

The Assembly met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Ms. Crofford: -- Well I think I win the prize today, Mr. Speaker. I have just a huge group up here in the gallery, in the west gallery, that I'm introducing to you and through you to the members of the Assembly -- 100 students from Riffel High School. And they're accompanied by their teachers, Jim Hudson, Dave Stouse, and Dale Flichel -- I hope I'm pronouncing that right. And we'll see you for a photo at 10:30 and for a visit in room 218 following the photo. Please join me in welcoming them.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mrs. Bergman: -- Yes, Mr. Speaker, I'd also like to welcome the students from Riffel High School, many of whom live in my constituency and go to Riffel just outside of my constituency. I'd ask again for everyone to join me and welcome them to the Assembly.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Prince Albert City Police to Learn Cree

Mr. Kowalsky: -- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, in my home town of Prince Albert many people are looking for ways that we can improve race relations. Today I want to bring to the attention of this Assembly a recent announcement of the Prince Albert Police department. It was announced that the city police employees will soon start learning to speak Cree. This is one of the biggest steps towards cross-cultural understanding in Prince Albert. The city police employees will engage in an 18-week language course which will focus on conversational Cree for beginners, and the actual course will begin in May. This program is a result of a recommendation of the Nerland inquiry that a police officer fluent in Cree should be on duty on all shifts.

Mr. Speaker, I feel that this is an example of things that citizens in Saskatchewan can do to bring us closer together. It will help break down the barriers of racism.

Mr. Speaker, I feel the Prince Albert Police department and all those in the project should be congratulated. Particularly I want to congratulate the city Board of Police Commissioners and the police department for undertaking this very, very important step.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

16-and-under Provincial Curling Championships

Mr. Sonntag: -- Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. A bad poet with a good eye for detail said, a hundred

years ago or so, mighty oaks from little acorns grow. Last weekend at Meadow Lake Curling Club, we were treated to some excellent curling at the 16-and-under provincial curling championships. The next Sandra Petersons or Rick Folks were on display for the large crowds. And, Mr. Speaker, the teams shot the lights out.

The final was triply exciting for the home crowd because it involved our Meadow Lake team skipped by Jason Richter, who ended up playing the Moose Jaw rink, skipped by Jeff Street, in three straight play-off matches. I regret to say that our rink got its sequence backwards -- it won the first match and then lost the next two, so the Moose Jaw rink took the title. I blame the members from Moose Jaw Palliser and Moose Jaw Wakamow, but I can't prove it.

Most importantly, Mr. Speaker, 16 teams, with coaches and supporters, came from all over Saskatchewan to our town. They got to see a part of the province they perhaps had not seen before and they had the fun of associating with their fellow curlers from across the province. They will take home with them a better knowledge of the infinite variety we in Saskatchewan have to offer.

I congratulate all the curlers, especially our team, made up of Jason Richter, Ashley Russell, Clayton Mamchur, David Blatz, and coach Ellice Mamchur. A special thank you, Mr. Speaker, to the organizers of the event under the leadership of Elwood Demmans and Lena Dubray. Thank you very much.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Trophy-size Buck Taken in Biggar

Mr. Whitmore: -- Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The town of Biggar has once again lived up to its name. Today I would like to announce to the Assembly a new world record has been set within my constituency, just north of the town of Biggar, for the largest white-tailed buck ever recorded.

The buck was taken by Mr. Milo Hanson, a farmer from the Biggar area, last November. This news has travelled all over the world. In fact the story of the hunt just landed on the front page and cover story about **Outdoor Life** magazine, a major sports magazine.

The world record brings good news to Saskatchewan for many reasons. With the coverage of this story and the excitement it will produce, the Saskatchewan tourist industry will surely benefit.

This trophy buck has drawn international attention to the quality of our wildlife. This speaks well for the habitat protection and practices of Saskatchewan farmers who own much of this land. Many visitors will be attracted to Saskatchewan as a result of the attention this event has brought us all.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate Milo Hanson on his prize-winning buck, and also thank him for the

potential rise in tourism and boost in our economy because of it. New York might be big, but truly this is Biggar.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Moose Jaw Zoo

Mr. Hagel: -- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In Saskatchewan it's not uncommon that adversity often leads to a good solution, and that was the case late last year when the former owner of the Moose Jaw zoo decided to give up the operation. The Moose Jaw zoological society came to the rescue to take over the operation in conjunction with the city of Moose Jaw and the province of Saskatchewan, formulate a plan to do that.

Tomorrow, Mr. Speaker, is an official day when another step takes place, and the operations of the zoo will be taken over by Dr. and Mrs. Sung, who recently moved to Canada, to Saskatchewan. Dr. Sung was formerly the veterinarian, zoological veterinarian at the Korean zoo in Seoul, Korea.

As a result of his involvement, in conjunction with the zoological society, a number of changes will take place at the Moose Jaw zoo over the coming months. The children's play area will be improved and the petting zoo is going to be enlarged. There will be a number of special weekend events. And in conjunction with the Moose Jaw zoological society there will be a significant emphasis, improved and increased, on educational programs, tours, and promotions.

As well, Dr. Sung will be involved in an international exchange of animals with Korea. There'll be upgrading of a number of facilities and particularly the monkey house, Mr. Speaker, because at the end of the day, Moose Jaw is determined to continue in monkey business.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

MLAs vs Media Hockey Match

Mr. Knezacek: -- Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well the Easter bunny came early for certain people in north-west Regina last night. The spirit of giving was in evidence during the combined hockey game and Easter egg roll contest between the mighty MLAs (member of the Legislative Assembly) and the Regina struggling press. This was the second annual challenge cup match between the two teams. Last year's game ended up in a 7-7 tie.

First and foremost, Mr. Speaker, the game raised \$220 for AIDS Regina. Second, to keep the MLAs from getting the feeling of self-importance, as they are sometimes accused of by the press, they gave the game away to the press, the score being 4-3. There was a general feeling that the loss was not the result of bad coaching however. As is their custom, the press made up the final goal out of thin air. It was a well-played game in which the lead changed several

times. At the end of the second period the score was deadlocked at 3-3. Needless to say, the press was keeping score. Special thanks go to John Weidlich and Costa Maragos who refereed the game, calling penalties against the MLAs when the press needed them.

I look forward to next week when we make the presentation of proceeds to AIDS Regina, and also from a previous game to Chili for Children. On behalf of the team, I wish everyone a happy Easter. May it be meaningful, restful, and to the member from Regina Wascana Plains, safe. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Recognition of Farm Equipment Dealers

Mr. Toth: -- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'd just like to make a few comments regarding the agricultural scene in Saskatchewan. Certainly the agriculture producers and many of the organizations have been really concerned with the shortage of grain cars and the ability to move grain.

But there's a lot of optimism in rural Saskatchewan as well, and I'd like to take a moment to commend the individuals who have really put a lot of money into the agricultural scene and certainly the farm equipment dealers across this province.

In my constituency, a number of dealers have been holding customer appreciation days. And when you look at it, Mr. Speaker, the farm equipment dealers have been major employers in our province and in our small communities. So I think it's appropriate that we take a moment to recognize the families and the individuals who have been a major part in agriculture across this province, and I extend an appreciation and tip my hat to the farm equipment dealers across this province.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Easter

Mr. Flavel: -- Thank you Mr. Speaker. Today begins the final weekend of the Easter season. This is Maundy Thursday, the day of the Last Supper at which the commandment to love our neighbour was given. Tomorrow is Good Friday and of course Sunday is Easter. This is the major religious observance of the Christian people around the world. As the member from Saskatoon Wildwood said on Tuesday, this is not the forum to engage in one's religious beliefs. But the significance of this holiday to our society should be observed.

This is the time in which we celebrate the victory of life over death, in which the promise of ultimate triumph over evil is given, and in very basic terms in which we observe the passage of winter into spring, the season of waiting into the season of rebirth. It is also the season in which we acknowledge the exalted principle of personal sacrifice for the good of others, the major example of which is at the heart of the

Christian religion.

As one denomination's prayer-book says, Mr. Speaker, at this time of the year we ask for, and I quote: peace in the world, that a spirit of respect and reconciliation may grow among nations and peoples. And we ask for help for the poor, the sick, and all who suffer, for refugees, prisoners, and all in danger, that they may be relieved and protected.

And I want to take this opportunity, Mr. Speaker, to wish each and everyone a very happy and peaceful Easter. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ORAL QUESTIONS

Electricity Rate Increase

Mr. Boyd: -- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my questions are for the minister responsible for SaskPower. Mr. Minister, please tell us what you're planning on doing with SaskPower is some sort of sick April Fool's joke.

Saskatchewan families already are paying the highest tax burden in Canada, already paying the highest utility bills, electrical bills of any western province, already paying for massive utility hikes you have imposed over the past two years. Saskatchewan families are already paying for all of these things and yesterday you hit them again, Mr. Minister.

Mr. Minister, please tell us this is an April Fool's joke. Please tell us that SaskPower rates will not be going up another 3.8 per cent tomorrow.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Anguish: -- Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for the question. I do want to clarify it's not an April Fool's joke; it's no laughing matter. And I think the member should take it seriously. And I do reinforce that the rates as of April 1 will be going up 3.8 per cent.

Mr. Boyd: -- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my next question is for the Minister of Finance.

Madam Minister, as the minister of SaskPower has suggested, it is no laughing matter. You promised in your budget that there would be no new taxes. You also said that there'd be no utility hikes planned in the foreseeable future.

I guess you were a little bit hasty in making that announcement, weren't you, Madam Minister? You should have checked with your boss first -- Jack Messer. Jack obviously didn't feel that he had sucked enough money out of the Saskatchewan taxpayers, or maybe he's just a little bit mad about the nasty letters to the editor that have been popping up in the newspapers around the province.

Why didn't you just say no to Jack Messer when he

asked for this outrageous increase? Why didn't you stand up for the people of Saskatchewan? Why didn't you stand up for farmers or home-owners or small-business people all over Saskatchewan? And, Madam Minister, why didn't you just tell the truth when you were asked about utility rate increases?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: -- Mr. Speaker, I'd be pleased to answer that question. And I would refer the member to **Hansard**, February 16 in which I was asked about utility rate increases.

And I said this:

The commitment was clear. If we met our deficit reduction targets, which we have -- in fact we have more than met our deficit reduction targets -- there would be no increases in taxes. That means no increases in incomes, sales, gas taxes.

Now the member opposite would also like to know about utility issues. They are a separate issue. They are decided on a different basis.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to make this simple point. In other provinces utilities are privately owned in many cases, and in fact would have been privately owned had those members remained in power. So does that mean when a privately owned utility increases its rate, this is a tax? It has to be only Tory logic that would have a utility rate increase as a tax. We have been absolutely clear in our commitments to the people of Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Boyd: -- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Madam Minister, in your pre-budget consultations and in your pre-budget speeches you said to the people of Saskatchewan, there would be no increases in utility rates. That's what you said, Madam Minister, and you know you said it. It's on tape, Madam Minister, and you know indeed that you said that.

As well, other members of your party have suggested things like this in the past, and I quote:

An unconscionable attack on poor families. These families have kids who need clothes, they have mortgages, they have car payments, and what is the government doing? It's reaching deeper and deeper into the pocketbooks, the purses, the wallets, the bank accounts of Saskatchewan families. Higher and higher taxes, higher and higher fees.

Those are not our words, Madam Minister, those are the words of the member from Moose Jaw Wakamow, the former SaskPower minister, talking about a power rate increase in 1988.

Madam Minister, when are the actions of your party going to start matching the actions of your words?

When are you going to stop piling burden after burden onto the Saskatchewan families?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Anguish: -- Well when you talk about the member from Moose Jaw Wakamow, I want to tell you that the policy that he stated is the policy of the government, that the increases would be in line with the rate of inflation. And that's basically what you have here.

But I want to address the issue that the member brings up about saying no to the utility rate increase. What the member opposite fails to tell the public in Saskatchewan is when management first came to SaskPower and said they wanted a utility rate increase, we did say no. This debate has been taking place since November of '93 within the SaskPower board. And when we said no, we said we want you in management of SaskPower to go back and look at internal efficiencies. And as a result there has been some \$5.6 million reduction in the operating expenses this year at SaskPower, and also a reduction in their capital expenditures by \$9.6 million, for a total of some \$15.2 million.

SaskPower found those internal efficiencies, and because of some of the legacy that you've left us with over at the corporation in the huge debt that's there, and some of the more noble things like rebuilding the ageing infrastructure system that we have, it was necessary to bring in a rate increase. That rate increase is in line with the rate of inflation.

The member from Moose Jaw, the minister at that time, stated very clearly we would not play games with utility rate increases. In fact it would be consistent and a smaller rate increase rather than . . . Do you remember the 12.6 per cent rate increase you brought in in 1983?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Boyd: -- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Minister, when Jack Messer came to you the other day and suggested that there should be an increase in this, you should have said no again, Mr. Minister; that's what you should have did for the people of Saskatchewan. You're inflicting pain on the backs of Saskatchewan families, Mr. Minister.

And let's also talk about the cost of business of this increase. Businesses in this province are already reeling from your government's economic policies. We are down about 12,000 jobs from the day your government took office and thousands more jobs are about to be lost if you push ahead with this destructive policy, Mr. Minister, of increases and your labour agenda. Now you're hitting every business in Saskatchewan with an additional 3.8 per cent tax on their utility rate and power bills.

Mr. Minister, how many people will be thrown out of work because of this increase? And when are you going to start working for Saskatchewan businesses

and workers instead of against them, Mr. Minister?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Anguish: -- I thank the hon. member for his question, Mr. Speaker. When no should have been said was back in the days of your administration. You should have said no to the sale of the coalfields that we owned in Saskatchewan. You should have said no when they sold off all the natural gas reserves which we have to buy from the producers now. That's when no should have been said.

