiere experienced many adventures together including winning gold at the 2006 Saskatchewan Winter Games.

The Melfort Special Olympics bowling team coach, long-time champion and advocate for Special Olympics Saskatchewan, Elvina Hirsch, was presented with the Unsung Hero Award. Elvina devoted 17 years of loving care to the Special Olympics athletes and programs in Melfort.

Mr. Speaker, I'd ask all members to join me in congratulating these very special people from my constituency. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

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

Pregnancy, Parenting and the Workplace

Ms. Morin: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, today is the International Day of the Family, a day set aside to highlight the importance of families. Therefore I think it's a particularly good time to say a few words about a publication designed to help both employers and employees in Saskatchewan address the ongoing challenge of balancing work and family.

Mr. Speaker, most parents of minor children in the province are also members of the labour force, and so play two very important roles in building Saskatchewan's future. The booklet is called *Pregnancy, Parenting and the Workplace* and it's about helping parents live up to their family commitments while still meeting the responsibilities that they have in the workplace, and helping employers create a family-friendly workplace so important to decreasing absenteeism and improving retention.

Mr. Speaker, I want to commend the Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission and Saskatchewan Labour for co-chairing the publication partnership committee. And I want to commend the committee members, including Saskatchewan Health and the breastfeeding committee for Saskatchewan, for their contributions to this publication. As someone who knows first-hand the challenges of work and family, I know it'll be a great benefit to both employers and employees in Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

ORAL QUESTIONS

The Speaker: — The member for Wood River.

Air Tanker Crash Near La Ronge

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, Mr. Speaker, I was saddened to hear the news yesterday that a northern air operations pilot was killed and two others were injured when the plane they were flying crashed near La Ronge. Our thoughts and prayers are with the family of the man who died in the crash as well as those recovering from their injuries.

I understand the three individuals were participating in a training mission utilizing a plane recently acquired by Saskatchewan Environment for firefighting.

My question is for the minister: can the minister tell this Assembly if his department is aware of the preliminary cause of the accident and what is the status of the other 580As?

The Speaker: — The Minister of the Environment.

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Tragically yesterday one of the Saskatchewan Environment forest fighting planes went down just near the La Ronge airport. There are two 580A airplanes in the fleet now with two more to be delivered from Conair Aviation in Abbotsford, British Columbia. The other plane is on the runway in La Ronge and is being held there.

The status of the other pilots and planes that are in La Ronge now is being discussed by the staff today. The Transport Canada officials are arriving on the scene today. The whole crash site was cordoned off by the RCMP [Royal Canadian Mounted Police].

The Speaker: — The member for Wood River.

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it's commonplace after a crash to ground the fleet, and that's why I asked the minister if the status was . . . if the fleet is in fact grounded. And that's why I was interested in knowing the preliminary causes of the accident because once the preliminary causes are out, then it goes to whether the fleet stays grounded or if in fact they can go back flying.

But if the fleet is grounded, can the minister tell us what contingency plans there are for firefighting now that this fleet is temporarily out of service?

The Speaker: — The Minister of the Environment.

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Canadian Interagency Forest Fire Centre has been contacted, and our neighbours on both sides, Manitoba and Alberta, are on alert and ready to come and help us if we need to do that. There have been situations where our fleet has gone to Alberta to help them when they've had similar situations. And this is, well, not a normal procedure, but it is the ordinary procedure when an accident happens.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — The member for Saskatoon Northwest.

Recommendations of the Children's Advocate

Mr. Merriman: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today the Office of the Children's Advocate released his annual report. It contains many examples of where the NDP government has failed children of this province and to demonstrate that a lot of children are being left behind. The advocate also points out that many of his recommendations from previous years were never followed up.

Mr. Speaker, to the minister: will he commit to implementing the recommendations of the Child's Advocate in a timely manner and to inform this House as to when this will happen?

[14:00]

The Speaker: — The Minister for Community Resources.

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. First of all I want to thank the Child's Advocate for his great work. There's no question that in the analysis of our department and how well we serve the people of Saskatchewan, we always ask for outside evaluation. And certainly from this perspective, inviting the Child's Advocate to look at our files and to work closely with him and to ask for his advice, that's one of the things that we want to do.

And I want to point out today that the advocate has been doing a tremendous amount of good work in his early placement and that our department continues to take very seriously some of the issues raised by the Child's Advocate. And I can point out, Mr. Speaker, that of the 25 recommendations that we've been working towards over the last five years, there's one if not two of them that we're having difficulty in terms of trying to make sure we have a successful conclusion. We'll continue seeking advice from the Child's Advocate in working towards resolution for many of these problems. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — The member for Saskatoon Northwest.

Mr. Merriman: — Mr. Speaker, his good works can only be done if the government implements his plans. I'd like to quote from the Children's Advocate annual report:

Our recommendations have often become stale-dated while we wait for government departments to complete their internal reviews prior to proceeding with our independent reviews.

Mr. Speaker, it's obvious with this government's track record some of the advocate's recommendations get lost in red tape. I'd like to quote again, Mr. Speaker: "In fact we have seen delays of up to three years." Mr. Speaker, we're dealing with children here, our most vulnerable resources, and we don't have the luxury of time.

To the minister: will he stand here today and tell this Assembly that he will implement the recommendations of the Child's Advocate and in a quick and timely manner? Will he make sure

that the children of this province do not get left behind?

The Speaker: — Minister for Community Resources.

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I've indicated, we are going to work very closely with the Child's Advocate on many, many fronts. And as I pointed out earlier, this government established the Office of the Child's Advocate. We've done that to make sure that every child is heard. And as the advocate has indicated in his report, the children aren't the leaders of tomorrow; they aren't the future. They are now.

So I think one of the most important thing that I want to point out is, we welcome the auditor's participation. We accept his recommendation, and we share the Children's Advocate in the primary goal of ensuring the safety and well-being of every child in this province.

Mr. Speaker, we'll work closely together with the advocate, and we will move towards change. And as I mentioned of the 25 recommendations that we spoke of, there are two that we're working towards resolution on. We'll continue that work. And again I stress we welcome his participation and thank him for his fine work.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Merriman: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well if working closely with the Child Advocate means that we wait three years, I'd hate to see what would happen if we weren't working closely.

The Children's Advocate is simply trying to look out for the most vulnerable in our society. But he faces barriers. I'd like to quote from the report, Mr. Speaker: "There are a number of child deaths and critical injuries that we are not seeing because the current protocols used by my office and the government mitigate against being referred for review."

Mr. Speaker, the Children's Advocate is working with the best interest of our children in mind, but the NDP government is putting up roadblocks. Why is the minister and his government putting up barriers to the Child's Advocate's office? Why are they making it more difficult for him to help our children?

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the Minister for Community Resources.

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again as I pointed out, having the Child's Advocate actively involved in bringing forward recommendations and working towards resolution for all these challenges that we have pointed out over time is that this is our plan . . . is to make sure that we respect his role and we accept the advice and we move forward in making sure that we find some solutions to the problems that he has identified as quickly as possible.

Of the 25 challenge areas that we spoke of, we are making good progress on 23. There are two of minor difficulties in terms of

our discussions. But we're not arguing about the intent; we're arguing about the process to achieve the best intention of protecting every child in the province. So it's really not the intent that we're having disagreement on; it's really about the process.

Mr. Speaker, It's important to point out everything that the Child Advocate has spoken about, including child deaths, is something that we take very seriously. We'll work closer with his office. And we will build a better and greater and stronger Saskatchewan for Saskatchewan children and families.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

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

Wait Times for Cardiac Diagnostic Procedures

Mr. McMorris: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, Valerie Paterson is 47 years old and has diabetes. As a result she's developed some health problems. In March Valerie's cardiologist told her that he wanted her to have an angiogram done. He said it should take a couple weeks to get this test done. Her name was put on the waiting list on March 6, 2006. She was told that waiting for an angiogram would be six months once she was put on that list.

Six months, Mr. Speaker, for a diagnostic procedure for people suffering from cardiac problems. Mr. Speaker, why are patients in Saskatchewan being told they must wait six months for a cardiac test?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — The Minister of Health.

Hon. Mr. Taylor: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I think the member opposite is aware that the professionals who establish individuals' places on waiting lists do a lot of analysis of individuals and their emergency or emergent needs. Mr. Speaker, this government has supported the development of the cardiac catheterization lab in Saskatoon, this year provided funds to in fact replace the lab, and a brand new lab in Saskatoon opened towards the end of February and in March.

Mr. Speaker, we are committed to supporting those who are in need of a heart diagnosis and surgery. Mr. Speaker, the professionals make the decision as to where individuals lie on that waiting list.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Member for Indian Head-Milestone.

Mr. McMorris: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Valerie Paterson couldn't wait six months. In fact one month after she was put on the wait list, she had a cardiac incident with stroke and heart attack symptoms. She was rushed to emergency and admitted on April 10.

Once admitted she spent another four days before an angiogram could be performed because there were other patients lined up

in front of her. Some of these patients had been waiting up to three to four weeks in the hospital to receive an angiogram. Every morning the cath lab nurse reassessed patients to see who was most needy and who would get the procedure done that day. Finally after her condition continued to deteriorate, Mrs. Paterson was given the procedure which found that she had a 95 per cent blockage in her main coronary artery.

Mr. Speaker, can the minister confirm that patients who need an angiogram are waiting up to a month in the hospital before that procedure is done?

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

Hon. Mr. Taylor: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As the member knows from my first answer, the province's commitment to working on cardiac activity in this province is significant. And in fact in this year's budget, and in development with the regional health authorities, we have completely rebuilt the cardiac lab in Saskatoon. We also have a very good referral program with Regina and outside of the province.

Mr. Speaker, there is no question that there continues to be more work to do. But, Mr. Speaker, the professionals on site within the regions provide the best care that they can and provide referrals when necessary.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — The member for Indian Head-Milestone.

Mr. McMorris: — Mr. Speaker, people, patients with a 95 per cent blockage should be moved to the front of the list. They shouldn't be told that they have to wait six months for an angiogram.

In the time that Valerie Paterson was waiting for this angiogram that would determine the severity of her heart condition, she had to make two separate trips to the emergency room. Mr. Speaker, Valerie's cardiologist told her that she needed an angiogram within a couple weeks; however the hospital said it would be six months. And the hospital then went on and told her not to keep bothering them, not to phone back. Because she couldn't access a timely angiogram, she had to go to the emergency room twice.

Can the minister tell this Assembly how this is good use of precious health care dollars that we seem to be lacking in our province? Wouldn't it make better sense to ensure that patients like Valerie could get timely access to an angiogram for example instead of having to use those resources of the emergency rooms?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Minister of Health.

Hon. Mr. Taylor: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to say to the member opposite and to the people of Saskatchewan that the professionals working within the Saskatoon Regional Health Authority, including those in the cardiac care unit, want nothing but the best for the people of

Saskatchewan and are working very hard to ensure that we have the tools necessary to be able to provide that care.

Mr. Speaker, the professionals, in this case the cardiac specialists, will continue to work with the Saskatoon Regional Health Authority to ensure that we have the facilities and the equipment necessary to do the work to assist Saskatchewan residents. Mr. Speaker, I have a great deal of confidence in the cardiac care unit at the Saskatoon Regional Health Authority. And, Mr. Speaker, I am assured that they will continue to work with the authority to put the tools in place. This government, Mr. Speaker, will continue to support the work that the regional health authority brings forward to us.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — The member for Indian Head-Milestone.

Recruiting Endocrinologists

Mr. McMorris: — Mr. Speaker, Valerie Paterson is lucky to be alive today. She believes that if she had been treated sooner, she wouldn't have the extensive heart damage that she has. Mr. Speaker, as a type 1 insulin-dependent diabetic, Valerie Paterson requires ongoing care of an endocrinologist.

She has come to the legislature today to tell the minister that the health care system is failing diabetics, especially in the Saskatoon area. She wonders why people who have chronic health conditions stay in this province because the health care system doesn't seem to be able to meet their needs. Will the minister commit today to taking action so that diabetics can get the care they deserve and need in this province?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — The Minister of Health.

Hon. Mr. Taylor: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have indicated to this House and the public at large in Saskatchewan previously that our efforts with regards to recruitment and retention of positions in this province is significant. Our commitment is ongoing, Mr. Speaker. I've also indicated that our commitment to ensuring that there are endocrinologists working in Saskatoon is significant as well.

Mr. Speaker, on the weekend I spent some time with the Saskatchewan Medical Association. And I committed to them that Saskatchewan Health will work closely with the Saskatchewan Medical Association and the College of Medicine to ensure that, on these hard to recruit specialists, Mr. Speaker, that we will ensure that our overall efforts are more aggressive and are intended to ensure that we meet the needs of the people of Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Member for Indian Head-Milestone.

Funding for Avastin

Mr. McMorris: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, today on the front steps of the legislature patients suffering

from colorectal cancer and their families assembled to deliver a message to this NDP government. They are asking for help from this government to fund the cancer drug Avastin. Combined with chemotherapy, Avastin has been proven to extend lives and is a standard of care for this disease. It's been recommended by the Saskatchewan Cancer Agency for funding. The NDP continues to refuse funding for this drug. Will the minister reconsider his ill-thought plan and fund the drug Avastin?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — The Minister of Health.

Hon. Mr. Taylor: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate and respect the courage and commitment shown everyday by cancer patients and their families in this province. Mr. Speaker, living with diagnosis and treatment is very hard, and that's why this government has regularly increased funding to the Saskatchewan Cancer Agency and its drug program. In fact, Mr. Speaker, over the last five years the Saskatchewan Cancer Agency's drug program has seen funding increase by 22 per cent in each and every one of those five years.

Mr. Speaker, this is why our decision on Avastin was a very difficult one to make. But, Mr. Speaker, that drug is still not universally available in any province in Canada. Mr. Speaker, we believe that there is a role for the national government and the provinces to make together, through the common drug review and the national pharmaceutical strategy. Mr. Speaker, we will continue to monitor this program and will work with our other provinces.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

[14:15]

The Speaker: — The member for Indian Head-Milestone.