I want to make it very clear to the member opposite, this is not a tax increase. If it was a tax increase, the Minister of Finance would have announced it in the budgetary process. This is a rate review, and we're not going to subject Saskatchewan people to huge rate increases, like you did, by manipulative games within the SaskPower Corporation at that time.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Utilities Review Committee

Mr. Swenson: -- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Premier. Mr. Premier, once again your government is inflicting another burden on Saskatchewan families, the families that elected you, sir, a short time ago. And once again the opposition is offering you a solution.

The very first Bill introduced this year in the Legislative Assembly, Mr. Speaker, is a Bill to create an all-party committee to review utility rate hikes -- a committee, Mr. Premier, I would remind you, that has a proposed majority of its members made up by your government members.

Don't you think that this would be a better solution to what we've seen in the last two days, Mr. Premier, letting the elected officials of this House do their job, rather than having every Saskatchewan family left up to the whims of your friend Jack Messer who pulls the plug every once in a while on them.

Mr. Premier, we could pass that Bill today. We could nominate people to the committee and we could put the elected officials of this House to work on determining whether this rate increase is justifiable to Saskatchewan families. Would you do that today, Mr. Premier? Would you allow that to happen?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Romanow: -- Mr. Speaker, I would say to the Leader of the Opposition that members of this Assembly are doing their job. I might add, in my opinion, from the official opposition's point of view they're doing their job very poorly when it comes to this issue. But you're doing your job none the less by asking questions, as you are here; and you're doing your job or you should be doing your job in Crown Corporations.

But I want to tell the Conservative Party opposite

there, that if you had been doing your job at the time that you were in office, you would not have allowed the privatization of the Manalta coalfields, or the privatization of the energy gas fields to your large, private corporation friends; thereby entering into sweetheart arrangements with them where they sell back the power to us at exorbitant costs, including the boondoggle of Rafferty and Shand, resulting in the tax increases as you had described them, the utility rate increases that are here before us now.

I say, Mr. Speaker, it is a little bit too late for the Conservative Party to be talking about MLAs doing their jobs. You had not been doing your job for 10 years; we're cleaning out your mess and we're doing it responsibly and the people know that.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Swenson: -- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Premier, you can drag out all of the red herrings you want. Nobody believes you, nobody believes you, sir. What they do know, sir, though is that you have put more faith . . . what they know, Mr. Premier, is that you have put more faith in your friend, Jack Messer, the guy you appointed to the presidency of SaskPower, the guy who doesn't hesitate to take Saskatchewan taxpayers to the cleaners, either for his own good, or for SaskPower. They know that, sir.

Now, Mr. Premier, there is no public input, no public accountability, and no real justification that anyone has seen for these rate increases. Mr. Premier, there is a suspicion that these rate increases simply will offset the increased labour costs that SaskPower is going to face through your changes to the labour legislation in this province.

Put it before the public, Mr. Premier. Put it before an all-party committee, a committee with your government majority on it, and allow these rate increases to be studied in this Legislative Assembly, instead of two years after the fact in Crown Corporations.

It's what the public wants, Mr. Premier. You know it, your ministers know it. Why don't we get on with the job and do it now, sir?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Romanow: -- Mr. Speaker, I would suggest, with the greatest of respect, that what the public wants from the official opposition is responsible opposition. What they want from the opposition is some admission that their 10 years in administration brought SaskPower almost -- well I wouldn't say almost to a state of ruin, but certainly put in a perilous state -- brought SaskPower to the point where you wanted to privatize it. And you remember that; you were part of the government that tried to do it. You were going to sell it off to your big-business friends.

You already sold off the coalfields. You sold off the energy, gas. You had a 12.6 per cent increase. You brought this corporation . . . you ran it like a personal

fiefdom, like you ran everything else in the province of Saskatchewan, to the point where we face a mountain of debt.

Now we're running this corporation responsibly and it is simply false to say there's no public input. The board of directors are representatives of the public. You have the right to question the increases of the corporation that are before this legislature. You have the right with respect to the Crown Corporations Committee. You have all of these things, if only you would be credible in your opposition.

I say to you, sir, 'fess up that what you did to Saskatchewan over 10 years has hobbled us, and tell the people the truth, that 3.8 per cent, under all the circumstances, in the light of all the savings that the minister has implemented, is a responsible, fair fee to charge with respect to the users.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Swenson: -- Mr. Premier, everyone in the public today is simply saying this is another tax grab by an NDP (New Democratic Party) government run amok. And, sir, you can make all the excuses you want for Jack Messer and Carole Bryant and all the other folks that you've put over there with big fat salaries. You can make all the excuses.

People in this province, Mr. Premier, understand the difference between their gas bill and their power bill and their telephone bill and their SGI (Saskatchewan Government Insurance) bill. And, Mr. Premier, they are sick and tired of having you tax them through the back door through those utilities which are monopolies in the province, sir, which are monopolies which you control with your friends. And they are saying it is responsible for this House to change the way it does things and debate these things in the House, sir.

And I'm saying to you, the opportunity is there. There's a Bill before the Legislative Assembly and it says that members of this Assembly can debate these issues in public and have them justified by the Crown corporations who have a monopoly.

Sir, that is a responsible way to handle it. Today would you give the commitment that the taxpayers of this province are going to have an opportunity to have these issues reviewed and that you simply won't tax them through the back door like you're doing now? Would you do that, sir?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Romanow: -- Mr. Speaker, the logic of the Leader of the Opposition and of the opposition parties is non-existent. The Minister of Finance makes an excellent point. When a private power corporation raises its utility rates, this in the minds of the Conservatives and the Liberals is not a tax -- that's a charge. When a public corporation does it, it's a tax.

How faulty can that logic and reasoning be? That is

only in the minds of the free enterprise parties, the Liberals and Conservatives, to adopt that. How credible is it for the Leader of the Opposition to get up now, having established a Public Utilities Review Commission and then disbanding it -- it was your commission, PURC, (Public Utilities Review Commission) and you disbanded it -- now say that what we need is yet another committee of the legislature.

Look, we don't need another committee of the legislature. What we need is you to start rolling up your sleeves and doing your job as an MLA -- that's what we need.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Labour Standards Amendments

Mr. McPherson: -- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Premier.

Mr. Premier, the business community and public sector employers are in a state of shock over the proposed changes to labour standards. Mr. Premier, an industrial service company from Prince Albert recently wrote our office saying, and I quote:

Please review the changes in the legislation with a view in mind of the employer who must try to operate a business and make a profit. Without these businesses and the profits they make, there will be no need for any legislation as there will be no employees to protect.

Mr. Premier, if you would truly listen to the people of Saskatchewan, if you would listen to them, you wouldn't be in trouble as much as you are. How much more evidence do you need that your proposed changes to labour standards will cost people jobs? How much proof will you need before you'll change your mind and withdraw this Bill until its possible effects can be measured?

Hon. Mr. Shillington: -- Mr. Speaker, to assist in putting the doomsday declarations of the right-wing members opposite into . . .

An Hon. Member: -- Liberal and Tory.

Hon. Mr. Shillington: -- Liberal and Tory, into perspective, someone was kind enough to send me a copy of **Hansard**, the British House of Commons **Hansard** in 1834. What was before the British House of Commons was a Bill to abolish child labour. Listen to what the cotton mill owners said of that Bill. They said:

it is absolutely necessary to the carrying on of the cotton trade with (respect to the) advantage, to allow the employment of children (who are) eleven years of age . . .

Well the cotton trade continues, and we abolished child labour. And I say to members opposite, the doomsday which you people paint with respect to the

assistance which we are granting part-time workers will sound just as ridiculous as this does with respect to employment of children.

The world did not come to an end when they abolished child labour; the world became a much more civilized place. The world will not come to an end when we lend some assistance to part-time workers; the world will become a more civilized place. And I ask you to give that some thought.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McPherson: -- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Obviously the government is digging deeper every day. Mr. Premier, in spite of what you call a consultative process, businesses had not seen the legislation until a few days ago. The head of SUMA (Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association) had to phone to ask for a copy because no one from your government bothered to send them one, even after it was given first reading.

Employers from one end of the province to the other are saying that they expected you to give them time to study the Bill, to discuss it with their colleagues and associations, and then be part of a meaningful consultation to develop regulations before legislation is enacted.

Mr. Premier, I believe you meant well with this legislation. However this ends up being one more thing your ministers have bungled. Will you do the proper thing and put this Bill on the shelf until the next session?

Hon. Mr. Shillington: -- We listened to members opposite, Mr. Speaker, who vote for a 24 per cent increase for judges, and that's fair. And yet they seem to believe the world simply can't live with a process which will provide some relief for the problems faced by part-time workers. I say to members opposite, you've got some awfully warped priorities -- you've got some awfully warped priorities.

If there is one thing, Mr. Speaker . . . if there was a consensus on this issue as we travelled the province, it's that something should be done. This process provides a mechanism for getting management and labour together to resolve a problem that everyone agrees should not be tolerated. I ask members opposite to give some thought to the welfare of the public and less to their political interests. And if they do so, I think they'll support the process which we are putting in motion.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McPherson: -- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Premier, the process by which you have set out to amend The Labour Standards Act is nothing short of a farce. You introduce a Bill which nobody has seen, wave it in front of the employers for a day or two, and then expect people to endorse the legislation. Anyone who doesn't is labelled an extremist or accused of fearmongering.

Mr. Premier, you and the members of your cabinet know that this is ridiculous to expect private and public sector employers to endorse a Bill which changes every time you meet with someone behind closed doors. Why don't you 'fess up like you recently did over the judges' commission recommendations; or 'fess up to the way you did with the mistake which you admitted making over the GRIP (gross revenue insurance program) changes? And the list goes on and on.

Throughout Saskatchewan, Mr. Premier, you're being called . . . throughout Saskatchewan, Mr. Premier, you're being referred to as Mr. Fess-up. Will you now in fact 'fess up, admit you've made a mistake and attempt to correct it before it goes too far, and guarantee us that the Bill will not come to a vote before next session?

Hon. Mr. Shillington: -- Thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, members on this side of the Assembly make no apology for the ongoing consultation which is taking place with respect with both business and labour. We make no apology for that. And that is one of the reasons why we have been able to, with some success I suggest, tackle a very difficult problem.

We continue to meet with them. We don't apologize for that. And if there are improvements to be made -- unlike members opposite who begin apparently with all things perfect -- we admit, if there are improvements, we will make them. We make no apology for meeting with business and labour. And we make no apologies for accepting their suggestions.

Members opposite are sitting opposite because they refused to listen to people who came forward with reasonable, sensible suggestions . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Well you're not learning it very quickly. The member from Rosthern says they're learning the lesson. He's learning it rather slowly, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Liquor Franchises

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: -- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise this morning to respond to a question raised in the Assembly yesterday concerning the liquor franchise at Elbow. And I regret that I was unable to address the hysterics of the member from Rosthern, but I was in Cumberland House on government business.

I want to say today that with respect to the franchises, the policy of the government is clear, and it is the same policy that was in place when he was a member of the government side.

The liquor franchises is the policy, sir, that liquor franchises cannot be sold or leased; that local retailers must have opportunity to apply for a franchise when there is a change in property owners at the existing site; and that there is no differentiation made between hoteliers and other retailers.

With respect to the situation in Elbow, I'm advised that the Liquor and Gaming Authority have not yet completed their analysis, and as such cabinet hasn't had a chance to review it.

But what I can say, Mr. Speaker, to the member, is our policy has changed with respect to officials from the Liquor Authority sending free booze over to cabinet ministers' offices. That policy has changed.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Welfare Numbers

Mr. Britton: -- Thank you. Mr. Speaker, my question is to the Minister of Social Services. Mr. Minister, your colleagues like to tell us how great your government's economic policies are working and how well you look out for families. Unfortunately, Mr. Minister, this doesn't seem to be true.

Mr. Minister, can you confirm for us today, for the first time in the history of Saskatchewan we have over 80,000 people on the welfare rolls. Can you confirm, Mr. Minister, also, that since you have come to power, 23,000 more people have got on the welfare rolls?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Pringle: -- Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all let me say that the federal Liberal government has just offloaded another \$40 million in UIC (Unemployment Insurance Commission) changes unilaterally that's going to cost us even more.

And, Mr. Speaker, I asked . . . this member to suggest that the case-load has increased has conveniently forgotten that the UIC changes of his federal counterparts in April of '93 and the federal treaty offloading of July, 1993 have dumped 9,400 new clients onto . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Yes they have, that's a fact, onto the case-loads.

Mr. Speaker, if you take away those 10,000 cases, the situation has levelled off and the indicators, which I will be happy to respond to in estimates next week, for new job creation for February are very, very positive. The signs are positive. Be optimistic like the rest of the public is.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

A Bill to amend The Provincial Mediation Board Act and to make a Consequential Amendment

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: -- Mr. Speaker, I would request that notice of this Bill be withdrawn.

The Speaker: -- The Bill has been withdrawn.

PRIORITY OF DEBATE

SaskPower Rate Increase

Mr. Boyd: -- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, yesterday the provincial government opposite announced yet another increase in the compulsory charges imposed by Crown corporations. The latest increase comes as a 3.8 per cent increase in SaskPower rates.

Mr. Speaker, because of the monopoly SaskPower has, the increase in charges applied by SaskPower amounts to a tax increase. Taxpayers in the province have no choice but to pay that increase or have their power cut off.

According to the provincial government's own figures, the average Saskatchewan household now pays the highest electrical charges of any western province. With excessive income taxes, provincial sales taxes, property taxes, fee increases and other utility charge increases, this latest 4 per cent SaskPower tax increase represents a significant blow to Saskatchewan taxpayers and citizens.

As well, Mr. Speaker, coupled with the proposed changes in The Labour Standards Act, increases to input costs for Saskatchewan small businesses adversely affects their viability and ability to create employment. Mr. Speaker, the people of Saskatchewan have no opportunity to review these increases before they happen nor to scrutinize the reasons behind the increases in a timely manner. Saskatchewan is one of the few provinces that doesn't have an independent review system.

Mr. Speaker, given the fact that today is the last day the legislature is sitting before the tax increases come into effect, and because the increases represent a significant blow to taxpayers and small businesses around this province, Mr. Speaker, I move:

That this Assembly condemn the government for its decision to again increase power rates and urge the government to consider the harmful and irreversible impact of another utility rate hike to the less fortunate, the business owners, the school and hospital divisions, and all other Saskatchewan organizations and individuals; and further urge this government to immediately form an all-party committee to debate this and every other utility rate increase in this province of Saskatchewan from this day forward.

Mr. Speaker, I so move.

The Speaker: -- Yesterday I received notice under rule 17, which was delivered to my office by the member from Kindersley. The notice was put under my door after 5 p.m. when my office was closed. Since this is the first occasion that the new urgency debate provisions have been invoked . . .

An Hon. Member: -- Mr. Speaker, a point of order.

The Speaker: -- There is no point of order until the Speaker makes his ruling.

I want to remind the member that written requests should be submitted directly to the Clerk pursuant to rule 17(2), rather than through the Speaker's office. In future the written request should be delivered in person at a time when the Clerk's office is open and on the day the matter is to be raised.

I shall now address the matter at hand. Rule 17(5), which I remind members is a new provision, states in part, and I quote:

In determining whether a matter should have urgent consideration, the Speaker shall have regard to the extent to which it concerns the administrative responsibilities of the government or could come within the scope of ministerial action and the Speaker shall also have regard to the probability of the matter being brought before the House within reasonable time by other means.

On this basis, I find the member for Kindersley has made a sufficient case that the matter proposed is of urgent public importance calling for immediate consideration. Since there is no reasonable opportunity by other means for the matter to be debated immediately, I now call upon the member to move his priority of debate motion.

An Hon. Member: -- Mr. Speaker, point of order.

The Speaker: -- What's the member's point of order?

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: -- The point of order that I would like to propose to the Speaker is that the member from Kindersley was allowed time to present why he believed this to be a priority debate. The member from the North Battleford rose to tell or to talk to the issue of why a utility rate increase, which are normal and happen as an annual event, is not an emergency, was not allowed to speak.

And I wonder, Mr. Speaker, why that was the case.

The Speaker: -- Order, order. Order. Order. I want to remind members that the members have adopted a new priority debate rule which we are now operating under. Under the new rules, the Speaker makes the decision as to whether or not it is an emergency.

The Speaker has made that decision. Order. Order. I have indicated very clearly that there is no other opportunity to debate this issue before the rate increases come into effect. And the Speaker has made . . . Order, order. The Speaker has made his decision.

(1045)

In the future, if members wish to raise a matter of . . . points of order, I will listen to them in the future. On this particular case I have made my decision.

Mr. Boyd: -- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I move:

That this Assembly condemn the government for its decision to again increase power rates and urge the government to consider the harmful and irreversible impact of another utility rate hike to the less fortunate, to the business owners, to the school and hospital divisions, and to all other Saskatchewan organizations and individuals; and further urge the government to immediately form an all-party committee to debate this and every other utility rate increase in the province of Saskatchewan from this day forward.

Mr. Speaker, I so move that, seconded by the member from Maple Creek.

An Hon. Member: -- Mr. Speaker, on a point of order.

The Speaker: -- What is the member's point of order?

Hon. Mr. Anguish: -- Mr. Speaker, I find it unusual that the members opposite can put forward an emergency debate. And you've had the written correspondence from them -- although it wasn't put through the proper channel, and you properly pointed that out to them . . .

The Speaker: -- Order, order. The member is debating my decision; I've made my decision that the debate is in order.

An Hon. Member: -- No, I'm not debating your decision.

The Speaker: -- You are referring to my decision and I recognize the member from Kindersley.

Mr. Boyd: -- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it comes as very little surprise that this government opposite and the members opposite are so sensitive about this issue. It comes as very little surprise, Mr. Speaker, because just the day before Good Friday, they want to ram through this kind of stuff, sort of in the dark of the night, so the people of Saskatchewan don't have an opportunity to have any input and maybe -- hopefully in the government's view -- don't realize what's going on.

But fortunately, Mr. Speaker, the people of Saskatchewan have caught on to this and they realize the kind of tactics that this government continues to put forward. Every single time we turn around there's another increase, just days before a statutory holiday. You did it just before Christmas in 1992 -- did any of you remember that? Just days before Christmas you brought in this kind of thing hoping that the people in a festive mood, in the festive mood that they are about to embark on, wouldn't notice that kind of increase, Mr. Speaker.

We're seeing now over . . . just under 13 per cent increase in SaskPower rates since this government has taken over, Mr. Speaker. And the minister of SaskPower should be ashamed of himself for letting again, once again, Jack Messer run over him like a steamroller. Once again the minister from North

Battleford finds himself in a position where Jack Messer steamrolls over him with yet another decision, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the people of Saskatchewan don't want to see these kinds of increases as they . . . as this government brings forward. The Minister of Finance promised, Mr. Speaker, promised prior to the budget, prior to the budget that they would not, they would not be considering utility rate increases; and the media knows that and it's on tape, Mr. Minister . . . Mr. Speaker.

The people of Saskatchewan don't believe the minister any more when she stands and suggests to the people of Saskatchewan that that isn't what she's going to do. Because it's just a few short weeks ago that she gave that commitment to the people of Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker. And now we see this increase piled on top of increases in the past, Mr. Speaker. And it represents, Mr. Speaker, a tremendous and significant blow to the economy of Saskatchewan.

We see, Mr. Speaker, this increase is going to cut into the jobs in the economy of Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker. Already, already there are 80,000 people on welfare, on the welfare rolls in the province of Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker. And we can only wonder -- and we'll be asking the government questions about this in the future, Mr. Speaker -- how many more people, how many more people will be forced onto the rolls of the welfare rolls of this province, Mr. Speaker, as a result of this latest decision, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker -- and somehow or another this government has the audacity to suggest to Saskatchewan taxpayers that this increase is not a tax increase -- well I'd like to know, Mr. Speaker, how anyone in Saskatchewan can avoid this type of tax increase, because that's exactly what it is, Mr. Speaker. How can you avoid it? When the power bill comes you either pay or have your power shut off.

It's not much of an option, particularly in Saskatchewan at this time of the year. Even though it's a pretty nice day out today, Mr. Speaker, this evening we'll see the temperature drop and obviously the furnaces and the lights will go on in the houses all over Saskatchewan and in the businesses as well, Mr. Speaker. They don't have an option in Saskatchewan. You may have options in another part of the world, but you certainly don't in Saskatchewan.

You turn the light on, you pay. Simple as that. If you don't want to pay, you get the power cut off. And I think everybody in Saskatchewan recognizes that, Mr. Speaker, that it's simply a tax. And if anyone suggests anything different, I don't think they're being very straight with the taxpayers of Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker.

According to the provincial government's own figures, the average Saskatchewan household now pays the highest electrical charges of any western province, Mr. Speaker. On top of that they have

excessive income tax, provincial sales tax, property taxes, fee increases, and other utility charge increases. This latest 4 per cent represents a tremendous blow to the people of Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker.

And probably maybe even more significant, Mr. Speaker, it represents another blow to the people of Saskatchewan that at times have believed this government about what their intentions are. But we've seen, Mr. Speaker, a continual habit, a continual way of operating that this government has found and sees fit to operate under and that is, make a promise one day; break it the next day, particularly if they think they can get away with it, Mr. Speaker.

If it's politically expedient, if it's politically expedient or if they think they can rush it through just prior to a holiday, Mr. Speaker, then they bring it out and try and slip it under the door, Mr. Speaker, so that no one notices.

But fortunately the people of Saskatchewan are a little more astute than that, Mr. Speaker, and they realize what's going on. In the coffee shops and in the businesses and the homes all over Saskatchewan, I would believe this morning, Mr. Speaker, that the discussion was on tax increases and was on SaskPower utility rate increases.

And I would hasten to say that there wouldn't be a great deal of support for this thing, Mr. Speaker. And I think that's the very essence, the very reason why what the Leader of the Opposition, in questioning the Premier of this province today . . . is correct when he is asking for an all-party review committee.

Sure, the Conservatives disbanded PURC. No question about it. We admit it. It was costly at the time. We since that time believe though, Mr. Speaker, that there is an alternative that is less costly, in fact a very little cost. If you read the Bill, Mr. Speaker, there is no per diems for members that would be on that board, on that commission that reviews utility rates in Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker. So it would be a very, very nominal cost, if any, to the taxpayers of Saskatchewan to have this committee put in place.

And what could happen, Mr. Speaker, what we envisioned happening was simply an opportunity for people in the province of Saskatchewan to come forward, make their case about utility rate increases to the Government of Saskatchewan, have the Jack Messers of the day sitting there and having to justify their actions and justify the increases to the people of Saskatchewan. And I would think, Mr. Speaker, that this would be a pretty high . . . or a pretty difficult job for Jack Messer, the minister of power, to justify this latest increase.

They say, Mr. Speaker, it's a result of a necessity to pay off the Shand power plant, Mr. Speaker. And everyone in this province realizes how absurd that argument is, Mr. Speaker -- absolutely incredible that this government would try and suggest that, Mr. Speaker. SaskPower made an annual . . . or a profit last year, a net profit, Mr. Speaker, a net profit of \$107 million.

And that takes into account, that net profit . . . therefore it takes into account the carrying costs on Shand. This is a net figure of \$107 million. So it is already taken into account, already taken into the account the amount of money that's the carrying costs of the Shand power plant, Mr. Speaker. So for this government to suggest anything different is absolutely wrong, Mr. Speaker -- absolutely false.

Mr. Speaker, any time that SaskPower comes forward with these kind of proposals, comes forward with these kinds of plans, Mr. Speaker, they already have hedged these kinds of developments. They have already sold bonds, Mr. Speaker, to finance the operations at Shand. It's been financed, both in terms of short-term, medium, and long-term financing, Mr. Speaker. The financing is already in place, has been for years, Mr. Speaker, in place for the Shand power plant.

And I think the people of Saskatchewan understand that and realize that it never would have been built had those kinds of plans been not taken into account years ago, Mr. Speaker. A hundred and seven million dollar net profit SaskPower had. And now they're saying, we need to have more; we need to have another 3.8 per cent. And one can only speculate about the reasons why, Mr. Speaker.

Well, Mr. Speaker, one reason that comes to mind about this power increase and the necessity for it -- at least the government's idea of the necessity for it -- is to provide a slush fund, to put together a huge amount, a pool of capital, a big pool of money, a slush fund for a future election date, Mr. Speaker.

And that's exactly the reason why this government is doing it -- put together a big slush fund of hundreds and hundreds of millions of dollars and try and buy the next election; try and buy the seat of the member from Cut Knife-Lloydminster for example; try and buy the seat for the member from Rosetown-Elrose, Mr. Speaker. Unfortunately, I don't think any amount of money will protect that seat of Rosetown-Elrose, Mr. Speaker.

But, Mr. Speaker, I think it's important to recognize that that kind of increase to the people of Saskatchewan represents a tremendous blow to the economy of Saskatchewan. The SSTA (Saskatchewan School Trustees Association), for example, says this will cost the K to 12 operations in Saskatchewan something in the magnitude of 160 to \$175,000 over the next year, Mr. Speaker. And that is a cost that they simply can't bear, particularly in light of the cut-backs that they've received in their budgets for the operations of the schools in this province, Mr. Speaker.

This is a tax increase -- make no mistake about it, Mr. Speaker. And the people of Saskatchewan can't afford these kinds of increases coming time after time after time from this government, Mr. Speaker.

We already look at the loss of jobs as a result of this government, Mr. Speaker. There are 12,000 less jobs

-- less jobs -- in the province of Saskatchewan today than there were when this government took over the operations of government in the fall of 1991, Mr. Speaker. And we can only wonder, and we'll be asking the government further questions about this in the upcoming days after the weekend, Mr. Speaker, about the job losses as a result of this change and latest increase in the power rates in Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, I think it's important that you look back on this government's record and look back at this government when they were in opposition about some of the things that they said when they were in opposition about utility rate increases. Now they're saying it's not a tax; then they said, in 1988, for example, they said it was a tax, Mr. Speaker.

And here I'd like to read a couple of quotes from the member from Moose Jaw Wakamow, who was the former minister of SaskPower, talking about a power rate increase in 1988, Mr. Speaker. And he said at that time, and I quote:

This is an unconscionable attack on poor families. These families have kids who need clothes, they have mortgages, they have car payments, and what is this government doing? It's reaching deeper and deeper into the pocketbooks, the purses, the wallets, the bank accounts of Saskatchewan families. Reaching deeper and deeper. Higher and higher taxes, higher and higher fees, higher and higher utility rates, leaving less and less and less for Saskatchewan families, Mr. Speaker.