Mr. McMorris: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Avastin does not cure cancer. But what it does do is give people at least six extra months to enjoy and spend time with their family and friends. Bob Loeppky who's in the gallery today, he's already paid \$10,000 of his own money for these treatments. He'll be paying another \$2,400 tomorrow as he goes for another treatment tomorrow.

Given that this government is refusing to cover this drug, what can the minister tell these people that they should be doing? Should they be funding the drug themselves, or will he reconsider the fact that his government should be paying for this drug?

Mr. Speaker, it smacks of two-tier medicine. People that afford it can get the drug, and people that can't have to go without. Mr. Speaker, that's appalling. Mr. Speaker, will this minister look into this situation again and re-evaluate and decide to cover the drug Avastin?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — The Minister of Health.

Hon. Mr. Taylor: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. And again I remind the member opposite that governments right across Canada — all of us provincial governments — are facing similar difficult decisions. And at this point in time, not a single jurisdiction in Canada is universally making Avastin available to its residents.

Mr. Speaker, when we made the decision earlier this year, it was based on three components. Mr. Speaker, the denial of the initial request. The second component was to review, monitor and evaluate changes that may occur while the drug is still available. And lastly, Mr. Speaker, make the drug available to those who could afford to pay it through the safe and secure administration of the Saskatchewan Cancer Agency.

Mr. Speaker, in all other provinces when a decision was made to deny the application of Avastin, they did not take the step forward to provide some compassionate coverage for those who could afford to do it. Mr. Speaker, today as I speak, the province of Ontario is looking seriously at the Saskatchewan model with a serious expectation of applying it.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — The member for Indian Head-Milestone.

Mr. McMorris: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On March 27, the minister was asked if he would consider a copayment option for Avastin. The minister said at that time and I quote, “This is not a matter that we’ve considered up to this point.” Well it’s been three months since that request. Has the minister considered that option? Has he looked at other options and a case-by-case funding proposal, Mr. Speaker, because that’s what other provinces do. Or has he flat out rejected the people that we have here in this gallery needing Avastin? Is that what his government has done, or will he look at options?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — The Minister of Health.

Hon. Mr. Taylor: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In the roll up to the decision that we and other provinces have had to make, Mr. Speaker, the Canadian Cancer Advocacy Coalition released its report. One of the findings in the advocacy report was Saskatchewan has one of the most comprehensive drug coverage plans in Canada for cancer patients. The advocacy report acknowledges that, and I quote, “Unlike other provinces, Saskatchewan provides supportive drugs . . . to cancer patients from its global provincial cancer drug budget.”

Mr. Speaker, the report suggests that Saskatchewan is the fourth-best cancer drug provider of all the provinces in Canada. And, Mr. Speaker, the support that Saskatchewan is giving takes into account what’s going on in other provinces, Mr. Speaker. We are monitoring this, and we support the development of a national . . .

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — The member’s time has elapsed. The member for Indian Head-Milestone.

Review of Infant’s Medical Treatment

Mr. McMorris: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Friday the Minister of Health revealed that a pediatric oncologist from Alberta is now under contract to this government to review the circumstances in the baby Paige case. When these tragic events first came to the public’s attention, the official opposition called on this government for an independent review of that case.

Mr. Speaker, why did it take three months for this minister to realize that this case does need to be reviewed independently? What was it in the internal investigation that has led them to call on a pediatrician from Alberta, a pediatric oncologist from Alberta, to independently review this case?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — The Minister of Health.

Hon. Mr. Taylor: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I remind the member opposite that what I said on Friday was that we were having a pediatric oncologist from Alberta review the care path that resulted from diagnosis to treatment.

Mr. Speaker, this is not an independent review of the case. This is a second set of eyes, professional specialist’s set of eyes, that deals with diagnosis circumstances relating to baby Paige.

Mr. Speaker, I’m very pleased to be able to say that baby Paige is responding to treatment, and our hopes, dreams, and best wishes go with her and her family.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Member for Indian Head-Milestone.

Mr. McMorris: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So far 32 people have been interviewed for a preliminary clinical report. But obviously, Mr. Speaker, when the opposition called on somebody independent to come into the province and look at what has happened, he’s finally decided after three weeks to follow through with our recommendation. When you bring a pediatric oncologist from outside of the province to look at the care path, that is not an internal review. That’s an external review which we called for three weeks ago, Mr. Speaker. Why has it taken so long? What is it in the internal review that has led you to call on expertise from outside this province?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — The Minister of Health.

Hon. Mr. Taylor: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I can assure the member opposite and the people of Saskatchewan that there’s nothing in the internal review that would suggest that the second set of eyes on the care path was absolutely necessary. But, Mr. Speaker, the Saskatoon Regional Health Authority decided that in order to ensure that the care path was followed according to normally acceptable procedures to pediatric oncologists that they would have a pediatric oncologist review that care path to ensure that one of the benefits and results of the investigation, Mr. Speaker, would ensure that anyone else presenting with the same circumstances

would have the benefit of the best practices available.

Mr. Speaker, we are supporting the direction taken by the Saskatoon Regional Health Authority because the long-term goal in this case . . . baby Paige is number one, other people in Saskatchewan, number two. Mr. Speaker, this is a very important part of the review.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Why is the Minister of Environment on his feet?

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — I am on my feet to ask leave to read a statement of condolence.

The Speaker: — The Minister of Environment has requested leave to read a statement. Is leave granted?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — Leave has been granted. The Chair recognizes the Minister of Environment.

STATEMENT BY A MEMBER

Condolences on Airplane Crash Near La Ronge

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, it's with a heavy heart that I inform the legislature of a tragic accident. Early yesterday afternoon one of Saskatchewan Environment's Convair 580A air tankers crashed near the La Ronge Airport during a training exercise. One northern air operations pilot was killed. Two others on board, a northern air operations pilot and a Conair training pilot, were taken to hospital with non-life-threatening injuries.

The Premier has expressed his condolences to the families of those involved and my deputy minister and I went to La Ronge yesterday afternoon to meet with staff and to visit the accident site.

I want to thank the staff and others in the community who responded to this emergency situation with professionalism: the emergency response and medevac crews, those who began the response to assist those emotionally affected by the tragic event, and those managing communications and support in La Ronge, Prince Albert, and Regina.

The air tanker involved was one of two Convair 580As that the province recently took delivery on from Conair Aviation of Abbotsford, British Columbia. These planes are land-based, fire-retardant-carrying tanker aircraft. Alberta and British Columbia have been using Convair 580s for a number of years and the aircraft have served those provinces well without major mishap.

We have forest fires every year in Saskatchewan and, every year, brave women and men step forward to fight them to protect our lives and our property. The three pilots involved were senior, experienced aviators, and each of them had more than the required training to captain an airplane of this type. Mr. Speaker, it is sometimes easy to forget how much training they

have and how professional they are. It is also sometimes easy to forget how much courage they have. I think yesterday's tragic accident underlines how dangerous their job can be and how much we owe them.

Mr. Speaker, I ask the members of the legislature to join me in expressing our support for the government staff who, as members of an extended family, are grieving the loss of their colleague and friend. I ask that you join me in wishing a speedy recovery to the two men who were injured in yesterday's accident. And I also ask you to join me in sending our prayers and our condolences to the family of the pilot who died.

Mr. Speaker, after some comments from a member opposite, I'd ask that we have a moment of silence in the Chamber. Thank you.

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

Mr. Hart: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it is with great sadness that the residents of Saskatchewan learned about the death of an air tanker pilot in a training accident just north of La Ronge yesterday.

All pilots who fly in our forest fire fighting fleet risk their lives to ensure the safety and protection of our northern forests. We are fortunate that these individuals have made the choice to serve in our provincial fleet. They deserve our utmost respect and sincere appreciation of the work they do.

Mr. Speaker, fortunately, the two other pilots who were on board managed to escape with non-life-threatening injuries and are recovering in a hospital in Saskatoon. We wish them a speedy recovery.

Mr. Speaker, we should also recognize the efforts of all those involved in the rescue of the pilots. I would like to join with the minister and all members of this Assembly in extending our condolences and prayers to the family, friends, and colleagues of the fallen pilot.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: — At the request of the minister, I would ask everybody to rise for a moment's silence.

[The Assembly observed a moment of silence.]

The Speaker: — I thank all members and guests. Please be seated.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

WRITTEN QUESTIONS

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the Government Whip.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the government, I'll be tabling responses to written questions no. 1,096 to 1,099.

The Speaker: — Responses to 1,096 through to 1,099 inclusive have been submitted.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

Deputy Clerk: — 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 Environment Vote 26

Subvote (ER01)

The Chair: — The estimates before the committee are the Department of Environment, vote 26, found on page 55 of your Estimates book. We have the minister with us and who will be joined by officials in due time. And I would recognize the member for Last Mountain-Touchwood.

Mr. Hart: — Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, the new federal government in Ottawa recently, and Minister Ambrose, the federal Minister of the Environment, last week made some further comments as far as her government's plans to deal with the whole issue of climate change and particularly Canada's commitment to the Kyoto Protocol.

As you know, Minister, the former Liberal government signed on to the protocol and then when Russia was signed on to the protocol it became effective. And I believe there's 160-some countries around the world that have signed on to the protocol. The current federal government seems to be of the view perhaps that some of the commitments made by the former Liberal government are unattainable and feels that perhaps we need to have a new plan to deal with climate change in Canada.

And, Minister, I guess my question to you is: have you been in conversation with the federal Minister of Environment over the whole issue of climate change and the Kyoto Protocol?

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

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Thank you, Madam Chair. The simple answer to that is that we've had very brief conversation about this, and it hasn't been a conversation that would go into great detail on the issues that are involved. I know that the federal minister is going to be in Regina next Monday and Tuesday for a meeting around bioresources and so at that point I plan to have conversations with her. I know that she has gone to the international meeting around the Kyoto Protocol, or is going this week. And so she will probably have some new information around there.

I think frankly we are disappointed by some of the signals that we're hearing about this, but I think we're willing to wait and hear what kinds of plans that they have.

Mr. Hart: — Madam Chair, Minister, will you in your discussions with the minister, will you be raising the concerns that some people, some residents of our province have — and I think justifiably so — in that with . . . Canada has committed to an international treaty or agreement as such, and then we start

backing away. I've had people talk to me about, you know, what is this doing for Canada's reputation around the world.

I mean, it's one thing to say, well perhaps we disagree with, you know, the former government's plans, federal government's plans. And I mean they certainly talked about, you know, put a plan in place. But if you look at the facts, while the whole discussion and the ratification process of Kyoto was taking place, Canada's greenhouse gas emissions were rising very rapidly, much more rapidly than many other countries, and in fact more rapidly than a number of countries who did not sign on to the protocol.

But the concern that some citizens of this province have raised with me is that we've signed on — certainly it was under another political party who was in power at the time — but nonetheless Canada signed on to a worldwide agreement. And now if we're backing away, what impact could we see by Canada doing that?

And, you know, I guess I'm asking you for your opinion, if you have that concern. But more so I would like you to raise that on behalf of Saskatchewan citizens, raise that concern because it has been raised with me, Minister.

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Thank you for that question. Our government is quite concerned about the recent steps that the federal government has taken, although they have indicated to us that they are going to set forward a plan sometime in the next six weeks.

I personally have a lot of concern around Canada's role in the international situation, and I think what we need to do is remember what is the ultimate goal here, which is to reduce the emissions worldwide to deal with some of the climate change issues that are related to emissions.

In Saskatchewan we've been trying to develop a balance between taking appropriate steps around reducing emissions, but also recognizing that we have a number of industries in our province that require special work to deal with the emissions.

Mr. Hart: — Thank you, Minister, for that response. Climate change is an issue that there is a lot of differences of opinion. But I think most informed opinion realize that there is something happening to our climate and that we need to deal with it. And I think all levels of government need to be engaged on this issue.

And I guess, I know whenever the issue or the subject of climate change is raised with your government, Minister, quite often members of your cabinet, colleagues, will point to what's being done over at the U of R [University of Regina] with petroleum technology research institute or — I'm not sure if I got the name exactly correct — but with the sequestering of CO₂ and using it to enhance oil recovery in our oil fields. And you know, that certainly is technology that needs to be applauded and used as a base to deal with this whole area of reducing greenhouse gas emissions and so on.

And I guess my question, Minister, would be: is there work being done within the province and particularly within SaskPower and Department of Environment and our

universities and any other bodies that have research capacity to develop systems whereby we can take the CO₂ from our coal-fired power plants and use them in the same manner as what we're using the CO₂ that's currently being used in the oil fields? And that CO₂ is coming from, I understand, a plant in the US [United States] and it seems to me we are producing greenhouse gases — CO₂ — in our province, particularly with our coal-fired power plants. And are we working on developing systems to take that and sequester it?

The Chair: — Before the minister answers his question, I see that he has been joined by officials. And if he would like to introduce his officials to the Assembly.

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Okay. Well maybe I'll answer the question first and then we'll . . . but well, I have . . . The officials I have with me are first, Alan Parkinson, the assistant deputy minister, he was here first; and then Lily Stonehouse, the deputy minister; Donna Johnson, our financial officer; and Dave Phillips, who's the assistant deputy minister. So I welcome them here.

And I will continue to respond to some of these questions around the whole issue of CO₂ sequestration. And the answer to your question is yes. SaskPower has been working with the various industries around methods of sequestering the CO₂ and looking at different places where this could be used. Other industries in southern Saskatchewan have been looking at this particular issue as well.

What we are doing here in Saskatchewan as a government is working together with industry around a number of different possibilities. We've heard mention of the clean coal power projects or project, depending on the number that SaskPower may be involved with. There's also a polygeneration project that has some aspects of this included in it as well. All of these things are being looked at very carefully, very seriously.

One of the things that we are waiting for from the federal government is the confirmation that the \$20 million deal that we had in the fall will in fact be continued. And our hope is that it will, because this is about providing power and dealing with the environment for the next 30, 40 years.