Those are not my words, Mr. Speaker; those are the words of the member for Moose Jaw Wakamow who was, up until the latest cabinet shuffle, the minister responsible for SaskPower. And that's when he was talking about utility rate increases in 1988 when he was in opposition, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, when are the words of this government going to meet the actions? When are the words of . . . For example, the Minister of Finance who said in her pre-budget consultations in her pre-budget embargo news conference with the media at that time said -- and I heard it on tape yesterday, Mr. Speaker -- said at that time that they are not contemplating any utility rate increases in the upcoming, foreseeable future, Mr. Speaker.

Unfortunately the Minister of Finance doesn't seem to be very perceptive about the future, Mr. Speaker. It seems the only one that knows about the future, particularly with respect to SaskPower, is Jack Messer. And it's obvious that when it comes to a showdown with the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Energy and Mines, Mr. Speaker, that Jack Messer wins the day and not the Minister of Finance or the minister responsible for SaskPower, Mr. Speaker.

(1100)

They have lost every single opportunity, Mr. Speaker. When they come up against Jack Messer, they meet

their match every time, Mr. Speaker. When it came to a little difficulty that Jack was having with the fly problem out at his farm, Mr. Speaker, again this government knuckled under. Again they knuckled under to the lord of the flies, Jack Messer, and he was given a nice little settlement for it and they moved the farm down the road and make sure that there's not flies on Jack out on the pool side, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: -- Order, order. I think the member is straying pretty far from his own motion that he has brought into the House, and I ask him to get back to the motion that's before the House.

Mr. Boyd: -- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the minister responsible . . . I think the minister responsible for SaskPower should stand up to Jack Messer, the president of SaskPower. He should have said no to this tax increase, Mr. Speaker. He should have said no to this tax increase because he knows very well, Mr. Speaker, he knows very well that the people of Saskatchewan can't afford it. And the Premier chirps from his seat, Mr. Speaker, asking us to say no. Why didn't you say no? Why didn't you stand up to Jack Messer, sir? Why didn't you stand up and say no to Jack Messer? Because he's really the premier of this province.

The Speaker: -- Order, order, order. Order. Order. I recognize the member from Kindersley. Order. The member from Kindersley has the floor. I want to remind the Premier that if he wishes to speak I'll recognize him. But now the member from Kindersley.

Mr. Boyd: -- Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: -- Order. That's the second time I think I've warned the Premier, and I ask him please, if he wishes to speak, I will recognize him later on.

Mr. Boyd: -- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's little wonder that this Premier is as sensitive to this kind of stuff as he is, because . . .

The Speaker: -- Order, order. Let the member get on with the motion that is before him.

Mr. Boyd: -- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, this motion deals with the utility rate increases that this Premier has hoisted on the people of Saskatchewan, the families of Saskatchewan. And he stands in his place day after day in question period and opportunities like that, Mr. Speaker, and he chides us, and he says for us to stand up for the Saskatchewan families and stand up for the poor and stand up for the farm families and stand up for the small-business people.

Well who is that Premier standing up for today, with this power rate increase, this power rate tax, Mr. Speaker? Who is he standing up for today, Mr. Speaker, when he hoists this on the people of Saskatchewan just prior to a holiday, Mr. Speaker? Who is he standing up for, and who is the minister of SaskPower standing up for when he does this, Mr. Speaker? I think the only people that he's standing up

for are the party members of the New Democratic Party who he's trying to put a slush fund together for, to try and eke out the next election for the NDP Party, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, this rate increase, this tax increase, is absolutely unconscionable. It represents a pattern that this government seems to feel that it's necessary to bring forward every once in a while, Mr. Speaker. It seems like about every couple of months, every couple of months we find ourself in this exact same situation, Mr. Speaker, where they promise one thing and then they take it away or jack up a fee or a tax or an increase.

An Hon. Member: -- Jack up, jack up.

Mr. Boyd: -- Mr. Speaker, jack up is an appropriate term, particularly when you're dealing with Jack Messer, that's for sure, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, we believe in the opposition that this should have gone before an independent commission, independent review commission of some sort. And we were suggesting at least put it before an all-party committee. There was PURC in the past and we recognized, we recognized . . . we cancelled it. Yes, we did. We recognized . . . we cancelled it because it was costly.

And now we are suggesting, now we are suggesting to the people of Saskatchewan that there's a better way; there's a cheaper way. There's a way to deal with this, Mr. Speaker, and there's a way that we have suggested. The member from Thunder Creek has suggested, the Leader of the Opposition has suggested that, Mr. Speaker. Put it before an all-party utility review commission, Mr. Speaker, a legislative body, Mr. Speaker, and allow the people of Saskatchewan to have input on to this, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, this is wrong. The Government of Saskatchewan knows it's wrong. They brought it in just prior to a holiday. I ask them, the minister, if he would rescind this order and finally, finally say something to Jack Messer that should have been said a long time ago; no, is the answer to the question that's put before him, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Goohsen: -- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy today to rise to second the motion made by the member from Kindersley. It is with deep sadness and regret that I find myself having to stand in this legislature to do the job of the Premier of this province, to take the position that he himself pointed out so strongly only a couple of days ago in this very Assembly, where he stood before the people of this province and said emphatically that he was going to stand up for the seniors of this province.

The Speaker: -- Order. Order. Will the member from Humboldt please come to order? Will the member from Humboldt please come to . . . I will warn the member from Humboldt that that kind of impertinence to the Chair will not be tolerated.

Mr. Goohsen: -- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A 4 per cent increase in utility rates, no matter which utility it is, but most specifically . . .

The Speaker: -- Order, order. I want to warn the Government House Leader that he is interrupting and interfering with the right of another member to speak in the House, and if he continues I will take the necessary measures that have to be taken.

Mr. Goohsen: -- Well thank you again, Mr. Speaker. I want to point out very clearly that it is an emergency in this province when the utility rate on SaskPower is increased by almost 4 per cent. That is a crisis in today's society and it is a crisis for the people of Saskatchewan. And we have to stand in our place in opposition to do the very job that the Premier himself a few days ago said that he was going to do.

He said to us very emphatically that he was going to stand up for the little people of this province. He said he was going to stand up for the seniors of this province. He was going to stand up for the farmers of this province. He was going to stand up for the teachers and the nurses and the workers and the secretaries and the waitresses. He was going to stand up for the little guy.

Well today we've got a 4 per cent increase on the most important utility in this province -- the power of this province that keeps people's stoves running so they can cook their food and warm their houses.

And what do these members say? They laugh in their seats at an increase in cost that will send . . .

The Speaker: -- Order, order. Order. The member from Maple Creek is in order but the government House members are totally out of order. And I want to warn the government House members, if they want to be named by the Speaker, they will be named very shortly. And I want to warn the member from Humboldt. He had been warned once already. He continues to interrupt from his seat, speaking loudly from his chair to his other colleagues. I will give the member from Humboldt one more warning.

Mr. Goohsen: -- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again I want to reiterate how important the increase of the utility rate in SaskPower will be for this province.

I know that the government members don't want to listen to this debate. I don't know if they wanted to bring this debate into this House or not; probably not. But they have to know that there is serious opposition out in the country and out in the cities of this province against this kind of rate increase. And we need to debate this in an emergency today because this rate hasn't gone into effect yet. We have time to stop it. That's why it's so important that we talk about this. We can pull this thing. We can stop it.

It's not a question of needing the money. You've got \$107 million profit in SaskPower last year already. Tell us where the dire need for your money is. Is there

something that we haven't seen? Is there some kind of cover-up for the need for this money? Will the labour legislation cost SaskPower this much money? We've got to answer these questions for the people of this province.

They want to know, why do you have to have this disguised tax grab at this time. And it is important and it is necessary and it is right that we should debate this issue here today. Because you still have the power to stop what could destroy jobs in this province. Not only destroy the tax base of this province, but the job base of this province. Because every time you put a little more on the top of this pile of encumbrances on the people of this province, you drive more of them out of the province and you destroy the tax base even more than you did before.

This is not a simple, little thing. You have your Minister of Finance stand up in this House, and prepared budget before her, not so long ago, saying there will be no tax increases. And the people have a sudden feeling of comfort because they feel like we'll get through this next year if we budget carefully. That's what budgets are all about. You're supposed to have a budget to show the people what to expect for the year.

And now you pull the rug right out from under them. All of the municipalities, all of the towns and cities have finished their budgeting process for the year almost -- most of them probably have -- and what do you do to them? You rip the rug right out from under them because now you have a utility increase that's going to be not budgeted for.

And that goes for every private citizen in this province, every individual. And the member from Kindersley pointed out even your own people, in their own words in the past, have said that you have to take into account the budgeting needs of the people. You have to take into account people's mortgages and their payments.

How do you suppose people take their pay cheque and pay out the bills? They put out a little bit from the mortgage, a little bit more for the payments on the car, a little bit more over here, and some less for food, and if you're lucky, maybe a little bit for some entertainment. But the entertainment this year is going to have to be to pay 4 per cent more for their power, so that they can watch the fly movie on television. And I hope it's a good one.

You've let Jack Messer get out of control and out of power in this province and it's time you reigned him in. Take him by the scruff of the neck and say, Jack, this is not going to happen.

The Speaker: -- Order, order. I think the personal attacks on a public figure, according to Beauchesne, is simply out of order. And I think the members are getting too personal in their comments and I wish the member would refrain from doing so.

Mr. Goohsen: -- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The 4 per

cent increase that we're talking about here is so devastating to a critical economy, that one has a tendency to get carried away, and I certainly would not want to attack a public figure. However, we must encourage the government to use its power to control the people who run the Crown corporations.

A little while ago, we listened to members talking about the reasons why we had to have this increase. First of all they said, we've got to pay for inflation. Well, Mr. Speaker, I point out very clearly for you that even though the media carried this excuse last night -- and that's what it is, an excuse -- the reality is that inflation is not that high.

Then they said, well this excuse is not flying so we'll blame it on Shand. The Shand power plant must have cost too much money. Well the member from Kindersley totally destroyed that argument for you because everybody knows that that was financed through a very, very important contractual system of financing. And believe me, if that wasn't properly financed, there would have been some more trouble in the wind, I can assure you.

Mr. Speaker, the money for this tax grab could not pay off the Shand power bill even if you wanted to because you're under contract to pay it off so much per year, and that was done in the budgetary process last year and this year. And next year it'll happen the same because you've already done that under contract. Or do you plan on breaking that contract like all the other contracts you've broken this year and last year for the people of Saskatchewan?

Is this money grab really a grab to pay off anything? Or were you just on the hot seat for having broken rules and laws with the judges? Or were you just on the hot seat because the labour law thing had gone out of control and you needed to throw something new into the mix in order to get the media and the people off your backs so they start talking about power rates? Maybe that's the whole scheme after all.

Well if you wanted to get into a debate, you've got it because we're here and we're not going to let you get away with putting these rate increases up for the people of Saskatchewan without a battle and without at least having an opportunity here today to tell you why you're wrong so that you can reconsider your action; so that you will put into the mix of your decision making the reasons why you can't do this terrible thing to the people of Saskatchewan.

The utility rate review commission that we have suggested is certainly now timely. You've already got 80,000 people on welfare in this province. You've got eleven and a half per cent unemployment and you're going to increase power rates that will destroy more jobs. You want 90 or 100,000 on welfare?

(1115)

The Speaker: -- Order. I would ask the member from Biggar that I'm sure that his partner is not that far away that he has to be that loud to interfere with the debate

that is on the floor, and if he needs to speak that loudly, I'd ask him to please leave the Chamber and speak somewhere else.

Mr. Goohsen: -- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The third reason, the third excuse I want to talk about that was used in the media for why we have to have this increase. First of all, it was inflation -- that didn't fly. So then we tried Shand -- that didn't fly. Then they said, oh but it's an annual review, we only do this every year.

Well the people of Saskatchewan are getting tired, very, very tired of having annual reviews three times a year. Every time you turn around we're having another annual review, so that one's not going to fly either.

So, Minister, take note, the people of Saskatchewan are not going to tolerate this increase without letting you know what the cost is going to be. And the cost is going to be very significant. Your labour laws are significant, your breaking of contracts is significant, but now you're doing something that every Saskatchewan person will have to pay for out of their pocket.

I know of no one who can get away without using power in our society -- absolutely no one. And they all must pay; it is a captive tax against the poor, a captive tax against everyone. And you cannot tell me that this isn't designed to be a tax because the reality is that every time you have a surplus, you put the surplus from SaskPower into the general fund and you pay off the bills of the province and make yourselves appear to have balanced the budget by some magical formula. And the magic in this formula is that it's a tax on the people and nothing else but a tax.

Mr. Speaker, we must convince the government that their timing is wrong. The people of Saskatchewan have mostly budgeted for the year. They cannot stand any more increases right now. And I know that my friends want to discuss this matter and I think that I have made most of the points that I have to make. But we've got to remind the government that we had a SaskPower rate increase of 4 per cent, March 1, 1992. We have another one, 4 per cent, January 1, 1993. Now we have one today. The people of Saskatchewan are being overtaxed through the Power Corporation of this province.

Every other jurisdiction of major importance has review commissions that check these things out. The United States has done it almost to a fault. They're so regulated already that it's almost becoming an overkill. And we haven't even caught up. In Saskatchewan we lag behind the fair-play politics of democracy. We need to have some fair play for the people of Saskatchewan.

Do you seriously think that you got elected on a platform to increase utility rates the way you're doing and using it as a tax? I don't believe you have. I say to you folks over there, do as your Premier said the other day. Stand up in your place and fight for the seniors,

fight for the farmers, fight for the teachers and the nurses and the workers and the secretaries, fight for the waitresses and the part-time workers in this province that you say you're going to work for with your legislation in labour. Fight for them by standing in your place and stopping this increase and this tax on . . .

The Speaker: -- Order, order. I think this is the second time I've asked the member from Biggar to quit interrupting another member while he is speaking. If he feels so compelled, maybe he should leave the Chamber. And I also want to ask the member from Kinistino to quit interrupting.