[14:45]

Mr. Hart: — Well thank you, Minister. Part of the former federal plan was to set up a system of emissions trading or trading in carbon actually is what it was. There was an ability . . . or the plan was to pay those, well, farm producers because farm land is certainly one of the biggest carbon sinks that we have and also our forestry sector. But the plan was to match up the final emitters, large final emitters who were emitting a fair amount of carbon, and they would pay producers to sequester this carbon in the soil.

And the reason I raise this, Minister, is I realize that this plan may not be in effect once the new minister releases her plan, but I just today, just actually just before walking into the House, I came across an article on the Internet where a number of — or I believe it was perhaps in one of today's papers — where a number of companies were planning on setting up, were already doing business in Western Canada. And some of them are now

pulling out of Canada and moving. One company's moving back to the United Kingdom and that sort of thing.

And this speaks to that whole issue of environmental goods and services; it's a piece of that. And we discussed that earlier, where producers get paid for the environmental goods and service that they pay. The sequestering of carbon was a very significant part of that whole concept. Are you planning on raising that issue with the Minister of Environment when she visits here next week?

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — To answer the question, I think I have to give a little bit of an overview of what's happening with the carbon sequestration trading of information. And for a number of years now there has been a limited market out of Chicago where these kinds of credits have been traded.

Quite a few years ago SaskPower was involved with some of that. We in Saskatchewan, in Saskatchewan Environment, received some money from SaskPower to allow us to replant some trees up in the northeast part of the province that were part of that concept as well.

What is happening right now is that the Kyoto Protocol basically was going to provide an international basis for a common valuation of these kinds of credits. And that's why there's a number of concerns around the present uncertainty on the federal policy because it won't be possible to do carbon credits just in Saskatchewan or even just in Canada, because this is a worldwide issue.

In Europe they have developed some things that look like they're a little bit broader in how they can do that. Now one of the really important or exciting parts of this whole issue is, how do you provide some certification or accreditation for the fact that carbon would be sequestered? And on that basis the international standard that appears to be developing is called the Weyburn standard and it's the PTRC, the Petroleum Technology Research Centre here in Regina which has the best information in the world around the reliability of statements about sequestration of carbon.

And who's interested in that? Well clearly industries are interested in that. Countries are interested in that. But more importantly bankers, people who run stock exchanges, corporate executives are, because they want to borrow money to get these carbon credits and they have to have something that can be comparable around the world.

So this is a developing area where Saskatchewan and Weyburn and our work here at the PTRC at the University of Regina are world leaders. And we're supportive of them. We're going to continue to work with them. And ultimately the best solution will be a worldwide system of trading credits because then that can come back and it can be an advantage in our forestry industry. It can be an advantage in our agricultural industry. But until the rules are set in a way that everybody will accept, we are in a quite a difficult situation to make any government plans from Saskatchewan's point of view.

The Chair: — I recognize the member for Biggar.

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Madam Chair. Mr. Minister, I

have a constituent concern that I'd like to raise. This couple has lived in Biggar for a number of years. They're American citizens. They're retired. He worked for the environment department in one or more US state, and she's a retired schoolteacher. And they've moved up here. They took out options on farm land. They're avid hunters. And they applied for citizenship to become a Canadian citizen and maybe because of their age, maybe because some health concerns, they've been denied. They've been very disappointed.

But I understand, and correct me if I'm wrong, but the current regulations require a person to be a resident of Saskatchewan and a resident of Canada to purchase a Saskatchewan resident hunting licence. And they meet the residency requirement for Saskatchewan but are considered a visitor to Canada under the immigration status.

Now non-residents cannot legally hunt many species of big game or coyotes. And he goes on to say that they have resided in Saskatchewan over six months each year, own a home, pay property taxes. They're very involved in the community socially and have economic ties to community. And if this is all right, if there's any loopholes or help that you can give these people as far as getting to purchase a resident licence and be big game hunters under their circumstance.

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — The way that the department works to deal with the resident of Saskatchewan issue is that people are required to present a Saskatchewan health services card or evidence that they have a Saskatchewan health services card.

I think the practical issue here is a federal immigration issue. So it may be one that they may want to contact their local Member of Parliament to see if there's some response that could be there. Because it appears that if they had the status in Canada that would allow them to get a health card, then it wouldn't be a problem. But it's really that federal status that's the issue.

Mr. Weekes: — Well thank you, Mr. Minister. Well that is correct. That is the problem, and I gather from talking to them that's not going to be resolved. They've been denied citizenship.

But they have offered a process, and I'll outline what the ideas are that you, as a provincial minister, could do to allow to get their licence. And I'll just lay it out.

The simplified process would be the validated landowner licence would be available to any person legally residing in Saskatchewan for at least six months each calendar year who can demonstrate residency, owns property and pays property tax, and has verifiable ties to the community, socially and economic, certified by an elected official.

Availability of this licence type could be handled without fanfare with an annual press release and eventually included in the regulation synopsis at the next printing. This licence could only be purchased by personally appearing at the department office and providing required documentation of residency.

The application fee would be the same costs as a non-resident licence so no loss of revenue would result, plus a \$25 processing fee. The department would issue a standard resident

licence stamped as validated resident landowner. The application would apply for drawings and purchase tags, the same as resident licence holders from any licence vendor.

That is their idea as I'll pass it on to you. But they're really caught between a rock and a hard place, you might say, because they cannot get citizenship, and they want to live in Canada. They want to live in rural Saskatchewan. And what they also would like to is buy land. Of course they cannot buy land as Americans either without, I guess, getting exemption from The Farm Land Security Act, which is not happening either.

So again their concern . . . And they're hoping to somehow have a process set up so people like them can still get basically a residency status even though they're not Canadian citizens so they'll allow this process to take place.

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Well unfortunately the present rules don't accommodate that, but the idea that they have is clearly presented on the record and we'll take a look at it. But I think it would be unlikely that we would have a solution to their particular problems.

The Chair: — The member for Kelvington-Wadena.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Madam Chair. Mr. Minister, and to your officials, I have questions about the flooding at Fishing Lake. It looks like the minister was anticipating this question and was probably waiting with great excitement to be able to tell me about the issue.

I had the opportunity yesterday to go out to Fishing Lake and talk to the cabin owners both from the Leslie Beach, Murray Beach, and Chorney Beach areas. And I also had the opportunity to see the number of sandbags that have been put up in that area — 12,000 on one side of the lake, 15,000, and 8,000. And they assured me that these sandbags are only good for one season as the sun will deteriorate them and they'll have to do it again next year.

I know that seven years ago, I believe it was, the last time there was the huge flood that was supposed to happen just once in 90 years caused a lot of concerns. And at that time there was a proposal, or a number of proposals — I believe seven of them — developed to deal with the issue. And since then the individuals and the organizations that were concerned have decided that project number three, and that is the one where there is a gate put on to equalize the water that runs east into Hazel Lake and then into White Sand and into Assiniboia, is one that everybody is looking at.

Can the minister give me an update as to what his department is doing in this area and where you are on the issue at this time?

[15:00]

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Well thank you for the question. The officials from the Saskatchewan Watershed Authority have been out to the Fishing Lake area and have been providing technical advice to the people there on the sandbagging that's there to protect the cottages, and they will continue to do that. People will end up having to do the work themselves but they will continue to do that. So that's what's happening right now.

After the 1997 flood there were some discussions and some proposals that were outlined and there were a couple of projects that were identified. One was to change the natural outlet of the lake to create a ditch which would lower the levels. But that project was rejected because of environmental concerns that couldn't be addressed or mitigated.

There was another project that would divert some runoff from entering into Fishing Lake and it didn't appear to have any major environmental impacts, but the project did not go forward because there were a number of objections from the Fishing Lake First Nation and some other problems that were identified around adequate control downstream from this project. So neither one of those projects went ahead.

Since 1997 the Watershed Authority has been advocating a more practical solution which is that cottage owners should see about getting their cottages built above the high waterline and at a distance from the shore which would limit the potential for flood damage. So that's been the recommendation since 1997. So they have been there and they are working with the people around the diking issues.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. The constituents that I spoke to yesterday were very thankful for the help that they've had from the Watershed Authority. And they did advise me that project number three which basically would equalize the water at 529.7 between Fishing Lake and Hazel Lake could be put into place quite simply by basically putting in a gate, and when the level comes to 528 feet that they could close the gates.

At the time this proposal would require no more surveys, no more planning. It wouldn't even require a lot of waiting that . . . From the conversation I had yesterday, I understand that really the main objection was Fishing Lake First Nations. And the group has met with the chief and some of the band members in the last week, and they actually have another meeting this week, and it sounded like Fishing Lake was more . . . the First Nations was actually leaning towards supporting this proposal. It would cost very little money, and it really wouldn't impact the First Nations, and it probably would help them because they are concerned about the water in their own reserve as well.

So basically what the people around Fishing Lake are asking for is, if there is an agreement with First Nations, is there going to be any kind of a roadblock with the department? From my understanding the surveys and all work that had to be done had been approved, including okays from Fisheries and from Environment and all the departments it would have an effect on.

So we do know that the amount of water right now is 24 inches higher than normal and that it only evaporates about 8 inches a year. So even if we don't have a whole lot of water this summer or snow this winter, we do know that next year there's going to be a problem with ice. Ice causes more damage than the actual water did and high winds, so the people are trying to prevent the problems that they know can occur if we don't do something with it. And from all accounts, the simple solution is just a gate between northeast and northwest of one and two, ten thirty-three. And I'm hoping that your department has looked at this proposal.

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Madam Chair, I'm pleased to respond to

the question. I in fact have had a conversation with the chief as well, a number of weeks ago, and he indicated that they were taking another look at this. And if the conversations that can take place in the community have some common perspective on all of this, that makes a great deal of difference in sorting out how this can be dealt with.

I can't make any comment here without the technical advice from the Watershed Authority and then also the Environment, and obviously probably some of the Fisheries and Oceans from the federal government could be involved. But the proposals were looked at quite thoroughly before, and if this falls within that ambit, well then I think there's a good possibility that something can be resolved.

And I do concur with the member that the water levels will be remaining quite high this year and next year. So to get a common purpose to have a solution for this or at least a partial solution I think is everybody's concern.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Minister, and I do appreciate it. And I guess I understand that you can't say today, right now, we can go ahead with it. But from my understanding, there was a considerable amount of work done seven years ago by your department, and there isn't any reason to believe that things have changed a lot, except that the water levels have continue to increase. So if we do manage to find the First Nations in agreement with this, we're hoping that something can be done.

The gate itself, I understand their proposal a number of years ago was about \$50,000, and if that's all we need to do is put a gate on that culvert . . . and I am aware of what that would mean. That's what I used to do before I was elected, is work with the C&Ds [conservation and development authorities], so I am aware of what the control structure would be like.

But in the meantime, we're also hoping that there's an opportunity to put a temporary block in this fall if the okay can be gotten to ensure that we don't have more of a problem next spring if there is a huge increase in water again. So I'm hoping that even if it's a matter of something as simplistic as plywood, it can make a huge difference if you put it in front of this culvert.

So I would ask for your response on that and also to ask if you, once you've had an opportunity to talk to the cabin owners after they've spoken with the First Nations, if you can get back to us as quickly as possible.

The Chair: — A few more officials are present, and they are guests of the Assembly. So if you would introduce them for us, that would be wonderful.

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Yes. Thank you, Deputy Chair of this committee. I have also with me Bob Ruggles who is the assistant deputy minister, and I have Dale Hjertaas who is the vice-president of the Saskatchewan Watershed Authority. And they and others have been helpful in sorting out some of these questions.

I would like to now respond to the member and say that getting people together, working on a common purpose, is a very large part of sorting this out. But ultimately how it's done will require

the engineers and hydrologists and others who are there because when water is diverted, then there are consequences other places, and those are the things that need to be looked at.

But I know everybody in this particular situation is quite willing to work together to see what can be done. And that's clearly the perspective from the officials in the Watershed Authority and Environment as necessary. And I guess I can't speak for the federal government officials but I'm sure they would be helpful as well.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. I thank you for these. I'm going to take the information back to the cabin owners, and I just want to give you my assurance if there's anything I can do when it comes to the organization back at Fishing Lake, please call me because I think if we can work together, this can happen fairly quickly this year, and I think it's imperative.

I'd like to thank your officials for the work they're doing. And hopefully by fall we can say we won't have to worry about spring. Thank you, Mr. Minister.

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

Mr. Hart: — Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, we have an area in the province that has too much water in one of its lakes. And not just too far away we have another area where people are quite concerned about the level of water in the Crooked and Round Lake.

We've discussed this before and you said there was ongoing discussions. I guess what I'm asking for is an update. Are we getting close to an interim agreement with the First Nations that are affected by the . . . around Crooked and Round Lake? And perhaps you could comment on that. I may have one or two other questions.

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — The response is that we're very hopeful. People are working very hard — lawyers on both sides of this issue as well as the technical people, the engineers and others. And so everybody's working very hard, and that's a continuation, and I think a hopeful sign for us as well.

Mr. Hart: — Minister, are you prepared to comment on the possibility of an interim agreement for this coming year, as we're in the second year of a two-year interim agreement with the First Nations communities that are affected by the water levels in Echo and Pasqua Lake? And I have an understanding that perhaps we may be able to reach an interim agreement with those First Nations communities around Crooked and Round Lake.

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — I think that my previous comments about being hopeful and people working very hard also apply around the interim agreement issue because clearly interim agreements are building blocks towards a final agreement. And people are working very hard, and we're hoping to get some of those agreements done soon.

Mr. Hart: — I realize, Minister, that it's difficult perhaps to comment without jeopardizing some of the talks that are going

on. Just one final question on this issue. If an interim agreement is possible and if we look at the interim agreement on Echo and Pasqua that's in effect . . . there was funding requirements both from the provincial and federal government. If the First Nations would agree to an interim agreement with some funding, is your government prepared to come up with provincial funding for an interim agreement?

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Yes.

Mr. Hart: — Thank you, Minister, for that very short but direct answer.