Mr. Goohsen: -- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly when we have an emergency debate in this Assembly, it should be for a serious matter. And this is certainly a serious matter.

It can be that you use a small figure of 3.8 per cent, 4 per cent, bring it in just a little under the 4 so it doesn't sound so bad. And you can say, well it's just a little bit. On my power bill, I did a little quick calculation here -- \$16. Well that's not so bad.

But let's add it up over the year. Let's add it up for the businesses that spend thousands of dollars a day. The petroleum industry, for example, in this province. Think about IPSCO, just up the street here. The thousands and hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of money that these businesses are going to have to put out on top of all of the costs that you're going to bring in with your labour legislation; on top of the legislation you brought in last year with occupational health and safety and your workers' compensation Acts, piled on top of piles of bills and debts and encumbrances for this province.

How do you expect this province to survive? How do you expect any young person to ever consider staying in Saskatchewan, with Alberta just a hop down the road? How do you expect anyone to stay in this province to build a business or to choose a career? How do you expect anyone to want to be here any more?

And if we drive them all out, where are the people going to be that are going to pay these bills? More and more costs for less and less people, and it has to come to a stop. We cannot sustain this attack on our people, because quite frankly they're going to leave and we'll lose our tax base.

The people from Winnipeg who phoned me last week and say they represent financial institutions and manufacturers are not going to advise their people to come to this province. They're going to have to say this province is out of sync with the rest of the free world -- not only out of sync with Alberta, out of sync with the rest of the free world. And they're going to leave this province and they're going to go some place else and they're never going to come to Saskatchewan. And on top of that, you drive away the people who are already here.

And how do you do it? One little insidious attack after the other. Pile the bills on top of the bills, and then the most Draconian labour laws that we have seen in the history of mankind. And the minister stands in his place and defends them with 19 . . . no, 1880 laws about child labour in England. I couldn't believe my ears, you would justify costs in this province with such a line. Never read a history book in their life. Had absolutely nothing to do with the changes in Europe.

And the Speaker's right. This utility thing is much too important, much too important to waste our time talking about history. Let's talk about today and what this 4 per cent increase is going to do, tacked on top of all the other costs that you said you weren't going to bring in.

Your Minister of Finance told us, no tax increases. The Premier said he's going to stand up for the little guy. Everybody said we're going to do everything so good. And now the bombshell explodes and the people of this province know very well that they'll have a tough time hanging on till next year. And the spring hasn't even started, and this must be a cruel April Fool's joke.

It has got to be, when you jack up prices of utilities just before seeding time, just before everybody goes out with that optimistic feeling that Saskatchewan is so well known for, where everybody gets that internal feeling of greatness and well-being and good feelings because spring is here, the robins are back, the geese are flying, and we're going to plant the seeds in the ground that will germinate and grow into the finest crop that you've ever seen. Because no farmer has ever planted a crop that isn't a bumper while he's seeding it. He sees beautiful fields of wheat in his mind's eye and in his imagination.

And we all start with that optimism in the spring; all of us do that every year. We plant the eggs under the hen to have a new crop of young birds. We watch the calves being born to start that new crop that will be next fall's market. And this year your government is destroying that hope in Saskatchewan and I hope you take that to heart.

Hon. Mr. Anguish: -- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I look forward to entering into this debate. Just so those that are watching the emergency of this situation today over the airwaves of Saskatchewan . . . I want to say that the debate centres around a motion by the member from Kindersley, seconded by the member from Maple Creek, who has just spoken. The motion reads:

That this Assembly condemn the government for its decision to again increase power rates and urge the government to consider the harmful and irreversible impact of another utility rate hike to the less fortunate, to the business owners, to the school divisions and newly formed health districts, as well as all other Saskatchewan organizations and individuals; and further urge the government to immediately form an all-party committee to debate this and every other utility rate increase

in the province of Saskatchewan from this day forward.

So that's what we are dealing with here today. And I think that the debate can get quite wide-ranging, as we noticed the member from Maple Creek was allowed some latitude to speak about labour legislation and other issues before us.

I want to, however, centre on the thrust of the motion about utility rate adjustments, and also the pros and cons of a review process for the utility rates within the province of Saskatchewan. I want to also point out the number of inaccuracies both in the speech from the member from Kindersley and the member from Maple Creek.

The very first point I would want to make is that they stand and say that they would want to participate in a non-partisan way in some special review process of utility rates. How can they stand in the House and say that's what their intention is, when even the wording of their motion is to debate the utility rate increase?

They're not interested in setting rates that serve the people of the province of Saskatchewan, to provide them with electricity and gas and telephones and auto insurance. They're not interested in taking the high ground, Mr. Speaker. They're interested, as it says here, to debate. To play out the politics of the situation at the expense of the taxpayers in the province, the constituents of the province, in that they . . . Well, Mr. Speaker, it must be very humorous. If you could share with us your humour, maybe we could all laugh about this emergency debate that we're . . .

The Speaker: -- Order, order. I ask the member to please apologize to the Chair. He knows full well that that comment is totally out of order. And I ask him to apologize and withdraw that comment.

Hon. Mr. Anguish: -- I apologize and withdraw that comment.

If anyone in this House can find humour in what we're debating today, they should place it before all people in the province so that people can laugh about what I view as a very serious motion. Otherwise it wouldn't be considered an emergency debate before the Legislative Assembly.

So let's look at the issue of a review. There are all kinds of avenues through which the utility rate increases are reviewed. Let's take the SaskPower, the topic of the debate here today, or at least the focus of the debate.

First off it's reviewed internally, Mr. Speaker, by management, by the employees of the corporation. Are the members opposite, the opposition, are they saying that these aren't credible, professional people? Is that what they're saying?

Secondly, it's brought forward to members of the board, members who are appointed from the public. Are they saying the public aren't credible and

accountable and want to do a good job for the people of the province of Saskatchewan? That's what I hear them saying, but I think not to be the case. I think that the board members take all kinds of serious due diligence in the job that they do.

But it doesn't stop there with the SaskPower board. The rate review then goes forward from the SaskPower board to the Crown Investments Corporation board. And the members of the Crown Investments Corporation board pay their due diligence, along with the staff there, reviewing rate increases, whether it be from SaskPower or from some other utility within the province.

And does it stop there? No, it doesn't stop there, Mr. Speaker. It goes forward then to cabinet. And cabinet pays due diligence in reviewing requests for rate increases.

(1130)

Also we have the Crown Corporations Committee. I would be happy, at the earliest convenience, if the members opposite are serious, to go before the Crown Corporations Committee, an all-party committee of this legislature, a standing committee entrenched by the rules of this legislature. I will go there and answer any questions that the members might put forward.

And it's not a matter of debate, as far as I'm concerned. It's a matter of finding a forum in which the people of the province of Saskatchewan can be served in the best possible way.

I suggest that the intent of the motion from the members opposite is not to serve the people of the province of Saskatchewan but to serve their own misguided interests; their political interests that they have, trying to increase their profile at a time where they're in some very dire straits in the province. They're into their 50-year cycle where they're about to disappear from the face of the Saskatchewan political map.

They bring up in debate, Mr. Speaker, the issue that Saskatchewan is the only province without a public utility review commission of some kind. That's correct, Mr. Speaker. And I would point out to you that every other province in Canada has higher combined utility rates than the province of Saskatchewan.

As we stand here and speak today, when you combine car insurance, telephone, heating and electricity, Saskatchewan has the lowest package of utility rates of any province in Canada.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Anguish: -- Does a public utilities review commission work? Apparently not, because the Tories brought one in. They found it cost them \$3 million a year plus. They didn't like what the Public Utilities Review Commission was saying, so they abolished it. They abolished their own Public Utilities Review Commission. Very insincere in their motion.

They used to have PURC; now they want LURC -- that's the acronym, Mr. Speaker, for the legislative utility review commission as being proposed by the opposition members. So they couldn't PURC; now they want to LURC; and I question their motives as to why they bring this forward. I can find no reason other than their own politically selfish motives for taking the busy time of this Legislative Assembly to debate something that they say is an emergency.

Mr. Speaker, on the issue of public review I think there's some middle ground. And I've said many times to the members opposite, and to the members of the media in Saskatchewan, that we need greater transparency in the way that rates are set because people want a greater level of comfort than what they do at the present time. The public demands that, and we're going to deliver that, Mr. Speaker.

But it doesn't have to be the extremes of the situation, as the members opposite indicate. They accuse secrecy and behind closed doors with no accountability, and through that discredit the very worthy professionals and the public that are appointed to boards in this province.

The other extreme they go to is a full-fledged public utilities review commission, which they abolished when they were in government, Mr. Speaker. They never talk about middle ground of greater transparency. And there is middle ground.

You know, I've said to members of this Assembly before and to members of the media that in the summer of this year, the summer of 1994, I will have on my desk the comprehensive energy strategy for the province of Saskatchewan. Part of that will look at the issue of greater transparency and how we involve the greatest number of people in determining the rate setting process and having a process that people understand and have the perception and understanding that it does in fact serve their needs.

I stand behind this government in saying that the current system does serve the needs of the people of the province of Saskatchewan. But we're willing to go further than that to provide the transparency, so we can no longer be accused of the false debate put forward by members of the opposition in this Assembly who have created some of the problems -- most of the problems -- that we face in the province of Saskatchewan.

How hypocritical of those members to bring forward a motion like this today. And at the same time, as one of the members so ably points out, at the same time to stand in here and vote for a 24 per cent pay increase for judges. Shame on you, members opposite. Shame on you.

Mr. Speaker, I would want to say that the record should be straightened out as well on the issue of tax increases versus utility rates. Why is it for the members opposite who wanted to privatize our utilities in Saskatchewan, and very nearly did -- why is it that if a

private utility increases rates it's a rate increase; but if a public utility, owned by the people of the province of Saskatchewan, wants to do a rate increase, they call it a tax increase?

An Hon. Member: -- They don't understand business, that's why.

Hon. Mr. Anguish: -- They don't understand business, they don't understand government, and they don't understand the people of the province of Saskatchewan either, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, tax increases are announced in the provincial budget and that's done by the Minister of Finance. And she did that. She put the record before the people of the province of Saskatchewan. She set out our balanced budget plan whereby people can start seeing a light at the end of the tunnel, and it's a candle burning.

It's not the same light at the end of the tunnel when the members opposite were in government, and people all knew it was a freight train coming to run them over. That light has changed. The freight train light has gone out, Mr. Speaker, and the light at the end of the tunnel is now a candle. It's that glimmer of hope for the province of Saskatchewan because of the balanced budget approach taken by our Minister of Finance.

If utility rate increases were taxes, we'd announce them in the budget. But they're not. The only reason why we have had tax increases in the past in Saskatchewan is because a legacy of debt and mismanagement by the Conservative government in the province of Saskatchewan.

Tax increases -- not utility rates -- tax increases would be like the member from Saskatoon Greystone who takes the position that we should have health care premiums like they do in Alberta. Well that is taxes. Health care premiums are taxes.

Utility rate increases, Mr. Speaker, are done for a number of reasons. In the case of SaskPower, the utility rate increase that was announced yesterday for April 1, goes through a very complex process. The first time management came to us within SaskPower and said they wanted a rate increase, the SaskPower board sent them back to the drawing board. They said, you will have to examine what you can do internally before we'll allow you to go to the public. SaskPower management and the employees of the corporation went back to the drawing board.

In that process they were able to find a reduction in operating expenses for 1994, of \$5.6 million, Mr. Speaker. They were able to find reductions in capital expenditures by some \$9.6 million, Mr. Speaker. That's a total of \$15.2 million that the board said no to SaskPower in the initial request. And they went back and they found some money within the corporation. And even with that, there needs to be a utility rate increase of 3.8 per cent over the balance of the year. What is this money for?

The money within the corporation is to pay for things like Shand and the infrastructure that went around that. There's a debt of \$2 billion at SaskPower, Mr. Speaker. It goes to paying the debt; money goes to improving the infrastructure system around Saskatchewan.

For 10 years the maintenance of our system was neglected by the Tory government -- 10 years it was neglected. Money now has to be put in place to do life extension of some of the ageing facilities that we have. And it also has to go into the rural underground distribution program, a program that should be supported by the members opposite; a program that's more economical in the long run, and it's safer for the farmers and the public throughout the province of Saskatchewan.

Those programs must continue, Mr. Speaker. The Saskatchewan Power Corporation today, as we stand here and debate this emergency resolution, is by almost any measure one of the most efficient electrical utilities anywhere in North America.

And we're not going to rest that it's gone as far as it needs to go. SaskPower will continue to develop internal efficiencies, to organize themselves with their employees to strive to be better, continually striving to be better.

And we are one of the best utilities in North America. When you look at the number of employees per kilometre of line, when you look at the number of employees per kilowatt-hour generated, we should stand up and be proud of our utility. Not to drag them through this kind of an emergency debate in the legislature where the motives are to embarrass the government, but at the same time they discredit our employees, they discredit the board members by the false accusations that they've already put forward in this debate here today, Mr. Speaker.

They talk about increases -- three since we came to power, Mr. Speaker. That's correct. There was one in 1992, I believe. There was one in 1993 -- January 1, I believe was the date. There's now one well over a year later, of 3.8 per cent. That's a total of 11.8 per cent, Mr. Speaker -- 11.8 per cent over three different years is basically within line with the rate of inflation. The members chirping opposite, we'll address being in line with the rate of inflation a little sooner.