Minister, last Friday we discussed the whole issue of biomedical wastes and the disposal of them, how they're being handled in the province. And you indicated that there is a plan which involves your departments, Sask Health, and local governments, for handling and disposing of biomedical wastes. I wonder if you could elaborate on that and explain what the plan is and how it operates. I also understand that biomedical wastes are deemed to be hazardous wastes and perhaps you could clarify that.

[15:15]

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — I thank the member for that question. I have as of today's date delivered to your colleague, the critic for Health, a copy of the *Saskatchewan Biomedical Waste Management Guidelines* which is about, I think, a 60-page document. And this is a document that's created by the departments of Environment, Health, and Labour, and it has very detailed procedures that set out how biomedical waste is to be dealt with. And it goes through and defines all the different kinds. The guidelines are from 1998, and they are very detailed as I'm sure you will see.

They address all the different biomedical waste groups. They address the handling, the packaging, the transportation, and storage issues, as well as the strategy for dealing with various wastes that are encountered in a medical situation. This information is what the health regions utilize to develop their own internal policies and procedures for each hospital or each clinic. And so that's the process and the procedure that's done. And there are different levels of concern or contamination, and procedures are set out there as to how they're dealt with.

Mr. Hart: — Minister, could you be somewhat more precise as far as the disposal? Are biomedical wastes . . . You had indicated on Friday that there is a landfill, a privately owned landfill site in Saskatoon that is — I take it from your comments — been permitted to deal with biomedical wastes. Is that in fact . . . are those the facts? Are there other landfill sites within the province that are permitted and approved to deal with the disposal of landfill or biomedical wastes?

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — I thank the member for that question. The segregation of these hazardous wastes, that is done in a whole number of different classes and a whole . . . Only a small portion of the wastes at a health care facility are actually biomedical waste. So effectively the classes that are described . . . and I'll give you all the different names to give you some idea: animal biomedical wastes, cytotoxic chemical wastes, human anatomical wastes, human blood and body fluids wastes,

microbiology laboratory wastes, sharps wastes, and special precautions wastes.

And I think each of these different areas have slightly different procedures as to how they should be dealt with. And some of those particular products would go to different disposal sites. Some of them may go to the same site. But there's procedures for all the different areas. And I'm not sure if I can answer all your very specific questions about those, but we can try. So thank you.

Mr. Hart: — Thank you, minister, for that explanation. I guess my questions are pertaining more towards the type of wastes — human fluids and blood products, sharps — some of, I guess, considered the most hazardous. What are the regulations that are in place in this province for handling of those very hazardous waste products?

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Thank you for that question. And once again you'll allow me a opportunity to educate you and the public around how this works.

There is a regulatory framework to deal with this. The disposal of wastes in Canada, which includes biomedical wastes, is primarily subject to provincial control. And as such a number of statutes have evolved within in Saskatchewan which either directly or indirectly govern the treatment and disposal of the wastes in the province.

So the different pieces of legislation that are here in Saskatchewan include The Environmental Management and Protection Act, The Municipal Refuse Management Regulations, The Water Pollution Control and Waterworks Regulations, The Clean Air Act and regulations, The Occupational Health and Safety Act and regulations, The Dangerous Goods Transportation Act and regulations. And then on top of that, there are municipal bylaws that would be possible to pass under our urban municipalities Act or rural municipal legislation.

There's no direct reference to waste in The Public Health Act, but it does provide power to local authorities, the medical health officers, to abate health hazards. And so that could include them making comments or rules around disposal practices.

So all of these different pieces of legislation could deal with a particular substance or problem. And as I said before, municipal laws may apply, and in some rare circumstances, there may be some federal rules that apply.

Mr. Hart: — Minister, under the regulations, is it permissible to incinerate things like blood products, human fluids, the by-products of surgery within our hospitals? What are the regulations as far as incineration of those type of wastes?

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — It's my understanding that there are a very few hospital incinerators still in operation in the province. There's not . . . There aren't as many as there used to be because of the high maintenance costs. They're quite expensive to operate and use and also the emissions controls that are required. And some of those rules around emissions would be provincial laws, but also federal laws. And the department has in this review or in some of the other rules, a list of the kinds of

materials that can be incinerated.

Most of the hospitals in Saskatchewan use independent contractors to treat and dispose of biomedical waste as required. And some hospitals will do some pre-treatment on-site before it's delivered to their disposal or the waste disposal companies.

We know that some of the most toxic substances in Canada all go to an incinerator in Alberta just west and north of Edmonton. And so it's possible that some very small quantities of medical waste would go there, but that would be unlikely.

Mr. Hart: — So just to be clear, Minister, did you say that we have a few incinerators located . . . and they are located at hospitals that do incinerate some of the most toxic wastes?

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — I think the response to that question is that the hospitals also comply with the rules, and they would only incinerate those kinds of substances which would fall within the guidelines and rules of the department.

Mr. Hart: — So, Minister, to your knowledge then there aren't any incinerators in the province that are — other than perhaps the ones you referred to at the hospitals, that is — are permitted or licensed to deal with the most toxic of medical wastes.

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — I think the answer to the question is that there isn't very much incineration of products in the province other than those hospital places. There may be a couple of incinerators that deal with incineration of lab cultures and animal wastes, but right now any biomedical waste that can't be treated by the facilities in our province are shipped out of the province. Typical the biomedical waste has been shipped to Alberta, Ontario, or North Dakota. The federal government tracks cross-border movement of hazardous waste. And of the facilities that Saskatchewan Environment permits, currently there are approximately 44 tonnes per year composed of anatomical, pharmaceutical, and cytotoxic wastes being shipped to North Dakota, and 7 tonnes of pharmaceuticals waste being shipped to Alberta.

Mr. Hart: — Thank you, Minister. Minister, I understand that the environmental protection Act, the federal Act, is being reviewed, and if my information is correct it's in the second year of a five-year review. And my question, Minister, is what involvement have you and your department have . . . do you have in this review process as far as bringing forward concerns from the province of Saskatchewan.

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — The method whereby we participate in this kind of a review is through the provincial committee. The Canadian Council of Ministers of the Environment are involved. And this particular committee includes every province and every territory and also the federal ministry. And it happens that this year I'm the president of that organization on a national basis and this particular, the particular issues related to the environmental protection Act have been the subject of discussion. So our Saskatchewan Environment officials involved with the review have submitted a proposal to that review committee.

Ultimately it is the federal government's responsibility around changes to the Act, but the traditional way of doing that has

been working in conjunction with all of the jurisdictions in Canada.

Mr. Hart: — Minister, there has been some concerns about this Act and the review process expressed to me. And they deal with the issue of virtual elimination, in other words of tracking toxic substances. And I believe in the Act, or at least the proposed changes that are dealing with measuring toxic substances and then legislating that, you know, a very small amount will only be allowed and so on.

And the concern that's being expressed is that the more . . . or I guess our ability to measure these substances. As they improve with the advances of technology, we may get those levels down to such a level of detection that's so small that'll virtually eliminate the use of some of our common products; like road salt will be eliminated because it's deemed to be a toxic substance. And with the whole measurement system that's being proposed, there's some real concerns being expressed. And I wonder if you've heard those concerns, and if you are bringing those concerns forward at the federal level?

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — I think that your question has identified one of the problems with the existing legislation which is being reviewed, and that's the fact that under the legislation there's only one category which is toxic. And so some of the proposals that have come forward have included more categories which would then allow for more appropriate rules for the different categories.

So that's the kind of issue that's being discussed on a national basis. And we're hopeful from a Saskatchewan perspective that we will get better rules which will allow us to protect the environment.

[15:30]

Mr. Hart: — So just to clearly understand, Minister, the level of involvement that you and your officials have. You've mentioned that you are working through the council of environment ministers. Do you have officials within your department working with other officials from other provinces on these specific issues? If you just give me a sense, Minister, of what level of participation Saskatchewan has in this review?

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — The involvement that we have from the department includes staff from the environmental protection section of the department. And we have officials that sit on the committee through the Canadian Council of Ministers of Environment.

We also have people who sit on the steering committee or the management committee as it relates to some of this legislation, the CEPA [Canadian Environmental Protection Act] legislation. And then that work is then reported to the ministers and will be discussed at the next ministers' meetings, probably in June and in September.

The other aspect of this that is not always recognized is that there is a full-time office in Winnipeg that has the role of coordinating this work across the country and fielding many of the issues and making sure that everybody participates.

Mr. Hart: — Well thank you, Minister, for that answer. I have had a meeting with the environment committee of the chamber of commerce, and this was one of their issues that they . . . And I'm sure they have certainly presented their concerns to you. And I think they have some, you know, very legitimate concerns.

I don't think we're advocating that we throw the . . . you know, water down environmental protection. But I think we need to make sure that whatever rules and regulations and legislation is in place that it is . . . you know, find some middle ground that we can continue to operate and businesses can operate. And that we don't eventually find ourselves in a situation where things that we use and really are harmless, but because of some oversight in drafting of regulations, may be deemed to be toxic and so on, Minister.

Minister, my colleague has some questions from Shellbrook-Rosthern, and I will turn the questioning to him.

The Deputy Chair: — I recognize the Minister of Environment.

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Yes, I would just like to comment on the last question that was hidden in the words of my friend opposite. He made reference to the consultation with the committee, the environment committee of the Saskatchewan Chamber of Commerce. I've met with them as well so I've heard a number of these concerns raised. And it's my understanding that they met with a group of deputy ministers related to the economy within the last two weeks around some of the same issues.

I'd also like to inform the House and public that this particular Bill and the changes involved are at the parliamentary committee in Ottawa right now under discussion so that there is review at that level as well. So thank you very much.

The Deputy Chair: — I recognize the hon. member for Rosthern-Shellbrook.

Mr. Allchurch: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Minister, welcome to your officials again. I just have a couple set of questions. I hope it won't take too long. And it's regarding the hunting regulations and the hunters' guide at a particular area just south of my hometown of Spiritwood. I believe it's in zone 54. And it's to do with the, first of all with the amount of wildlife in that area, especially deer. And also a bigger problem is the amount of elk in that area. And when I look at the guide, the last couple years there's only been 25 tags for that specific area.

There was a meeting in Spiritwood where councillors and reeves got together to discuss issues in the area. And somebody from Prince Albert, his name was Denis Engele from SERM [Saskatchewan Environment and Resource Management], was also there at that meeting, and a biologist out of Meadow Lake — and I just forget his name, pardon me for that. But anyway we raised that issue with Denis Engele and the other official in regarding to the hunting licences for elk and wondered if the licence could increase from 25 to a possible 75 or 100, whatever. Now in regards to that, there has been surveys and there is an abundance of elk in that area; probably in the

neighbourhood of 4 to 500 or so. So 25 does not do justice to that area.

One of the things that concerned me with one of the answers from the regional biologist was the fact that, in order to change the hunting regulations or the numbers to the hunting regulations in that area, two things need to be looked at. One is the sportsmen, and one is the First Nations. Mr. Minister, can you comment?

Yes, I agree that the sportsmen have a say and the First Nations have a say. But what I'm saying is, to the landowners in that area, what about them? They're the ones that have to put up with the damage done by the elk and they get very little if any compensation to this problem. And it's a growing problem, Mr. Minister.

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — The process that's normally used is to get information from many sectors so clearly that includes the First Nations. It looks at the previous year's records around hunting in that particular area, but it also relates to information received from landowners, ranchers, or farmers around some of the numbers of animals that are there.

And it is a bit of a process to change these quotas, but given the fact that you've raised this here and they've had some public meetings, I think people will be looking at this and seeing if there can be some other quotas set in this particular area. So it is a process, and people are trying to gather information from a number of different places, but the landowners and the ranchers, farmers are not excluded. In fact their information is welcomed.

Mr. Allchurch: — Well thank you for that answer, Mr. Minister. Mr. Chair, just maybe to spinoff from that in regards to the amount of wildlife in that area, especially deer, and it was also mentioned at the meeting in Mayfair where your assistant minister was. The question was also raised at that time.

One of the things I want to read to you and that . . . in regard to last year. A letter came from a southern Saskatchewan landowner in regarding white-tailed and mule deer. And that is in regards to farmers, landowners that own their land in rural municipalities and wondering if the government has been looking at allowing outfitting in the south, south of the forest fringe, especially for farmers and ranchers who own their own land and have an abundant of wildlife on their land.

Has the government looked at this? And if you have, what is your comments in regarding to allowing some kind of outfitting to take place on farm and ranchland south of the forest fringe?

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Well thank you for that question that once again allows me to give a bit of an explanation about what's going on. There are a number of requests around setting up some other ways of organizing the hunting. Saskatchewan Environment and Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food officials met with some representatives from five different RMs [rural municipality] and two regional economic development associations in the month of March this year to basically hear from the proponents around some ideas that they had.

And the meeting was, I think, a positive meeting in that they could talk about this. And the issues that were raised and

discussed were around non-resident hunting being one of the several tools that the community and the farmers and ranchers in an area could use to generate some extra revenue for their local area. So that was one of the issues.

A non-resident hunting licence is a drawing card in a way. It generates a lot of other economic opportunities when people have that ability and that's whether it's camping or angling or, you know. So there are other kinds of things that can be done. So a person might do some hunting one day and then do a number of other activities in the community during the week that they're in the community. And so this becomes then a drawing card as part of a tourism package.

And there also was a sense from this group of people that they didn't want to use the existing licensed outfitters, but they rather wanted to do it in some community fashion. So that was a point that was raised.

Now the issues that come out of this for the government will be, what are the potential impacts that it may have on resident hunters access to private land. That becomes one of the issues. So a Saskatchewan person who wants to hunt now, normally if they get the approval from the landowner, can go and hunt there because they're a Saskatchewan resident. So this setting up some kind of a control process for non-resident hunters on a fee basis could then cause some problems for Saskatchewan hunters.

And also there was a clarification in this particular instance that what they're really interested in was the trophy class white-tailed deer buck. That was a big drawing card in this whole area.