But I'd like the members opposite in their future speeches on this debate here today to stand up and tell us why they had a rate increase of 12.6 per cent in 1983 -- 12.6 per cent. The following year, 9.2 per cent. Both of those years it was at least double the rate of inflation in the province of Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker. In 1986 when the rate of inflation was 3.1 per cent in Saskatchewan, they had a rate increase of 7.5 per cent. The following year when the rate of inflation was 4.9 per cent, in 1987, they had a rate increase of 7.5 per cent again.

Was there an emergency then? Was the emergency that you had to gouge the people who paid for utility

rates at that time? But a rate increase today that's in line with the rate of inflation, all of a sudden there's some new circumstances that you want to address in an emergency debate before the legislature?

Why don't you get on board and try and have the best possible system anywhere in the world, instead of trying to discredit the people of the province and trying to discredit the employees who are the professionals who make the system run and have made it run for so many years in the province.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the other thing that comes to my attention is the dividends that were paid from the members opposite when they were in government. Now how many would know that in the years 1989 and 1990, how many members in the House today would know what the Tories made SaskPower declare as a dividend in those two years?

An Hon. Member: -- Hundred per cent.

Hon. Mr. Anguish: -- Hundred per cent, one members says. But do we have a dollar figure? In those two years combined I'd want to inform the House today that the total dividend declared by the Tory administration into the Crown Investments Corporation from SaskPower totalled in those two years, \$882 million -- \$882 million over a course of two years. What game is it they're playing in this House today, Mr. Speaker? What game is it they're playing?

A cruel, cruel joke on the people of the province of Saskatchewan is what the members of the opposition do, Mr. Speaker, not the fact of a utility rate increase that's in line with the rate of inflation.

(1145)

Mr. Speaker, we will continue to strive for efficiencies in the best possible utility in the world, at SaskPower. The employees, the people that make the electricity flow every day, are committed to that. They're committed to making SaskPower what everyone wants it to be. And they've done that as employees for a number of years.

In order to do that, you have to keep pace with the rate of inflation on your utility rate increases. Hopefully some day we can get to a point where we won't have to have further utility rate increases, but that day is not here yet, Mr. Speaker. But we want to strive for that day.

Going back in history, up until the '70s, Mr. Speaker, electricity rates continually came down in Saskatchewan. It's just a new situation whereby our infrastructure needs to be updated, life extensions have to be done; that rate increases now need to be increased within the rate of inflation.

Mr. Speaker, I want to say that I feel this rate increase is justified and it's fair. If you look at the average utility bill, it's not a great deal of money, but I understand the frustration that Saskatchewan people feel at having to

pay increased utility costs.

To respond to that, SaskPower can save money by having customers use less electricity through efficiencies. You'll find over the coming months we'll be launching a program of energy efficiency through SaskPower that will show the consumers in the province of Saskatchewan, whether they be business or residential or industrial or farm, how they can use less electricity. And by using less electricity, it'll cost them less on their utility bill. It'll also cost SaskPower less because we don't have to increase the generating capacity to any great extent, Mr. Speaker.

So it's a win situation for the province; it's a win situation for the power corporation; and it's a win situation for the people of the province of Saskatchewan. That's where we're going with our electrical utility, Mr. Speaker, not some hidden agenda that's talked about by the members opposite. I ask them not to discredit the people of the province in that way. Come clean and be above board.

Mr. Speaker, I will also say today in regard to utility rate increases, that as I stand here speaking on behalf of SaskPower today, is that people should in future years, at least for the foreseeable future, plan in their budget expenditures or their budgeting process at home or in their business, that there will be future rate increases at SaskPower in line with the rate of inflation.

Now we've mentioned that a few times and members opposite chirp that it's not in line with the rate of inflation. Well, Mr. Speaker, if we just review the real record, I want to look at the period from 1991 to 1994, the Saskatchewan consumer price index, the indices that gives the rate of inflation that's used in the province -- not our figures; these are figures that are compiled by independent sources or the federal government -- the rate of inflation over that period of time was 11.8 per cent. During that same period of time, the rate increases for our electrical utility, Mr. Speaker, were 11.3 per cent -- one-half per cent lower than the rate of inflation. And members opposite stand up and say: oh, no, it's not within the rate of inflation.

An Hon. Member: -- They never understood numbers.

Hon. Mr. Anguish: -- Well my colleague points out they never understood numbers. And the longer we look at the books of the province and find out the horror stories, that statement was never any truer than what it is today. They don't understand numbers on the debt side and they don't understand numbers on the revenue side, and that's why they'll never be the government in the province of Saskatchewan again. That's the long and the short of that one, Mr. Speaker.

I would also want to put this into perspective, Mr. Speaker, in terms of the increases in other utilities in the western provinces. If you look at the period 1991 to 1994, Trans-Alta had increases during that period of time of 19 per cent; Alberta Power, 25.4 per cent;

B.C. Hydro, 12.6 per cent. The only one lower, Mr. Speaker, is the province of Manitoba, Manitoba Hydro, which was 7.9 per cent. Again we're the second lowest of the utilities in western Canada.

And if you look at the situation with Manitoba, it's a very different situation. Almost all their electricity in Manitoba is produced by hydroelectric dams -- very cheap source, the cheapest source of electricity generation you can have. In Saskatchewan, 70 per cent of our electricity is produced by coal. It's more expensive to produce it. And yet we're very close to what the increase was over that period, '91 to '94. We're closer to the utility that produces the cheapest electricity because they have the cheapest fuel -- water. We're closer to them than we are to the people in Alberta, the Alberta utilities that are there.

Mr. Speaker, I hope that some of this, I hope that some of this sets the record straight, Mr. Speaker.

And again I want to say that it is our judgement and, I think, the judgement of the people of Saskatchewan who listen to this debate today or read it tomorrow, is that it's better to have increases you can handle and understand the rationale for the rate increases, than to have the policy that the former administration had when all of a sudden, with no reference to anything, you'd have a 12.6 per cent rate increase in one year.

We prefer consistency, we prefer the planning, and we prefer the professionalism that we have at SaskPower and within government to establish the rate increases which I earlier pointed out are lowest of anywhere in Canada when you take them as a package.

And yet they want some kind of an expensive review process. To review what? To review their sagging record is what we maybe could review. But I'm not about to subject the consumers of electricity in Saskatchewan to pay for their political whims that they raise through this Legislative Assembly. I am not prepared to do that, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I want to address also the issues of our fuel that we use at SaskPower. We use water to produce electricity, we use coal to produce electricity, and we use natural gas to produce electricity, Mr. Speaker. The cheapest of course is water, and I've already addressed that.

But the majority of our electricity is produced from coal and natural gas. And what did they do when they were in office, Mr. Speaker? They sold off all the coalfields. Ironclad contracts -- so ironclad that if the Department of Energy and Mines, my ministerial responsibility, was to increase the royalty on coal, do you know who pays the increase on the royalty on coal? Not the owner of the coal. SaskPower has to pay for the increase in the royalties. Shame on them for doing what they've done to our utility, our Crown jewel in the province of Saskatchewan. Shame on them for what they've done on that.

But that wasn't far enough. They hadn't gone far

enough with that, Mr. Speaker. They sold the gas off too. And so that now when we buy gas in Saskatchewan, we have to buy it from private producing companies to pay the full market price that anyone else would pay for it. That's not a paper transaction. It's hard, cold cash we have to pay for natural gas to provide heating to the homes in the province of Saskatchewan.

They sold our gas off -- shame on them for that. All the gas is gone. Enough gas, Mr. Speaker, that you could have heated every home in the province of Saskatchewan for somewhere between seven to ten years depending on how cold the winters are. They sold it all off. Left us with a legacy of debt.

I think, Mr. Speaker, that we need to set the record straight on a number of issues that have been addressed here today.

An Hon. Member: -- Well then sit down and we'll do it.

Hon. Mr. Anguish: -- The member from Rosthern says I should sit down, Mr. Speaker. I find that unacceptable. They want to spread irrelevant, false rhetoric out to the people of the province but they don't want the factual information to be placed before the people that follow what happens in the Legislative Assembly. They can give misleading information but they don't want to set the record straight.

Do you think that they could be serious in wanting their LURC put into place, their legislative utility review commission put into place? Why would we think they'd be serious about that, Mr. Speaker? We don't believe they are serious about it. We think they want to continue playing the cheap politics and the games that they played in opposition on the people of this province.

The issues that we need to put on the record I think can be best brought out by just putting some straight factual information on the record here today. This 3.8 per cent rate increase will provide about \$20 million in additional revenue this year to the utility. A typical residential customer, Mr. Speaker, will see an increase of about \$1.95 per month. A farm customer, your average farm customer, if we look at the average amount of consumption on the average farm, it's an increase of about \$4.15 per month.

An Hon. Member: -- Hogwash.

Hon. Mr. Anguish: -- And if the member opposite says hogwash, the member from Rosthern, I guess he'd know all about hogwash. If his bill is paying more than that, that's because he's a larger consumer of electricity. And if he's a larger consumer of electricity, he must be doing something -- either generating revenue or wasting it maybe, I don't know what he's doing with it. But we're talking about the average farmer. Maybe he's so large in his operation, he can't identify with the average farmer, Mr. Speaker. And the small commercial customer will have an effect, the average customer, of about \$6.68 per month.

I want to put on the record here today that the total revenue at SaskPower in 1993 was some 9,7 . . . pardon me, \$790 million. This amount will increase by the amount I earlier mentioned, but the net income, Mr. Speaker, is only going to be marginally increased -- it's basically the same amount.

So when they say it's a tax increase, it's not a tax increase. If it was a tax increase, there would be more money on the net income line and more money through the process of dividends, which the members know full well is not a taxation measure, Mr. Speaker.

In 1994, Mr. Speaker, the interest and depreciation expenses are forecast to be \$333 million. This is about a 4 per cent increase over the 1993 actual expense of \$320 million. So 3.8 is fully justified in that regard as well.

The 1994 rate increase will be applied equally to all customer classifications, so no one is being centred out from the rest. And I want to get into a little later, the cost of putting in electricity to rural Saskatchewan, and we're willing to share that equally across the board in the province because it's important that we don't charge people based on where they live. If they live in the province of Saskatchewan, that's good enough for us. They should have the service to our utilities.

The current residential and farm customers, Mr. Speaker, pay significantly less than the cost to provide the service and we'll deal with that a little bit later in my remarks.

Saskatchewan's rural underground distribution program continues to be an important part of upgrading the reliability of the electrical system and adding to the safety and efficiency of farming operations.

The \$46 million rebuild program has also contributed to some 20 new manufacturing jobs through the expansions at Moose Jaw and Weyburn, where there is cable manufacturing plants in those two communities. It has also generated some 82 construction jobs along with \$15 million and 20 additional jobs in the economic spin-off.

(1200)

In 1994, Mr. Speaker, the projected profit, including this rate increase, will help to provide for a 10 per cent return on equity. And that's not bad; that's reasonable to expect that. Without the rate increase it would be 8 per cent.

Mr. Speaker, the fixed-cost component related to electrical distribution facilities, recovering only 34 per cent from existing costs for farm customers and 43 per cent for residential customers, as the rebuild program continues over the coming months, this ratio will even worsen. And we're not complaining about that, Mr. Speaker, but I want to point out the cost of extending the system and the life extension of our

system within the province so people can continue to expect good service for good people in this province.

Let's look at some of the facts about the rural underground distribution program. This RUD program began about 1986 and it's expected to take some 20 years to complete. The goal is to replace 113,177 kilometres of rural service lines. And as of the end of 1993, the program is some 24 per cent complete.

The existing farm overhead system is approaching the limits of its ability to meet the present demand as well as the future needs. The system is ageing; 86 per cent of the farm overhead lines have been in existence for more than 30 years. And this addresses some of the neglect that I talked about earlier by the previous administration. There are power poles in Saskatchewan today that should have been replaced several years ago. We have to address that situation, Mr. Speaker.

Under the farm rural underground distribution program, it enhances farm safety. Between 1977 and 1992, contact with overhead power lines resulted in 24 fatalities and 69 injuries. Mr. Speaker, that's unacceptable. With the rural underground distribution program that will no longer be an issue out there.

We've enhanced farm efficiency. The removal of the overhead lines from farm land makes the use of large farm equipment more productive. And there isn't a farmer in Saskatchewan you could talk to that wouldn't tell you about the inconvenience of having power poles on their land. In fact I think that we should go to the farming population of Saskatchewan and ask them if they want to participate to a greater extent in the rural underground distribution program. Chances are they would. Chances are they would likely participate to get the poles removed from their land, Mr. Speaker. The average distance for each farm service is about 1.5 kilometres, at an average cost, Mr. Speaker, of \$11,126. It's costly but it's worth the investment, for the reasons I earlier pointed out.

And parallel to the replacement of service to individual farms, the RUD program includes the movement of a lot of the 25 KVA lines from cultivated land to road allowances. Again we're responding to people in rural Saskatchewan who want those lines off their land, and we're responding to that.

I want to turn now, Mr. Speaker, to some of the SaskPower cost-cutting initiatives. SaskPower is undertaking cost reduction measures which will result in the reduction of \$5.6 million in operating expenditures and \$9.6 million in capital expenditures.

The \$9.6 million in capital expenditure savings will come from a couple of areas, but the basic thing is that they are deferrals, the things we feel we can defer for a little while. But nevertheless, they'll have to be updated at some point. And the \$5.6 million comes from operating expenses within the corporation.

In addition the corporation has achieved savings through the reduction in the number of management positions and getting a flattening of the organization. In 1992 the number of vice-presidents was reduced by six, Mr. Speaker -- not the heavy-loaded end that was there before under the previous administration.