So ultimately the issues and where the balance has to be developed is between the resident hunters and the non-resident hunters — that's the non-resident having contributing maybe more dollars, but not being here on a year-round basis — and what is that balance between these groups of users of the provincial wildlife resource.

And we know from many conversations — whether it's with some of the organizations in the province, wildlife federation, or from the outfitters association — that there are many differing views about this. And so we'll continue to listen to various proposals. But it's not as simple a task to change what has been the traditional structure in Saskatchewan as some people would purport it to be.

Mr. Allchurch: — Thank you for that, Mr. Minister. One thing I know for a fact is the fact that yes, we've got to look at the outfitters. Yes, we've also got to look at the wildlife federation. But I think what we also must consider is that the landowner himself, the landowner himself needs to come up with some kind of extra revenue for a resource that they look after.

And I'm looking at this amount of damage wildlife cause to the farmer, ranchers, and the ag producer. And yet through Sask Ag and Food they . . . if a person puts in a claim for wildlife all they can get is 80 per cent. In Manitoba and Alberta it's 100 per cent coverage, but yet in Saskatchewan it's only 80 per cent coverage. So this is one of the things I think that the minister needs to address with Sask Ag is they change this policy from

80 per cent coverage to 100 per cent coverage as Alberta and Manitoba has.

Also when we look at the outfitters and the sportsmen, especially with the sportsmen saying they don't have access then to this farm land, well if they would just go and ask the farmer permission to hunt, I'm sure most of the farmers would allow them to hunt. But a lot of the problems with the hunters is they come out and they think that they can just go on the land whenever they want and do whatever damage they feel like.

[15:45]

The biggest question is, though, that the farmer, rancher, the producer has to have some compensation for allowing the wildlife to be on his land and having this outfitting, of some sort. And I know, I understand, Mr. Minister, that there is some problems with that that needs to be addressed. But maybe you could be started with just provincial people that want to hunt, that there can be some outfitting guidelines for the farmer, rancher, to allow outfitting on his land south of the forest fringe. And then if it works good, have out of province. But right now just for the province of Saskatchewan hunters it may not be a bad idea because it would give some revenue in the hands of the farmer, producer.

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Well I will accept your comments as a suggestion in the debate. And it is another perspective that . . . And as I indicated before, officials have been looking at this and listening to the various proponents of different perspectives. So I appreciate your comments.

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

Mr. Hart: — Thank you, Deputy Chair. Minister, your predecessor in Environment initiated a green strategy and extensive consultation process last fall. There was a series — as I don't have to tell you — there was a series of six meetings across the province. And the understanding . . . I attended a number of them and it was my understanding, and I'm sure the people that attended, that you would be bringing forward a green strategy for the province.

To this point in time, we haven't seen any formal document tabled. And I'm just wondering, Minister, where that process is at and when we can see some results of that consultation process.

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Well the simple answer to that question is we are working very hard on this particular project. And it's something that I know officials and I have been working at from the government perspective. Also we've been working right across government with every department to get perspectives to add on to all of the information that we have from the public. And we're planning to bring forward our green strategy very soon.

Mr. Hart: — Minister, one of the areas that's in limbo is the whole area of solid waste management, and particularly in rural Saskatchewan with the regional waste management authorities. Last year there was a need for an injection of cash just to keep some of those authorities operating.

What is the status this year with these authorities? Have you been in talks with the association and with individual authorities as far as the viability of their operations for this current year?

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — I met with your former colleague, Mayor Wally Lorenz, just last week, and this was the topic of discussion. He was here as a representative of the Association of Regional Waste Management Authorities of Saskatchewan, and the specific topics talked about related to, well, the long-term plan, the medium-term and short-term plan. And we are working with them to make sure that we have a long-term plan.

What we've been getting, information from different groups including management people, engineers, and others around how our waste is managed in Saskatchewan, it's not a simple choice. One of our big challenges obviously in Saskatchewan is a relatively low volume of waste and long distances, and so we end up having to evaluate all the things that we do in light of that.

But the conversations are ongoing, and we are working very diligently to end up with an overall plan that we think will serve the province well.

Mr. Hart: — Well, Minister, I understand that one of the issues with that organization and I believe with the larger municipal governments who deal with a larger volume of solid wastes is the whole area of paper fibre. And there certainly has been discussions and a call for a stewardship program in that area. And I know discussions were under way. Where are we at as far as a stewardship program for paper fibre in this province?

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — The Saskatchewan Environment has been working on a solid waste management strategy, including a multi-material recycling program. And there are key stakeholders that are part of an advisory committee. I met with that committee approximately six weeks ago. They met again last Friday. They are working with advice and information from a number of professionals, whether it's engineers or management people, around a number of the products.

And so the types of material that are being discussed include paper, metal, clear glass, and plastic, as we already have a system for the recyclable bottles and cans, aluminum cans, and also now for paint. But there are some other products that end up in landfills. There's also a discussion around what one does with materials that are compostable and how that fits into the overall structure.

The goal is that they will come forward from their advisory committee, which includes members nationally — some from Toronto, some from Vancouver — representing some of the lines of material which are part of the overall process. And we're looking for a report from them hopefully by the end of June which would give some strong suggestions about how we might handle this in Saskatchewan.

Mr. Hart: — Minister, as part of those discussions, are the milk containers, are they part of the discussion? It just seems to me we have deposits on various other beverage containers, including fruit juices and those sorts of things. And yet the milk containers, there's really no incentive for consumers — no

financial incentive — for them to recycle milk containers. And I was just wondering if they are part of those ongoing discussions.

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — The milk containers — and I assume you're talking about the cardboard milk containers and the plastic ones — are not presently included in the deposit system where we pay a fee and then get some money back when we return them. So they have been included in the discussion around paper and plastic in the multi-waste issue. And that is the kind of question that is part of the discussion.

One of the great challenges that arises in this whole area is that at some points of time some of the recycled materials have a fair industrial value, and people will actually pay for them, whether that's paper or whether it's shredded plastic. Other times they don't. We've run into a specific issue right across Canada, but especially in our area, as the US dollar goes up, that also affects the price . . . or as the Canadian dollar goes up against the US dollar that affects the price that we get because some of the customers for some of these recycled products are in the United States.

So it's an area where very smart people involved at the municipal waste side — whether the city of Saskatoon, city of Regina, or in some of the private waste disposal companies, or in some of the other industries which produce these packaging materials and others — all of them are working together, and we're anticipating some very good advice around a plan that we can ultimately implement. Thank you.

Mr. Hart: — Minister, last year it was necessary for your government to put a cash injection of I believe around \$700,000 into the Regional Waste Management Authorities. Are you anticipating that there'll be a need this year for a further cash injection?

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — When I met with the group last week this was one of the issues that was up for discussion. The \$700,000 that was provided last year primarily dealt with accumulated debt. And all of the various regional waste management authorities were able to gather together their financial information to show the accumulated debt. And not all of them needed some assistance, but the \$700,000 was provided and it dealt with that accumulated debt.

Some of the same kinds of issues are arising this year, and there's a willingness — and that's what we indicated to them — to get the information and share it to see what requirements might be there in this year or next year. And so those kinds of discussions are ongoing.

Mr. Hart: — So, Minister, if I understood you correctly then, it sounds as if there will be a need for additional revenue or a cash injection to that organization so that they can continue to operate and do what they are intended to do. And the need for extra revenue, is that because of the depressed prices of the recyclables, or is it a structural problem where municipalities are only able to pay a certain amount for waste management services and the authorities aren't able to operate with the revenue available to them?

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Well these are exactly the kinds of issues

that are being discussed, but I would identify probably the greatest cost increase relates to the transportation cost, which is a fuel cost. So that is clearly something that has changed quite dramatically from last year, and also the fact that some of the products that come from the recycled materials have less value going back into the operation.

I think what happens on a national level is we need to compare the kinds of costs that we have in Saskatchewan for disposal of waste with some other jurisdictions in Canada. And I think that we are, in typical Saskatchewan fashion, very efficient and careful how we do these things. And we'll continue to try to have that balance of using the dollars that we do commit to that in the most efficient way, as well as being as environmentally friendly as possible. And in Saskatchewan we can often do things in a more efficient way than other places. So thank you very much.

Mr. Hart: — Chair, I'd like to thank the minister and his officials for the information they provided this afternoon. And I certainly appreciate their willingness, the minister and his officials, their willingness to answer the questions that we have asked and for that I thank them.

[16:00]

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

Hon. Mr. Yates: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I move we report significant progress.

The Deputy Chair: — Moved by the Deputy Government House Leader that we report progress. Is it the pleasure of the committee to do so?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: — That is agreed. We will recess. I want to thank the officials from Saskatchewan Environment. And we will recess now for a few moments while we await the officials from Learning.

General Revenue Fund Learning Vote 5

Subvote (LR01)

The Deputy Chair: — The members of the committee will come to order. The estimates before us are the estimates for the Department of Learning, and I'd like recognize the minister and invite her to introduce her officials.

Hon. Ms. Higgins: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. With me today are various officials from the Department of Learning. To my right is Wynne Young, deputy minister. To my left is Larry Steeves, the associate deputy minister. To Larry's left is Naomi Mellor, executive director, education finance and legislative services. Sitting directly behind Naomi is Nelson Wagner, executive director of facilities. Directly behind Larry is April Barry who is the executive director of early learning and child care. Directly behind myself is Don Hoiu, executive

director, accountability, assessment and records. And sitting behind Wynne Young is Karen Allen, executive director of corporate services.

That's the officials that are here with me today, Mr. Chair, and we look forward to questions.

The Deputy Chair: — Thank you, Minister. So the estimates for Learning are before central management and services. Are there questions? I recognize the hon. member for Melfort.

Mr. Gantfoer: — Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And welcome, Minister, and to your officials. It's a pleasure for us to have I believe an hour and 45 minutes of time together to consider the estimates for the Department of Learning.

I have a number of colleagues, Minister, that have specific issues that they'd like to raise with you, and I'd like to allocate this first period of time to their concerns. So, Mr. Chair of committees, my colleagues would like to ask questions.

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

Mr. Elhard: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And to the minister, thank you for an opportunity to raise some questions that have, in some cases, provincial import and in other cases, very specific to my own constituency.

Madam Minister, with the importance of the role played by regional libraries in the province of Saskatchewan, would the minister be able to indicate for us whether or not her department provides financial support for regional libraries throughout the province?

Hon. Ms. Higgins: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. What we do within the Department of Learning, we have a vote, provincial libraries. And what this unit does is develop legislative and policy framework for the operation of Saskatchewan public library system.

We administer a variety of grants and act as a coordinating agency for the system. Information technologies, some sharing of services. So I mean, I could go into a little lengthier of a definition, but I guess the best way for us to do this is, a majority of our focus is maximizing the co-operative use of information technologies and establishing public access to information databases, virtual reference services, and coordinating interlibrary loans.

So it's a lot of the accessibility areas. So if there's something specific that you would like to ask, we would work at getting you a more specific answer.

Mr. Elhard: — Madam Minister, from the response you gave it would seem that most of the direction of the department as it relates to regional libraries is administrative and support, as opposed to direct financial involvement or direct financial assistance. Is my understanding correct? If not, could you identify the amount of money that the department allocates to regional libraries?

Hon. Ms. Higgins: — I don't have a lot of specific detail as to

the regional libraries here with us today. I mean, you will have the numbers for total budget of \$9.365 million and also transfers for public service, and this ties into the accessibility and information sharing. And there was a 2 per cent increase in the grant, and funding for the CAP [community access program], previously funded within the department.

Mr. Elhard: — If the minister has additional detail that she would like to provide or share with us, we would be happy to receive it.

The issue of accessibility and the role that regional libraries are playing in rural Saskatchewan seems to be increasing. It's interesting that in this modern day of technological advance you would think that maybe hard book activities would be diminishing but that doesn't seem to be the case. And so I guess the question becomes, has the minister or her department given consideration to possibly increasing the funding that is going to help underwrite program delivery in regional libraries in future budgets?

Hon. Ms. Higgins: — What I will say to you is, I actually have toured the Palliser Regional Library that is housed partially in Moose Jaw and went through a very good afternoon of meeting with the board talking about the issues that they have. There was the 2 per cent increase, but there's a lot of issues.

And you're accurate, and when you say, you know — and you think of all the technologies and BlackBerries and wireless Internet and Internet — that the call for books may be reduced, but in most cases, in a vast majority of cases that's not accurate. People still like books. We still like to be able to sit and read books whether it's for resource, whether it's for pleasure, whether it's for hobby — whatever the reason. What's accessible on the Internet, many of us still like to read it in hard copy and to have a book to read.

One of the big pressures for the regional libraries is the cost of transporting books from one location to another. And there is some issues, I know, with some changes that have been proposed from the federal government having to do with a book rate, postage that may be charged because many of the regional libraries and the branches that are in smaller communities still may rely on Canada Post. If they don't have a courier service, Canada Post is the only access they have for shipments of books as they're being moved from one location to another.

So there's a number of concerns that are out there. But the 2 per cent increase was included in this year's budget, and these are issues that we will continue to work on and look at because I know people right across the province of Saskatchewan rely on libraries. And they are an important resource in the communities where they reside, and we need to maintain that service.

Mr. Elhard: — Mr. Chair, it sounds like the minister is quite sympathetic to the needs of rural libraries and the people that they serve, and I think we would await with some anticipation their consideration of the financial requirements for regional libraries in the future.

I'd also like to note that it's pretty hard to curl up in front of a fire with a nice BlackBerry, and maybe a book is indispensable

in that respect. But nevertheless I'd like to move to another topic if I may, Madam Minister.

I have a school in my constituency that has faced its limitations in terms of student population. And in order to achieve a level of viability, the school has undertaken a very aggressive recruitment process, going to international countries and identifying students that would like to come to the community and be there as international students to get their education here in Canada, to participate in the community life.

[16:15]

It's not an exchange program as such. It's a recruitment effort to bring those individual and hand-picked students to the community. In many instances the student population wouldn't exceed probably 40 or 50. And I guess the concern that I would like to bring to the discussion today is that when those students are recruited — and they pay a substantial fee in order to access the educational opportunities in these schools — that's income that is badly needed in that particular school. And yet there is the concern that any funding that might come from the provincial government through the enlarged school division now will be reduced to offset the increased revenues that are generated by these international students.

I'd like an assurance from the minister today that that simply will not happen — that what would be the outcome or the result of cutbacks to offset those monies would be penalizing the initiative of the school that has undertaken this particular program. Can the minister give us that assurance today?

Hon. Ms. Higgins: — Well I have to say the member opposite has started off with a couple topics that hadn't been top on our list here to bring along information for. With the information that we have here, yes it does look like that tuition that is paid into a school is looked at as other-source revenue and would be looked at with all other other-source revenue that will come into that school division and would be deducted from the foundation operating grant. I mean this is one of the difficulties, one of many difficulties that comes up when we are looking at simplifying the foundation operating grant and removing some of the inequities that have existed and been kind of added into the foundation operating grant over the years.

So you're accurate. It would be deducted. You know, it would be something that could be looked at as we're reviewing the foundation operating grant as the members opposite are aware. The first half of the foundation operating grant has been removed or we are about halfway through. Those changes were implemented this year. We are looking at working our way through the rest of the foundation operating grant over the next short while and having it implemented in the next budget year. So this is something that could be looked at through that.

Mr. Elhard: — Mr. Chair, through you to the minister, I'm wondering if there isn't an opportunity for the department to look at these kinds of, kind of, unique circumstances in a special way. What you've got basically is a very small school in a tiny, remote community that is threatened with closure because of the decline in rural population and the assimilation of one farm by another and the growing land base that is associated with some of these farms. So the school is under

threat from declining numbers and possible closure.

The administrator in that school and some of the community people saw this recruitment activity as an initiative that would help offset the inevitable, I suppose is the best term to describe their situation. And by including the income that they generate by undertaking this rather extensive and unique effort to save their school, we're really penalizing their initiative. And I don't think that that's the kind of thing we want to see happen.

Now I'm not sure that this kind of example is going to be replicated in small schools throughout the province. It may only happen in one or two or half a dozen or so. But where you have that kind of determination on the part of the administration and the community to save their schools by this recruitment of international students — who are paying substantial monies to come to the province to benefit from our education and from good quality instructors that are already there — there might be a necessity on the part of the department to consider the unique circumstances of those types of schools. And if the minister could give us some undertaking to do that, I think that would help assuage a lot of the fears that surround this particular initiative.

Hon. Ms. Higgins: — Thank you very much. As I previously stated, phase 1 of the review of the foundation operating grant is complete and we've seen with this budget that phase 1 has been initiated. Phase 2, we are going into a process of consultation to finish doing a review of the foundation operating grant.

What we want to look at is any of the . . . I mean this includes the special circumstances that may exist in any of the school divisions, whether on the expenditure or revenue side. There will be a consultation process that we will go through with the divisions, with the directors of education, and there will be opportunity for this board to make representation to the department when we're looking at phase 2, and put their case forward as to the issues they have and how they see being able to work this into their division and an asset in their division.

So that's part of phase 2, a review of the foundation operating grant. And we would be more than happy to include this as one of the topics that needed to be touched on.

Mr. Elhard: — Madam Minister, on the other side of the coin, I have another situation that's developing in my constituency where some international students who have become clearly aware of the quality of education we offer in this province have come to communities in my constituency, have taken up residence with local people, and are attending local schools without paying a premium. And they're just there as new attendees at the school.

The concern, I think, is that they come, they don't pay a premium for the educational service because they're maybe related to somebody in the community or whatever. But there is a scenario here where you've got some of these students who take advantage of the educational opportunities we provide with no additional fees. But there is a cost associated with delivering education to them as it relates to providing English as a second language.

And I'm wondering, Madam Minister, what the position is of your government and your department on assisting with the cost of English as a second language in these circumstances. If there is no provincial funding for this type of opportunity, then the cost falls back on the local taxpayers.

Hon. Ms. Higgins: — Well you have brought a few difficulties to this kind of question. The regulations were just changed not that long ago to avoid this type of situation. When you have fees that are charged to international students that may be here, part of the reason for those fees is to cover these extra costs, whether it will be English as a second language, whatever the circumstance may be. So if it was being done properly, these extra costs would not fall back onto the taxpayers in that division. So this is something else that we're going to have to look at in our regulations and maybe add into the phase 2 review process.

The Deputy Chair: — I recognize the hon. member for Batoche.

Mr. Kirsch: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. To the minister, I've got a school, the Three Lakes School, and it's in the town of Middle Lake. And it's part of the new Horizon School District. And it's got K to 12 [kindergarten to grade 12].

And the roof has been leaking. And it's at the point where they're setting out 5-gallon pails. They've done their B-1 form, sent it in, inspector's been out. He inspected and said it's one of the worst roofs he's looked at. And they've patched, patched, and patched. They're concerned now with what's going to happen with . . . mould or something's going to happen next. And the big question is, when do we get a roof?

Hon. Ms. Higgins: — The member opposite, we may need to get a little more information from you. If there's been a B-1 submitted it's not something that we recall here right now. So it may have been fairly recent . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . No?

Anyway there's just under \$10 million that is budgeted for these types of projects. There's a number of them. Roofs are fairly common when it comes to block funding so it's . . . Just to let the member know, it's not on a first-come, first-served basis. So what I need to do is get a little bit more information from you to do a bit of background on this. If you're saying it's not a recent issue, we should have information on it somewhere, but not on my fingertips here. Middle Lake is . . . Okay.

[16:30]

Mr. Kirsch: — Madam Minister, the school is called Three Lakes School and it is in the town of Middle Lake. And their concern is . . . I mean we definitely need the roof fixed. It's a growing school which is rare in rural communities. We added on a classroom, a mobile classroom the other year. They added a second mobile classroom on and the school is still growing. We're in the Bourgault circle so a lot of the people that live in the area are employed at Bourgault Industries so the outlook for the school is good.

The gymnasium had a leaking roof and of course the real answer is a pitched roof and that's what they did on the gymnasium — put on a pitched roof. And that would be the

correct answer for this one too with a school that's going like it is. We should have a pitched roof. And I'm looking forward to an answer on when we can get it because it's needed. The big concern is, yes it's leaking, but what do we do if mould sets in and then we lose the school?

Hon. Ms. Higgins: — Well there's a fairly formal process that goes through. I just want to assure the member that it's not done on a first-come, first-served basis. It's done based on need. So what we will do, we will get information from the department and we can pass it along to your office here at the legislature. Okay?

Mr. Kirsch: — Thank you. It's been inspected even, so it's not just the B-1. The inspector has been out and he said it's one of the worst roofs around. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: — I recognize the hon. member for Cannington.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Madam Minister, and your officials, I'd like to ask you some questions about the proposed school in Oxbow. I believe the B-1s have been sent in and approved. Just wondering when the finances will be made available to start construction.

And I know the community is interested in expanding the school construction that has been proposed by the department. One of the teachers that I was talking to was particularly interested in having an expansion of the industrial arts area. His information to me was that the industrial arts area will be shrunk under the current design from what he previously had in the high school, and he would like to have that enlarged as well.

So I'm just wondering what the status is and what the process is in the design programs when the department does the designing.

Hon. Ms. Higgins: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, for your patience. My understanding is that the Oxbow project is almost done its planning stage. The dollars were put forward for that, and that stage is almost complete. The member will know that we have a system of assessing major capital projects and the requests that are put forward, and they are prioritized on a list.

The top priority for sure is health, fire, structural safety — and that is divided into three subcategories. Basically health and safety are the top priorities. Also if it is a federal agreement or a federal partnership with the federal government, there also may . . . it will put it into that category. Priority 2 is critical space shortages. Priority 3 is structural repair, building systems, and building restoration. Priority 4 is non-critical space shortages.

The Oxbow project is currently sitting at the top of the priority 1 A-list. Funding is committed for this year. This list is reviewed every year for priorities and other projects that may come forward. But as it sits currently, Oxbow is at the top of the list, and as soon as resources become available it would be . . . That's where it is right now is at the top of the list. So I mean if we . . . Hopefully no other priorities come forward where it may be health and safety or other issues that are a higher priority because as it sits Oxbow would be on the approval list.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Madam Minister. I know that there was some serious problems in the gymnasium last year or the year before. Maybe it happened twice where they had structural problems that they actually had to evacuate the kids out of the gymnasium and not use it for a period of time.

When it comes to a new school and the design of a new school, is the criteria for every school the same? Do they all have to meet the same criteria, or are there some exceptions where some schools may get one type of construction — certain different things within the facility — and another may get something different?

Hon. Ms. Higgins: — Actually you know, I forgot a piece of the question you asked previously. You'd talked about the industrial arts and the shops — the Oxbow project. Those type of facilities would be purely numbers driven, so it would depend on enrolment at the school. Now that kind of ties in with the question that you just asked.

Yes, there are basic guidelines and core guidelines that are required for facilities. And there is flexibility, and some of that may change, depending on the enrolment in the facility, also program delivery within the facility and the age, what type of school it is. So while there's a number of variables, yes, there are, there are basic guidelines for facilities.

Mr. D'Autremont: — So there is some flexibility within the system to allow for design changes that may be proposed to a division regarding a particular school. Would that be correct?

Hon. Ms. Higgins: — Yes, the school can move space within the facility guidelines depending on the variables that may be there: enrolment, type of school, program delivery.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Okay thank you. This project is combining four schools — the Oxbow Elementary, the Oxbow high school, I'm told the Alameda School as well, plus Glenn McGuire, which is a special-needs school. So I'd like to ask a few questions about the Glenn McGuire School.

What is the department's policy on special-needs students? Does the department have the desire that those students remain in their home community and therefore are trained in that home community school? Or does the department also approve schools where a special-needs student may be in a residential setting where they're attending one school rather than the individual schools within their own particular communities?

[16:45]

Hon. Ms. Higgins: — I think the member will know and be well aware of the program changes that have taken place over the last number of decades. The McGuire School was initially a residential . . . well is a residential program.

And we see more and more now that families would prefer to have their family member as close as possible to them and to home. So while we may be moving away from that, most families, I think, would want their children to be as close as possible to home but still being able to access as many services as they can for their child. That's, I think, a trend that we've seen over the years, and I think you will . . . I mean, that's just

the way that this facility is going also.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you. Well it certainly would seem to be the way that the department is moving with this facility. Yet the parents whose children are in that facility want it to remain as a residential community where they have access to the new school so that they can integrate into the whole student population but, nevertheless, have their residential area in close proximity so that they can access that.

The parents that were there . . . there was a meeting down in Oxbow a couple of weeks ago. A good number of the parents that have their children in the Glenn McGuire School wish their children to remain in that school under a residential setting. And yet the changes that the department is making don't facilitate that. And so are there any other residential schools as part of education across the province, because these parents certainly wish it to continue?

Hon. Ms. Higgins: — The member opposite may be aware that there has been a decision made by the board to close the residential program, and the department is committed to working with the parents. There has been contact with parents up until very recently. It's still continuing on. And we've made the commitment to work with the parents to look at other options and what may be there to suit the needs of the families and the family members. So we'll continue to do that.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Madam Minister, when you talk about working with parents, that's good. But in what vein are you working with parents? Are you working with parents to take that child that's in Glenn McGuire now and put it into the school where their parents are resident? Or are you looking at working with the parents to maintain the residential component of the Glenn McGuire School?

You take a look at moving those students from the Glenn McGuire into their home communities. You're looking at having at least one special ed teacher there. You're looking at having an aide for every one of those students. You're looking at changes to the facilities that may be needed in the case of those individual schools, depending on the severity of the impairment that the student may have. You're looking at, I think in most if not all of these cases, making changes to the school buses to provide lifts in them for wheelchairs. So you're looking at some major costs throughout the system to take those 8 to 12 students and put them in the various communities from which they were resident.

Have you looked at that as well as the difference between the cost of making those changes and providing those teachers in every one of their community schools versus having a residential setting where I believe there are two to three full-time staff employed at Glenn McGuire and I think about four aides as well to look after those students?

So you're looking at some major costs to move those students out whereas it may be beneficial to have them in the residential setting where most of the parents want them to be.

Hon. Ms. Higgins: — Mr. Chair, one of the things that I do want to say is part of this work that goes on is with the families but also with the school division in the area. And the member

opposite really laid out a couple of options and some of the difficulties that go along with each of those options. But I believe that we need to work with the families and with the division and come to the best solution for that child as we can, for that student, whomever is in McGuire. We need to make sure that their needs are looked after and that there are other options that are fully explored before any final decisions are made.

The Deputy Chair: — I recognize the hon. member for Kelvington-Wadena.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you very much, Deputy Chair, and Madam Minister, and your officials. I appreciate the opportunity to ask you about three separate issues today.

And I'm going to start with the school in my constituency, Porcupine Plain Composite School, that has been looking for expansion and some major work done on it in the last few years. It's one of the schools that I believe has a lot of hope in the future because of the enrolment and the potential enrolment, but they have some needs within the physical building itself.

The people are very much looking forward to the opportunity to enhancing the school. It's used as part of the community, and it's still the heart of the community. And I'm wondering if you could tell us where this school is on your list of schools that are deemed to be valuable in this province?

Hon. Ms. Higgins: — The Hudson Bay, Porcupine Plain high school and according to the list that I have, it is replacement of the high school. It is on the major capital request list as a priority 3. So it is fairly far down on the list of priorities.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you. When you say fairly far down, I need to have a more definite answer. Can you give me an idea of what the number is and, more specifically, what year we're looking at?

And I'll tell you, our concern is of course when it comes to school closures — and it's happening right across the province — the number of students is important but also the shape the school is in is also one of the considerations. And if the school is allowed to deteriorate, then it's going to be far easier for somebody to say, we'll just move the students rather than fix up the school. So you're going to have a lot of support from people in that area if the minister and her department determines that this list is much closer to the year 2006 than it is to 2010. Thank you, Madam Minister.