They talked earlier today about the bloated salaries over at SaskPower. I'd want to just say for comparison's sake that there were years when their president, George Hill, made well in excess of \$300,000 a year. And I can assure you that the pension plan that was put into place was \$1.1 million -- totally unacceptable in the dying days of their administration. There's no such deal in there for the current CEO (chief executive officer); I assure you of that. He's only eligible for whatever others are eligible for. And the salary is less than half that paid to their man, George Hill.

Now let's look at some of the questions as to why does SaskPower require a rate increase just one year after the last rate increase. Well first off, it's been more than a year. The last rate increase, Mr. Speaker, came January 1 of 1993. This is April 1, 1994 -- one year and three months after. Why was it later than that? It should have likely come in in January 1, but we wanted management at SaskPower to look at internal efficiencies. And they did that and they delivered, just like the employees in the field for SaskPower deliver good service to the customers that they have throughout the province.

Over the past four years SaskPower's debt has actually increased from 1.2 billion -- that's January 1 of 1990 -- to \$2 billion as of January 1, 1994. This primarily reflects the addition of the Shand power station, which in itself is \$500 million, and the transfer of \$226 million in debt that was transferred there from SaskEnergy so that SaskEnergy who they left . . . the Conservatives left when they left office with 100 per cent debt and no equity in it.

The result of these substantial increases and depreciation of 51 per cent and finance charges of 25 per cent, the corporation is trying to keep debt down to reduce future rate increases, and that's important. We have to keep the debt down so that we can reduce the amount of future rate increases.

But who in their right mind would ever think you can run a utility with never having a rate increase? The Tories may think that, but it can't be done, Mr. Speaker.

Something else that has come up during the debate and during questions outside the legislature, is to . . . With a Canadian inflation of less than 2 per cent, why does SaskPower need 3.8 per cent? Well SaskPower's costs and operations are affected more by the Saskatchewan economic environment than the Canadian economic environment, so the rate of inflation in Canada is different than the rate of inflation in Saskatchewan. And we've documented that and I'll go through that again for you, Mr. Speaker.

Rate increases have not kept pace with the debt or the interest growth costs. In 1992 the rate increase only offset the debt transfer. Rate increases for the period '91 to '93 have been less than the rate of inflation for Saskatchewan for the same three-year period. Even including 1994, this rate increase we're debating today, we're within half a per cent of the rate of inflation over the same period of time.

In Saskatchewan, between 1991 and 1994, the Saskatchewan consumer price index rose by 11.8 per cent. During that same period, 1991 to 1994, the SaskPower rate increase went up 11.3 per cent -- less than the rate of inflation. And they stand in the House and criticize this?

I pointed out between 1991 and 1994 a rate increase of 11.3 per cent. In one year, Mr. Speaker, in 1983, in one year, they increased it 12.6 per cent. And they stand to criticize us through this emergency? What emergency?

Well we want to look at also the concerns people have as to how the rate is allocated. The rate will be allocated equally amongst all classes of customers who are served by SaskPower.

Now how do we compare to other jurisdictions? That's an issue that we have to look at. In comparison to our neighbouring utilities in Alberta and Manitoba, our farm and manufacturing rates are quite comparable.

The comparison in 1993 of the various jurisdictions is . . . sorry, I should say 1992 where you look at cents per kilowatt-hour, SaskPower is 5.56 cents; Trans-Alta 4.76 cents; Alberta Power, 5.43 cents; Manitoba Hydro, who generates virtually all of their electricity by water, is 3.45 cents; B.C. (British Columbia) Hydro, 4.57 cents.

So I think that we're in the ballpark, Mr. Speaker. But what's even more telling is over that period, 1991 to 1994, what have been the percentage of rate increases in those other jurisdictions? In Saskatchewan, remember, during that period, 11.3 per cent; Trans-Alta, 19 per cent; Alberta Power, 25.4 per cent; B.C. Hydro, 12.6 per cent. The only one lower than Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, again, for they use water to generate almost all of their electricity, Manitoba Hydro, 7.9 per cent.

Mr. Speaker, I think we need to again address whether or not we'd expect utility rate increases from SaskPower each year. I want to go on the record here today saying yes, we can expect that for the foreseeable future. We want to make sure that there's rate increases that are consistent so that the bills at the utility can be paid, that were run up by the debt-ridden Tories. And once that's under control, Mr. Speaker, once that's under control, maybe there will be a day when we won't face rate increases at our utility, SaskPower.

But people should now today budget into the future

what those rate increases are going to be, because they will be there and they'll be in line with the rate of inflation.

Mr. Speaker, I think that we should look at the operating maintenance expenses in 1993. The operating maintenance administrative expenses in 1993 were some \$234 million. Comparing that to 1992, a year earlier, it was \$197 million. Now there was a 19 per cent increase there. And I guess that begs the question, what is the nature of that expense increase?

The increase of 19 per cent, some \$37 million, was due primarily to additional maintenance expenses at the Boundary dam generating station, at the Shand generating station, and the Queen Elizabeth generating station; and to costs related to the enhanced retirement program; and PCB (polychlorinated biphenyl) disposal costs.

The administrative expense component amounted to \$61 million in 1993 and \$41 million in 1992. The increase in costs were due to the enhanced retirement program, PCB disposal again, and the cost of the A.L. Cole clean-up, which the previous administration didn't address.

Do you know what happened at the A.L. Cole building under the previous administration? They sold it off to an independent private investor who was going to build condominiums in there. Well maybe it sounded like a good idea but they forgot that it's contaminated with PCBs and other waste contaminants.

But did they clean it up? No. They closed a blind eye to it. Can you believe that? Closed a blind eye to the environment.

Well I'm happy to say that now the A.L. Cole plant, in terms of the PCB and the dewatering in the basement, has been cleaned up. We're in further negotiations to make sure that there's an environmental certificate issued so that if somebody wanted to build condominiums or something else there they could, and not deceive them in the way that the previous administration did.

(1215)

Now I want to say that in comparison to our neighbouring utilities in Alberta and Manitoba, I mentioned our rates are quite comparable. But if you look at the efficiency of SaskPower, we can be proud to place the efficiency of SaskPower up against any other utility in either Alberta or Manitoba. No matter what gauge you want to use, we will stack our utility, SaskPower, up to compete against any other utility that neighbours us, Mr. Speaker.

SaskPower rates, Mr. Speaker, reflect the high cost of producing electricity from low-quality lignite coal and servicing the sparsely populated area that we serve. That's virtually throughout the province of Saskatchewan.

Because of governments like ours, virtually everyone who wants electricity in Saskatchewan has access to it, Mr. Speaker. That wasn't the case in earlier years before the rural electrification program took place under Tommy Douglas's government.

Governments prior to Tommy Douglas and the CCF (Co-operative Commonwealth Federation) advised people to buy a windmill or buy a generator of their own. They weren't interested in serving people of the province. And I maintain they haven't changed to this day. They're still not interested in serving the people of this province. They're only out there perpetuating false rhetoric that they can't get away from.

It also costs us more to produce electricity in Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, than our neighbouring provinces. SaskPower produces about 70 per cent of its electricity with lignite coal. About 25 per cent comes from our hydro plants, and the remaining from natural gas.

By comparison, Mr. Speaker, Manitoba hydro which historically, by the way, has the lowest rates in North America, generates 98.5 per cent of its electricity from hydro, the most economical source of electrical production. But if you look at efficiencies within the corporations, we can be proud to stack up our utility against Manitoba Hydro.

Now while most of the costs are fixed within SaskPower, our corporation continually is reviewing its discretionary spending to its fullest extent and what we can do in dialogue with our employees to continually improve the efficiencies of our corporation.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Anguish: -- Now I want to turn to an issue that will save people in the province money. And this is energy management and energy efficiency -- the conservation measures that people can take.

Now how much can a residence or a farm or a small business save by actually undertaking some conservation or energy management measures? Those customers can expect to save an average 5 to 7 per cent of their power bill with efficiency measures such as using fluorescent lights, which pay for themselves back within two years, and further savings are possible by taking other measures of energy efficient in the home. We're going to try and provide people . . .

An Hon. Member: -- Eating cold food?

Hon. Mr. Anguish: -- Well some members opposite say by eating cold food. I would have thought, Mr. Speaker, that the members opposite would take this debate more seriously. Nobody in this government would expect people to eat cold food, but that's as much ingenuity and vision as the members opposite have is to say, Mr. Speaker, that they can save it by eating cold food.

What kind of a hoax are they trying to play on people in the province? Is that the new Liberal policy, Mr. Speaker? -- the cold food policy. Is that what they want to put forward?

Mr. Speaker, over the coming months, as I mentioned, either during question period or earlier in this debate, we'll be making the strongest effort ever by SaskPower to inform our customers how to save on electricity in their homes, on their farms, and their businesses.

And I think that members opposite should get on side with that and help put out information as to how we can save money -- not giving misleading information about the money that it's costing the people of the province of Saskatchewan.

Now is this rate increase a tax? No, it's not a tax. We've addressed that earlier. I want to say that the practice of dividends, Mr. Speaker, has been a long-standing practice of all governments in the province, whether it was Ross Thatcher's Liberals, or the member from Estevan's Tories, or the CCF government of Tommy Douglas, or the government today.

Corporations in Saskatchewan that are under public ownership that make a profit, pay a dividend to the Crown Investments Corporation each year, Mr. Speaker. What happens to that money once it gets there? And the members opposite don't understand it because the member from Maple Creek was talking about putting money from the corporation directly into coffers of the government.

One of the members opposite from the Liberal Party is hollering across about building up a war chest for the election. There is no war chest for the election, so obviously they don't understand. So I'm going to take some time today just explaining it.

In 1994 there will likely be about four Crown corporations, maybe five, that will pay a dividend into the Crown Investments Corporation. Now what happens with that money from there, Mr. Speaker? A couple of things. There are some Crown corporations that don't make a profit so they need to be subsidized. Those that are subsidized are subsidized because they provide a service to the people of this province.

One of those is the Saskatchewan Transportation Company; very worthy company with a social mandate to provide transportation and express service to people in the province regardless of where they live. Well I'm not willing to do away with Saskatchewan Transportation Company, so some of that money that the wealthier Crowns have goes to subsidizing some of the others. Some of those Crown corporations -- like I used Sask Transportation Company as an example -- are working very hard to make themselves break even or make a profit.

They're also left with the legacy of debt in Eagle buses that the members bought. And I don't think we want to get into Eagle buses today, but that's how they spent

the taxpayers' money, Mr. Speaker, buying Eagle buses and the great old kickback deal that they had going there. But I didn't want to get onto that. I want to talk about those Crowns striving for excellence in providing service. And some of those Crowns in future years, will likely make a profit or at least break even.

But there's something else at the Crown Investments Corporation that doesn't very often get talked about, and that's what they call CICI (Crown Investments Corporation Industrial Interests Inc.) Within there, Mr. Speaker, there are a number of investments made for the most part by the members of the previous administration; by the acting leader who's sitting here in the House with us in this debate today.

What are they? They're investments that have lost hundreds of millions of dollars for the people of the province of Saskatchewan. Bad business deals, Mr. Speaker, bad business deals.

And so money from the Crown Investments Corporation that comes in from the profitable Crowns goes to servicing some of that debt.

What have we done since 1991? We've restructured some of those deals that were made by the previous administration, so continually it costs us less. It costs us less, Mr. Speaker, because we paid due diligence to the accounts of the people of the province of Saskatchewan and to the bad deals that were made by the previous administration. Hundreds of millions of dollars have been saved there, but there is some debt that has to be serviced, because they can't all be turned around overnight. And the ones that are still there, we have confidence in, will pay a return at some future point.

There are others there that were contracted into by the previous administration, that we have a responsibility to uphold. And then if there's money left over after all that -- and some years there isn't money left over after cleaning up all the Tory deals -- but if there's money left over, a small amount goes into the Consolidated Fund, Mr. Speaker. And that's been the accepted practice of every administration since Crown corporations existed in the province of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, it's a business practice. There's a reason we have commercial Crowns in Saskatchewan. It's so that service can be provided. Do you think for one moment . . . does anyone in this legislature think for one moment that if there was a private utility in 1944 in Saskatchewan that every farmer could have got electricity? No. That's why there was a public utility to start with, Mr. Speaker -- to provide the service.

And we're now into competition with some of our corporations. And over the years, such things as the Free Trade Agreement and the North American Free Trade Agreement have changed the face of the North American economy and the market.

We have to prepare our Crown corporations for the future, Mr. Speaker, because in the future we'll have more effect on us by a market driven economy than

we've ever before had in the past. And I would hope that some members in the opposition benches would understand that, because if they don't understand that they'll stay in the opposition benches for a long, long time into the future.

The market driven economy is upon us by no wish of our own, but we can't close our eyes to the outside world. We know full well that federal regulatory agencies such as the CRTC, the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission, had said to our utility, SaskTel, that there's going to be open competition and we'll tell you how much you can charge for the infrastructure you've put in place to your competitors. We can't set that rate. It's affected by someone else far beyond our borders.

So as we walk through this balance we want to walk together with the members of this Assembly and as we walk through this process, we not only have to provide the service to the people of the province, we have to do it at competitive rates because we're preparing for a market driven economy which will be foisted upon us whether we like it or not, so we'd better get prepared for it.

And that's what we're doing. We're getting prepared at SaskTel; we're getting prepared at SaskEnergy; we're getting prepared at SaskPower . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Well the member opposite, the new member from Regina North West says, getting prepared for an election. What a point she would make . . . what's the point she's trying to make, Mr. Speaker? Is it the same thing that they talk about a war chest being built up for election time? Is that what you're referring to . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Oh, the member from Shaunavon said that too, and now he's training the member from Regina North West.