Hon. Ms. Higgins: — I would again remind the member opposite, to be a priority 1, it has to be a health, fire, structural safety issue. Health and safety is the top priority on the list. Priority 2 is a critical space shortage. The Hudson Bay project would fall in as a priority 3, so it would be structural repair, building system, building restoration.

So we look at priority 1 as the ones that have the highest priority of having funding allotted to those projects. So when you're on the priority 3 list, chances are pretty slim at this point in time. Now when the member is asking for, is it next year, the year after, is it 2010, when can I see this project move up and be a priority 1, this list is reassessed yearly. There will be

projects added. They will change, their priority will change. And it also depends on the funding that is allotted to capital projects. So there's many other factors that can come into play on how a project is on the list and when it may move up and when it in fact may have funding committed to it.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you. I say thank you for the answer, not for the real answer, because I'm sure this isn't going to make the people happy in my area. In fact probably an attack of black mould is something that would make them happier because it would move it up the list.

My next question is regarding a young person that was at my house yesterday. It was a First Nations young lady from Saskatoon who is now attending school in Yellow Quill. She hadn't been going to school in Saskatoon for a year and a half and she's 16 years old and she moved back to Yellow Quill because she has a relative who is making sure she goes to school now.

I had asked the question the last couple of years about student numbers and tracking. And I'd been given some assurance that September of last year there was going to be student numbers. And it sounded that things were going to come in place so we could be sure that our First Nations students, that everybody had a student number, but specifically that students moving back and forth between reserve schools and urban schools or small-town schools would be tracked.

The young people that are not in school, as the minister knows, are most at risk of everything that we're all scared of. And this beautiful young person that was at my place yesterday should have every potential in the world but for a lack of education. And we spent most of yesterday afternoon talking about the chances she had to fulfill her dreams if she didn't have an education.

So my question to you is, is the tracking system in place? If it's not, when is it going to be in place? When can we be sure that we are giving our young people who have to go to school, that it's mandatory that they be in school, we can make sure that they are?

Hon. Ms. Higgins: — I want to thank the member for the question. This is something that's come up in question period a couple of times. And it's nice now to have a little more time when I can give you a little more complete of a answer, and do a little more of an explanation as to how this process has come about.

Previously ... well still, the school divisions have the responsibility and have traditionally kept the numbers of students within their division. It has not been something that's been done within the Department of Learning.

[17:00]

What we've been working on is a tracking system that will put in place a provincial program. So we've begun in Saskatoon where we have had a sign-on by all the schools. We're running a pilot project. Currently we have about 95 per cent of the public schools that are signed on to the project that have been adding their information to it, but we only have a level of about

63 per cent of the First Nations schools.

So part of the problem is we do a verification of numbers through the health system, but the health numbers can't be used for tracking within the school system. So you have a variety of school divisions that have all had their own numbering system and system that they have kept track of students. Also within the First Nations community, First Nations schools and through INAC [Indian and Northern Affairs Canada] have also had maybe the same system, but not the same numbering system as what we have been using.

So what we've been working on is compiling this into a consistent system where we have a clean set of data where we don't have duplication of students, duplication of names, maybe something as slight as a spelling difference that may cause a duplication of a student's name.

Like I say, we're at about 95, 98 per cent of all of public schools that are signed on and we have about 63 per cent of First Nations schools that are on the system. We hope to have 100 per cent coverage of the province by this fall and then we will be able to get some true numbers.

What we've been doing . . . And I know the other day in the House I mentioned numbers between 1,000 and 1,500 students may not be attending school in the city of Saskatoon. Those are numbers that were put out, not by the department because we have never put out a number because it's never been our responsibility to keep numbers of students within school divisions. That's been something that's been the responsibility of the division. So those were from a community group that had taken on this project and was looking at the issue in the city of Saskatoon.

So what we hope to do by this fall is to have more accurate numbers. And then we'll be able to move ahead planning and looking at what's the best way to make sure that there is that ever important connection between students and the school system, family and the school system, and what do we need to do to make sure that that connection is built and re-established or established with these young people or children that for some reason have not been part of the system so far and have not been receiving the education that they need.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Madam Minister. And I concur with what you're saying. It's just that it's taking too long. We started talking about it, I think, the first time in the House when I was the critic for Education about five years ago. And we talked about that. And even when we were on the committee dealing with children that were being exploited in the sex trade . . . And we have to be able to attract these children.

And especially our concern are the First Nations children because after September 30 when the schools do their numbers, there really isn't the same prevalence or importance to making sure that we know where they are after that. We don't want them just to be seen as a number for making sure they get money into a school division. That's not the point of it because we have a responsibility past that. And I know the minister feels the same.

And my last question is about the Pleasantdale school that is

closing. There was an article in the paper about it. There's lots of good points for the Pleasantdale school, or good issues, and it made a difference on many hundreds of children's lives. But they have one program going that I thought was excellent, and they taught Cree at the school.

The students from Kinistin First Nations came to the school to get their high school education, and that school offered Cree. And now I'm concerned that it will no longer be available to them. I know that Kinistin they'll have their own school system. But it should be an option, and I'm wondering if that school division is looking at it in some other schools.

Hon. Ms. Higgins: — I just want to let the member opposite know that our director of First Nations and Métis education, Darren McKee, has been working with the division. I agree with you that this is a very important opportunity in the province of Saskatchewan that we need to recognize the special nature and some of the advantages that we have here and that we can promote here. And I think having Cree and Aboriginal languages within the school system is one of those. So with Mr. McKee involved, I'm sure this will be recognized as an advantage that it is. And it's an opportunity for many students and will need to be continued on. So thank you very much for your comments.

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

Mr. Hart: — Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, I've just received a copy of the letter from the Lemberg Town Council to the new Prairie Valley School Division. And in the letter the council expresses great concern about the fact that their local bus contractor will not have his contract renewed. And also they are very concerned with the plans of the school division to have maintenance at the school in Lemberg done by their employees out of Regina.

And so they've written the school division and expressed their grave concern over the fact that services that are available locally will no longer be used by the school division. In fact they'll all be centralized out of the school division office here just out of Regina. And I'll just quote a couple of sentences from their letter, and I'm quoting:

Needless to say, council and indeed all the residents of Lemberg and district are extremely angry and upset over this blatant move to centralize everything in Regina and leave rural Saskatchewan with nothing other than a tax bill.

And then another sentence, Minister, is:

In your effort to save tax dollars with these proposed changes, you will in effect cost rural Saskatchewan more. Every time we lose a resident or a business in our town, the tax base shrinks. And when the tax base goes down, the mill rate goes up.

Minister, I would like you to respond to the concern. How would you respond to the concerns expressed in this letter from the town council of Lemberg?

Hon. Ms. Higgins: — I would thank the member for his comments. But I would like him just to actually kind of have a look at it, maybe read it over again — not right now but sometime when you got a few minutes. You talked about your local division and a local bus contract. Those are local decisions. Those are decisions that are made by the board.

One of the things we had talked about in the early, early discussions about the school division restructuring . . . I know many people talked about saving dollars, and there was questions asked a number of times in this House. What were the projections? What would be saved? What would be kind of cash in your pockets at the end of the day?

And any of the answers that I heard, and any of the information that I've seen since I have been Minister of Learning, is that that was never the intent. It was more efficient use of the resources that we have to provide equitable services right across the province of Saskatchewan, to put in place the regional pooling so we would see more equitable spread of the resources that were there. I believe that is still as valid as it was when this whole process was initiated.

So to your local community, the letter was written to the appropriate group — to the board. Those are the folks that make the decision as for the contracts and where they access their services from. So I really don't have any comment on that, but that's the appropriate place to send the letter.

Mr. Hart: — Minister, I think you're missing the point here. They're expressing concern about the increased cost of delivering education services to their community and all other communities within the school division. Because if you're bringing a plumber and a carpenter out of Regina to do something that a local contractor could provide with no travel costs, that's one of their concerns.

And their larger concern is that every time you centralize and amalgamate, it leads to erosion of services and the erosion of economic activity in rural Saskatchewan. And I think what they're saying in their letter is that you need to be cognizant of this and perhaps provide some direction to the school divisions — these mega divisions — that wherever possible, provided that it does not cost more, that they should be utilizing local contractors and local services within communities. It could be part of rural economic development or at least minimizing the impact of the erosion of services and erosion of business in rural communities. And I think that's the point they're making and they felt that this should be raised at the board of education level, but also with you, Minister.

Hon. Ms. Higgins: — No, and I thank the member opposite for raising the concerns. But I will say again, I mean local boards, local communities, local services within those communities — I believe that is understandable right across the province. We all know that you need to access services in your community if you want to maintain them, if you want to use them. It's more viable in many cases and I'm sure that that will be something that the board will look at when it is looking at contracts and looking at decisions that it's making in those communities.

The Chair: — I recognize the member for Moosomin.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Madam Chair. To the minister: Madam Minister, it's my understanding that the Department of Learning grants daycare licences. I'd like to know if that's correct and what the criteria is before a daycare licence is granted.

Hon. Ms. Higgins: — Yes, we do. We do the licensing. As the member may be aware, this unit was just moved into the Department of Learning in February of this year. We feel that it is a very good fit within the department and that early learning and child care is appropriately placed. We do do the licensing.

There's a number of criteria — much, much too lengthy for me to recite here and now. There is a fair bit of regulation. The licensing will depend on space, will depend on need, will depend on meeting a fair number of regulations to do with health and safety, fire code, space — again for children depending on the ages. It's fairly involved. But along with that licence will come funding for spaces and a pile of responsibility for those young citizens of Saskatchewan. So yes, it's much too lengthy to kind of run through here.

Mr. Toth: — Madam Chair. Thank you, Madam Minister. Madam Minister, about a month ago you should have received in your office a letter from a couple in the southeast corner of the province regarding a daycare licence that was lifted.

And if I understand correctly, you indicated the daycare program had just been put into your responsibility in February. So a lot of what transpired would have transpired before this came into an area of your responsibility. However, a follow-up would have come from your office. At that time, back in the fall a couple had applied for, had gone through as they indicated the process of applying for and had gone through the screening, the training, the long hours of work, the extra insurance, and were granted a daycare licence.

[17:15]

And unfortunately last fall a accusation was made against the couple which resulted in their daycare licence being lifted. The question they have to ask though, is when they went through the process — and, Madam Minister, you may or may not be able to answer this, but you can let me know — when they went through the process of applying for, they'd gone through all the screening, they were told at the time as well that there would be adequate services in place if they ever had a problem. When this accusation was raised, nobody was there to assist them.

And the Department of Learning, it took a long time. In fact it was just later this spring they finally got back to the couple and said, well we'll reinstate your licence but we're going to send it out to you in the mail. And the couple asked the question, well how come nobody was willing to even come and talk to us personally?

Now the issue that arises is the fact that an investigation was undertaken. Within a week the RCMP said there's nothing to substantiate the accusation and their recommendations were that the couple should have had their daycare licence back. It wasn't granted. As a result at the end of the day when Learning says we'll reinstate the licence, we'll just send it out in the mail, what has transpired is everything is dragged out over a period of

months. The daycare's no longer operating. In fact the couple are no longer together. It's actually a sad story.

I'd like to know, Madam Minister, what the department did in response to this letter and how they did the follow-up. It seems to me that where the couple said there'd be the support mechanism there, it never was there.

Hon. Ms. Higgins: — Madam Chair, I have to say to the member I don't have a lot of this information. Well I don't have any of this information specific to this case. I know there is a whole process that goes through when there is a complaint, the investigation that is followed through on.

And I know there's always a concern that maybe we've overreacted, but I would hate to think that we didn't react quickly enough or stringently enough and put at risk children. So there's always that balancing act, and it's always a difficult process to go through.

But what we will do, I will get a little further information from you after, and I can get a more detailed answer or response to your questions this afternoon and get it back to you, because we don't have any of the detail specific to that case here with us today.

Mr. Toth: — Madam Chair. Thank you, Madam Minister. And I'll get a photocopy of this shortly so that you have it before, your officials have it before the end of the debate on Learning.

But I guess, Madam Minister, and I'll ask this. I won't prolong the questioning, but I think what I'd like from you is, in view of this information that I'm going to be sending over and how everything transpired, what the department . . . now that you're responsible, what you can learn from it and how we deal with this down the road because I don't think a couple or anyone — it doesn't matter what part of the province — should have to go through what this couple went through.

Like the lady said, I was given a phone number for victim services. That's after she's been devastated. When I called, victim services said get a lawyer. What kind of response is that? Like, this is so inhumane. And that, I think you'll see — as you go through the letter — that where they were assured all these services would be available, they weren't available.

So what I would like, just to ask of the minister if you could get back to me and also if you could do a follow-up with this couple, because that was the understanding I had indicated. When they called, I had asked them to send the letter to your office, to DCRE [Department of Community Resources and Employment] — and this, I've got the copy and we can get back to them, because I think this is an issue that needs to be dealt . . . We need to protect children, but we also need to protect individuals from accusations whereby they have no recourse to follow-up.

And in this case as well, without charges, as the lady said, I can't even go to court to prove my innocence unless I go to court and take in a lawsuit which she's not able to do. So Madam Minister, I'll look forward to your response. Thank you.

Hon. Ms. Higgins: — We will look into that and get a little more detail on it, and then we will pass it along to your office what we can.

The Chair: — I recognize the member for Melfort.

Mr. Gantefer: — Thank you very much, Madam Minister. Thank you for entertaining the questions from my colleagues on issues that are various and from various parts of the province.

Following up on our last session, I appreciated the minister sending over last session appendix B, the 2005 mill rates for different divisions. As the minister knows, the date for setting mill rates for 2006 was on May 8. Does the department have updated information in terms of the mill rates for 2006, and could we ask for a copy?

Hon. Ms. Higgins: — Yes we do. And we actually . . . We had had a discussion this morning that we had passed you the preliminary kind of document. So we do have a document — same set-up — that is the final mill rates, and we can table it so you will have a copy . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Oh is it? Oh. It's our only copy. We'll get a copy and send one over.

Mr. Gantefer: — Thank you very much, Minister. I very much appreciate that.

In the time we have left to us, I want to touch on a couple of general topics. One of the realities of our province that have been discussed in question period and elsewhere is the changing demographic of our student population. And for whatever reason — I won't get into that tonight — but for whatever reason there's a significant loss of students in various parts of the province. It's more marked in rural, various rural locations, but it's also a reality in the urban centres.

Minister, have you looked forward in terms of forward planning or looking ahead and saying, if these demographic trends continue in this location, it's going to likely mean that the school in that location is not going to be viable in a year from now? A year ago, going into the future, has there been some work by the department to try to anticipate what the impact is on changing student demographics on the viability of schools in the province?

Hon. Ms. Higgins: — This is an area where the department looks at projections about three years out, same as the school divisions will. We will work together. Depending on the process, whether someone's looking at new facilities, I mean, there will be work done looking at projections out.

I was thinking of this the other day. I went out to visit my mother where she originally was born and raised. She come from a family of 13. She had a family of four of us, and I have a family of two. So you know, there's many reasons for numbers going down. Birth rate is one of those. While the member opposite may not have wanted to look at that during question period, it is a factor that has a big effect on the school system.

So it's something that we do projections on, but three years, maybe out as far as five. But we don't have a highly sophisticated system to go, you know, past that. We're really making some loose projections at that point.

Mr. Gantefer: — Minister, I recognize that there are a number of factors that all influence these trends, and certainly Saskatchewan isn't the only jurisdiction in the world where they're occurring. I mean to differing degrees, depending on other issues, they have greater or lesser impact.

The question is, is when we're looking forward, we also then are going to be faced with the reality of trying to comprehend what is going to happen in terms of transportation. That as these demographics unfold, they're potentially are going to be areas where we get into a huge geography and a huge challenge of transportation times on busing or things of that nature.

And I'm wondering is the department looking at the concept — and I don't know what the right word would be, but I would call them schools of necessity — where it may not make a whole lot of sense based on the enrolment that a school is in a certain physical, geographical location but because it is unfair and unreasonable to transport students, especially elementary school students beyond a certain length of time, that a school has to be there in some form. And I'm wondering if the department is starting to look ahead to that because it sort of gets to be too late when all of a sudden the realities are all in front of us and we haven't did any fore planning.

Hon. Ms. Higgins: — The member opposite will know that in phase 1 of the foundation operating grant review, you know, a number of factors were simplified and clarified.

Phase 2 will include the factors where ... [inaudible] ... isolated and small school factors that are in there. We recognize the importance of these issues. Currently you will know that these are decisions that are made locally by the boards, but those factors remain and will be reviewed in phase 2 of the foundation operating grant.

Mr. Gantefer: — Thank you, Minister. And I appreciate the department's commitment to changing these factors or formula in terms of the foundation operating grant. But I think that some decisions are going to have to be made that may not have the kind of influence on these factors as we would like, that it's simply a matter of necessity.

And that's why I call these, potentially, schools of necessity, that it may not fit snugly and easily into the foundation grant formula. But it simply reflects the fact that you can only bus children so long in a given day and there's going to have to be compromises and recognition of that in some way. And I'm not confident enough that a simple formula is going to properly address that.

The other potential component for dealing with this issue in the broad context is — again I might not be using the right terminology but — what I would call virtual schools, schools that are virtually computer based or computer driven, Internet linked, and things of that nature, distance education potentially linked. As again we get these expanding geographic realities, are we going to have to look at some of these creative alternatives in terms of providing a proper curriculum to students in some of these remote areas?

[17:30]

Hon. Ms. Higgins: — The member will know that there is a — well may not know — that there is a fairly sophisticated e-learning component within the department, and not only just for remote or isolated schools but it can be for ... and not just Internet but also through satellite can be accessed. And not just for schools that may be smaller or more isolated, but also can provide some expanded curriculum or expanded elective courses for students that may be in locations that don't have access within their region to more unusual courses or different options that are available in larger centres. So that's there.

But also I just want to remind you that phase 2 of the foundation operating grant, when we are looking at the review of it, there will be some extensive consultations that will be looking at this whole area of isolated schools, small schools, what's needed, what opportunities are there, what options are there. So that's something that will be involved in the phase 2 review.

Mr. Gantefer: — Thank you, Minister. Minister, in terms of the work, is there a spreadsheet or anything of that nature that outlines this anticipated demographic shift to students going forward? Has the department got to that stage of actually developing something specific in the geographic regions or the new school divisions, and if they have, is that available?

Hon. Ms. Higgins: — There is a provincial report that's updated semi-annually that does projections for the province as a whole. And it's public information, so we can get you a copy of that.

Mr. Gantefer: — Thank you, Minister. The province as a whole, is it broken down by these new reorganized school divisions?

Hon. Ms. Higgins: — No, the only projections we do are provincially.

Mr. Gantefer: — I would suspect the calculations to get a provincial number come from the various school divisions, so it would strike to me that this number provincially doesn't just happen. It's a total of the various local numbers. So is that spreadsheet available?

Hon. Ms. Higgins: — The information isn't collated by division. The only way we have it is provincially.

Mr. Gantefer: — Thank you, Minister. While we're, in the available time that's left to us, continuing on demographics, the other side of the coin of course of the student changing demographics is also the teacher demographics as well and how those match up. I mean does the department, again broken down by school division, have an outlining of the teacher workforce and their ages and their time to superannuation? And is that available?

Hon. Ms. Higgins: — For the member opposite, we do a supply-and-demand study when it looks at staffing every five years. And one is due to be done, a study, this summer with expectations that the results will be out early in '07, either end of this year, December not likely, probably more apt to be out in early '07.

Mr. Gantefoer: — Is it an all-or-nothing once every five years? Surely that you update this and it's a rolling kind of a projection, or is it you live and die with the projection that was done five years ago?

Hon. Ms. Higgins: — This study that is done every five years is commissioned by the Board of Teacher Education and Certification really to help the universities establish what they will need in the coming years.

So there isn't a rolling process that we would do, but there would be more of a . . . probably a rolling set of information that would be done by the school divisions to know what their needs are individually as to retirements and what needs to be brought in and what program changes there would be. So the once every five years is accurate for this study itself.

Mr. Gantefoer: — Thank you, Minister. Minister, is there work done by the department or coordinated by the department to make sure that, you know, in this time of change . . . There certainly is the changing student demographics. There's school boards that are reducing their professional staffing component. These adjustments are occurring pretty much across the province in one form or another at a greater or lesser extent. Is there . . .

My concern is that no one is keeping an eye on this whole trend or . . . if it's only evaluated once every five years because there could be . . . And we know that in the setting of the spring budgets that there are divisions that have reduced their teaching component by some significant numbers. The concern that I have is, are those divisions looking beyond their own situation to say there's going to be a place for these teachers, as you know the way that teachers' seniority and time of service within the division is an important component. So as you approach retirement, doesn't mean you're the teacher that may be part of the staffing reduction. It could be one of the newest, younger teachers that are just located to that community are the ones who are not going to have their position retained.

And so I'm concerned about dislocation and sort of having a forward-looking kind of vision of what's likely to happen because it can be fairly devastating. And after it's done, you lose some of the younger teachers whose seniority wasn't sufficient to retain their position. And two years later the demographics occur such that teachers are retiring, and all of a sudden you're looking at rehiring. And that makes a very cumbersome, difficult process.

Hon. Ms. Higgins: — The member opposite has really hit on something that is . . . I mean it's important, especially currently when we are looking at the restructured divisions. While I know there has been a number of divisions that have been raised in the paper as looking at some major changes in staffing, one thing that I would say is that through the discussions that we have had through the various divisions, there is a hope I think through all of them that being able to look at attrition, whether it's retirements, whether it's managing vacancies, that it will not be as severe as what many had first projected. So we're going to continue to work with that. We won't know final numbers until the end of this month, early in June.

You know I have to make the comment that when there's an opportunity for teachers to move around when they're . . . And you know and in your own comments, you made the comment about, it's the teacher with the least seniority that is more apt to get bumped or not have a spot to go to in September. In a larger unit and in a larger division, there is going to be more opportunity for movement. There is going to be more opportunities that are there than what there would be in a small division.

So I know that being in this difficult spot of change, we're kind of in the middle of it here and now. The boundaries have been drawn. The new boards are in place, but there is still a huge amount of work that needs to be done. I believe we are on the right path. I know the school divisions believe that. We've seen some very good work that's been done within the divisions, but there's still a fair bit to go.

And I know the divisions are busy. And I know the teachers are kind of in waiting to see what is going to happen. And while that's regrettable to leave anyone in that situation — I know that's a concern of mine — but they've worked through this. They have been great and kept up the quality of education that goes to students in our classes. And I know this will be very good at the end of all this.

Are you calling me out of time already . . . waving . . .

An Hon. Member: — No, but whenever you want to wrap up that would be okay.

Hon. Ms. Higgins: — Well, Madam Deputy Chair, she's waving her pen at me, so I'm assuming I'm out of time, and I'm supposed to hurry up and sit down. I would like to thank the opposition for their questions. And I would also like to thank the department for a great deal of work that they have gone through in the last while with the restructuring and the many changes that have taken place, and also for shepherding a new minister through, which isn't always the easiest task. So thank you very much to the department.

The Chair: — I recognize the member for Melfort.

Mr. Gantefoer: — Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I too would like to thank the officials and the minister for answering our questions over the course of these estimates and look forward to working with the department and conducting ourselves in a professional way in the best interests of the students and the children of this province. And I think everyone will be well served if we endeavour to make sure that that's the focus and the priority. So thank you very much.

The Chair: — I recognize the Government House Leader.

Hon. Mr. Hagel: — Madam Chair, I move the committee rise, report progress, and ask for leave to sit again.

The Chair: — The committee has moved that we rise, report progress, and ask for leave to sit again. Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried.

[The Speaker resumed the Chair.]

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

Ms. Hamilton: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The committee has requested that I rise, report progress, and ask for leave to sit again.

The Speaker: — When shall the committee sit again? The Chair recognizes the Government House Leader.

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

The Speaker: — The Government House Leader.

Hon. Mr. Hagel: — Mr. Speaker, in order to accommodate the good work of the House Services Committee as well as the Human Services Committee, I move that this House do now adjourn.

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

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — Motion is carried. This House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 1:30 p.m.

[The Assembly adjourned at 17:50.]

TABLE OF CONTENTS

TABLING OF REPORTS

The Speaker.....	1657
------------------	------

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRESENTING PETITIONS

Elhard	1657
McMorris.....	1657
D'Autremont	1657
Draude	1657
Hermanson	1657
Bjornerud	1657
Stewart.....	1657
Wakefield.....	1658
Chisholm.....	1658
Gantefoer.....	1658
Weekes.....	1658
Huyghebaert.....	1658
Allchurch.....	1658
Kirsch.....	1658
Brkich	1658
Merriman	1658

READING AND RECEIVING PETITIONS

Deputy Clerk	1659
--------------------	------

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Krawetz.....	1659
Forbes	1659
Cline	1659
Belanger.....	1659
Merriman	1659
Atkinson.....	1659
Gantefoer.....	1660
Wartman.....	1660
The Speaker.....	1660

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Regina Volunteer Receives Kinsmen Award

Hamilton	1660
----------------	------

National Police Week

Merriman	1660
----------------	------

Prairie to Pine Awards Banquet

Sonntag	1661
---------------	------

Canadian Federation of Independent Business Anniversary

Stewart.....	1661
--------------	------

Saskatchewan Cycling Association Shamrock Tour

Borgerson	1661
-----------------	------

Provincial Awards to Melfort Special Olympians

Gantefoer.....	1661
----------------	------

Pregnancy, Parenting and the Workplace

Morin	1662
-------------	------

ORAL QUESTIONS

Air Tanker Crash Near La Ronge

Huyghebaert.....	1662
------------------	------

Nilson	1662
--------------	------

Recommendations of the Children's Advocate

Merriman	1663
----------------	------

Belanger.....	1663
---------------	------

Wait Times for Cardiac Diagnostic Procedures

McMorris.....	1664
---------------	------

Taylor.....	1664
-------------	------

Recruiting Endocrinologists

McMorris.....	1665
---------------	------

Taylor.....	1665
-------------	------

Funding for Avastin

McMorris.....	1665
---------------	------

Taylor.....	1665
-------------	------

Review of Infant’s Medical Treatment	
McMorris	1666
Taylor	1666
STATEMENT BY A MEMBER	
Condolences on Airplane Crash Near La Ronge	
Nilson	1667
Hart	1667
ORDERS OF THE DAY	
WRITTEN QUESTIONS	
Iwanchuk	1667
The Speaker	1667
GOVERNMENT ORDERS	
COMMITTEE OF FINANCE	
General Revenue Fund — Environment — Vote 26	
Hart	1668, 1672
Nilson	1668
Weekes	1669
Draude	1670
Allchurch	1674
General Revenue Fund — Learning — Vote 5	
Higgins	1677
Gantefoer	1678, 1685
Elhard	1678
Kirsch	1680
D’Autremont	1680
Draude	1682
Hart	1683
Toth	1684

GOVERNMENT OF SASKATCHEWAN

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Premier

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Minister Responsible for Seniors

Hon. Pat Atkinson
Minister of Advanced Education and Employment
Minister Responsible for Immigration
Minister Responsible for the Public
Service Commission

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Minister of Northern Affairs
Minister Responsible for the Status of Women

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Minister of Community Resources
Minister Responsible for Disability Issues

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Minister Responsible for Investment
Saskatchewan Inc.
Minister Responsible for Information Services
Corporation of Saskatchewan

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Water Corporation

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Provincial Secretary
Minister Responsible for Gaming
Minister Responsible for Saskatchewan
Government Insurance

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Minister Responsible for Literacy
Minister Responsible for Liquor and
Gaming Authority
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