You see there's no war chest for election time, Mr. Speaker. What we have there is some very dedicated, hard-working employees making the best . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Oh, the member from Shaunavon wants to keep an eye on me. Well you're welcome to do that. What I invite you to do is take us to the Crown Corporations Committee at your earliest opportunity, and there we can examine in depth. So call me before the Crown Corporations Committee because I'm anxious to get into the debate about this war chest for the election. There's no such thing exists, Mr. Speaker.

As I was saying earlier, we have some very dedicated employees that are working in Crown corporations to pay for the most . . .

The Speaker: -- Order. I've listened very carefully for the last 20 or 25 minutes and I haven't kept track the number of times the member from Shaunavon has interrupted, but it would be numerous -- numerous. And I'll ask him to please stop interrupting and let the minister continue with the debate.

(1230)

Hon. Mr. Anguish: -- Well thank you, Mr. Speaker. I don't know who they're trying to fool when they talk about some election war chest. I mean we have the public board of SaskPower. Is the member from Shaunavon and the member from Regina North West really accusing these people of doing something illegal? Is that what you're doing?

I mean, are you accusing the staff at SaskPower of hiding money somewhere? Are they accusing the members of the Crown Investments Corporation board, who have a duty to uphold to the people of this province, to pay due diligence to the work that has to be done, not only for the day-to-day business of the Crown Investments Corporation but to clean up the disastrous mess that was left there by the Tory administration.

Is it those people that are being accused of hiding money? Is it the cabinet that's being accused of hiding money? The only place I found there was money being hidden recently was through the paper, where somebody, in his safety box, found a whole bunch of money.

I mean is that, is that what the member from Shaunavon and Regina North West are accusing those people that I mentioned of? Is he accusing them of that? I find that hard to believe.

An Hon. Member: -- What about Ted Yarnton -- the old, instant Liberal?

Hon. Mr. Anguish: -- The hat's changed. Ted Yarnton, isn't that the guy who used to deliver liquor to the Tory offices and now . . .

The Speaker: -- Order. Order. Order. I'll ask the minister to please get back on the motion that is before us and not on . . . Ignore the comments that are made by members from their chairs. That is not pertinent to the motion, so will the member please get back to the motion.

Hon. Mr. Anguish: -- Well if there was proper decorum, then the members wouldn't be chirping from their seats and I wouldn't be distracted by what they're saying.

The Speaker: -- I would ask the member from The Battlefords to please withdraw that statement that he . . . reflecting again on the Chair and the decorum in the House. I ask the member to withdraw the statement that he just made.

Hon. Mr. Anguish: -- I withdraw the statement I just made. May I proceed now?

The Speaker: -- If the member doesn't proceed, I'll call upon another member to speak.

Hon. Mr. Anguish: -- I apologize. I heard you say something, and I didn't know what you said . . .

The Speaker: -- I will ask the member . . . the motion is before us, and I ask the member -- he's got the floor

-- to continue with the motion. If the member does not continue with the motion, I'll recognize another speaker.

Hon. Mr. Anguish: -- The total debate here today on this emergency motion does draw to the attention of members of this House the need for a process whereby they can at least be informed, because it may be that they put out the information they do because they don't know any better. And if that's the case, I accept that and we need to change the process so that they can learn what the real facts are.

But on the other hand, Mr. Speaker, if they know the real facts and then come in here and mislead this Legislative Assembly, then that's another issue. And that's a destructive force . . .

An Hon. Member: -- Let's put some evidence on the record.

Hon. Mr. Anguish: -- That's a destructive force . . . Well I'm being asked to put evidence on the record. I've put evidence on the record here this afternoon that counters any of the false presumptions that were being made by the members of the opposition. I invite them to take me before the Crown Corporations Committee where this can be dealt with in greater detail.

But maybe that's not what they want. Maybe they just want to make political gain out of this charade that they come forward with.

People within the province don't want the pure politics of the Tory Party. They've seen what destructive force that is.

Now I think that we need to address the future of our utility. The future of our utility is bright, Mr. Speaker. But it won't be bright without some rate increases that are within line with the rate of inflation. And we've documented that well here today. It's been documented very well.

What are the options for us in terms of rate increases? We could have a zero rate increase and we could have SaskPower go out and borrow the money. That would be a Tory solution or a Liberal solution.

We could have zero rate increases and have them borrow money for an extended period of years until their credit ran out or we could do like the previous administration did in 1983 and have one huge rate increase all of a sudden. In this case, they raised it 12.6 per cent when the rate of inflation was about half of that. That's what we could do.

But that's not responsible. In fact, that's irresponsible, Mr. Speaker. And you'll find that, as we go through cleaning up the legacy that was left there by the Tory government, that we'll be addressing the issues of greater transparency; to involve the public in understanding rate increases from a factual basis, not from the basis of the information that's misconstrued by members in the opposition.

Well, Mr. Speaker, it seems that when we talk about a topic that they bring before the legislature, that once it gets started in the debate they don't want to talk about that any more, they want to chirp about something else from their seats. So maybe you should bring in another emergency motion on another day to address those other concerns. But for the time being, I understand that the motion had to do with the emergency before us at the present time, not all these other things that members keeping interrupting with, Mr. Speaker.

In fact the motion, the motion -- I want to restate it so the members who are trying to listen here can focus on that.

That this Assembly condemn the government for its decision to again increase power rates and urge the government to consider the harmful and irreversible impact of another utility rate hike to the less fortunate, to business owners, to school divisions and newly-formed health districts, as well as all other Saskatchewan organizations and individuals and further urge the government to immediately form an all-party committee to debate this and every other utility rate increase in the province of Saskatchewan from this day forward.

So that's what we were here to debate in emergency debate before this Legislative Assembly here today.

I think that we've gone through the reasons why this is not a very honourable motion. This motion is not honourable from the perspective of the experiences this House has had with the Public Utilities Review Commission which the previous administration brought in and then they took it out. It didn't work; it wasn't effective; it cost a pile of money.

I've already pointed out in the debate, if we want to check back through the record, that the rate-setting mechanism is a good one. We've looked at the factual side of it in terms of the rate of inflation versus the rate increases at SaskPower. To have a PURC come back into place in Saskatchewan -- why would we want to go through that experience again just for the rhetoric of the opposition parties here in the legislature? If it doesn't serve the people of the province, we're not going to do it.

And how can we think that their intentions are honourable when they say they want some new kind of committee, the legislative utilities review commission, from the earlier PURC that they couldn't handle and did away with, to now LURC which . . . I don't think their intentions are honourable. And I think that what hurts the people of the province of Saskatchewan is not a utility rate increase that's consistent and people know it's coming, what hurts the people of this province is the false information put out by the members of the Liberal and Conservative parties. That's what hurts people in the province.

People have for the first time in several years started to become optimistic about the future, Mr. Speaker. Young people, people in business, the residents of our great province. They're becoming more optimistic about the future because the future is brighter than it's been for several years.

No thanks to the help of the opposition because they don't help; they hinder the process. And when things are going well, they say they're going bad. Do they say that to help the people of the province? I think not. They do it to bolster their own political image.

Well I'll tell you what, the people of this province are more sophisticated than that, Mr. Speaker; they see through that. And I'm telling you, members of the opposition, get onside with being helpful; don't keep spreading inaccurate information out there to try and harm the most optimistic time we've had in several years for our economy in the province. That doesn't help.

You see, people have come this far because of the confidence they have in this government being above-board, setting a direction, working within a plan, and being honest with the people of this province, and involving people in the province in the decision-making process.

And there will be more of that. We will continue to promote the optimism that people have within Saskatchewan. We invite members opposite, whether they be Liberals or whether they be Conservatives or some new party they might form together, we invite them to get on board with us to increase the optimism in the province.

An Hon. Member: -- Don't undermine SaskPower.

Hon. Mr. Anguish: -- That's right. One of the members here today says, don't undermine SaskPower -- continually undermine the professionals and the members of the public that we have running those corporations.

Do you know why I'm anxious to get into debate in Crown Corporations? So we can have detailed information there, not by some spur-of-the-moment emergency debate on the floor of the Legislative Assembly. You come there equipped with your accusations, your false accusations; we'll come there with the facts. And we'll see what the proper story is.

And the proper story is a bright one. It's a bright story of the past, of loyal employees who provided service to people of the province; and it's a bright future story for employees in the public who strive continually to improve the efficiencies of the corporation.

And when that's all said and done, and all those questions are answered, and all those falsehoods are put to rest that you promote, then will you come onside? Do you think that they'll come onside then? No, they want to play politics on the backs of the people of this province, just like they've done today here in this Legislative Assembly. They don't want to

deal with the statutes. They don't want to deal with the laws of the province. They want to make political hay to an emergency debate in this forum. Well shame on you.

This Legislative Assembly performs three purposes, serves three functions. The people in our constituencies elected us to come here, first, to preserve democracy. And that's something that I think is alien to the minds of members on the opposition benches. To preserve democracy, that's the major function of this institution, and you abuse it by bringing here for your political gain issues which are better dealt with through the committee structure that's been long-standing to serve the legislative process.

The second reason that people are elected to come here, that your constituents elected you to come here, is to deal with budgets. Budgets deal with taxation, the expenditure and the accountability of funding government and its agencies within the province.

And the third reason that we come here is to deal with laws, to bring in new laws, to change old laws. If the law doesn't serve the people of the province, then you change the law.

But there's three reasons people elect us to come here -- democracy, dealing with budgets, and dealing with laws. That's the purpose of this Chamber. And then you come in here today with an emergency debate instead of participating in the process. I pointed out earlier, the greatest thing that you can do is get together with us, and when the comprehensive energy strategy is tabled on my desk this summer, to look at what the recommendations are there from the professionals that put that document together.

(1245)

You try and paint this into a black and white situation of the review that's being suggested by your resolution here. It's not a black and white situation. The public need confidence and a level of comfort that they're being served well by the rate-setting process. I believe that they are. They don't want to take my word alone for that. They want to see more information about this.

That information will be available in the summer of 1994. You can help add more information to it by calling the Crown Corporations Committee together and having me there to deal with the facts about the rate-setting process and where the money goes to and how it serves the customers. The other extreme at the end is the full-blown Public Utilities Review Commission. That's unacceptable. It's a failed experience in Saskatchewan. And I again remind you that Saskatchewan is a package of utility rates; has the lowest of anywhere in Canada. In the top ones, the most high are mostly Liberal provinces. And they all have a Public Utilities Review Commission. So we don't want that extreme of the Public Utility Review Commission because it's been a bad experience for Saskatchewan people. And the members opposite full well know that, and we want more transparency than

what's there now.

So get together with us through the established process that we already have to enhance the transparency of the rate-setting system instead of coming here and spreading inaccurate information before this Assembly. You should be ashamed of yourselves for doing that.

But whether you come onside or not, by the end of this year, the people who are customers of SaskPower will have the greatest access to information they have ever had in the history of the corporation. And by having access to the greater amount of information they'll know how the rate-setting mechanism works; they'll know where the expenditures are done; they'll know why they're done, and we will have too a sense of public participation that's never been experienced before with SaskPower. And that's what we're committed to doing.

What I have to ask today: does this motion accomplish that? Does this motion accomplish that? No, because even the writing isn't done in a constructive way. They talk about another committee, yet another committee, to debate. Well this is the forum to debate, and that's what we're doing here today.

But to debate . . . if the word even said, to review, or to construct, but no, it says, "to debate". There's already all kinds of forum to debate -- this forum, the committees, through the media like you often do. And then again they want another all-party committee to debate. I could have taken this seriously had they said to review, to construct, to build.

How can you expect people in this Assembly to take what you call an emergency seriously when you use wording like that? I ask you, when are you going to come before -- when are you going to come before the Crown Corporations . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Well the member from Rosthern says the phones are ringing. The phones are ringing because people don't understand well enough -- and we've addressed that -- don't understand well enough the rate-setting process.

I've tried to set that out here today, and I don't know whether I've done it adequately enough for the public to be informed. But some of the reasons the phones ring when a utility rate is increased is because of the misinformation put out by the members in the opposition. Stop spreading those things out. It's not to the benefit of confidence in our province, and it's sure not to the benefit of you members, and I think you'll realize that when you decide that you're going to participate in the recovery, not the destruction, of the province, like you did over your 10-year . . .

The Speaker: -- Order, order. According to the new rules that have been adopted by the Legislative Assembly, it's at this moment that the Speaker must interrupt the debate and the vote will be taken. And for the edification of the members, I will read 17(8)

No "Priority of Debate" motion shall be adjourned and unless sooner concluded debate shall end at ten minutes before the ordinary time of daily adjournment when the Speaker shall interrupt the proceedings and forthwith put every question necessary to dispose of the main motion.

The motion that is before the Assembly is the motion moved by the member from Kindersley, seconded by the member from Maple Creek.

The division bells rang from 12:52 p.m. until 12:54 p.m.

Motion negated on the following recorded division.

	Yeas
Swenson	Toth
Muirhead	D'Autremont
Neudorf	Goohsen
Boyd	McPherson t

	Nays
Van Mulligen	Flavel
Wiens	Roy
Tchorzewski	Scott t
Lingenfelter	Crofford
Anguish	Wormsbecker
Teichrob	Stanger
Johnson	Knezacek
Kowalsky	Harper
Cunningham	Keeping
Upshall	Jess
Hagel	Carlson
Renaud	Langford
Murray	

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Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: -- Mr. Speaker, I move the House do adjourn, but before I leave, I just want to wish a very happy Easter to members of the opposition, all government members, and the staff who work here for us. During this season I want you to all have a good, restful holiday.

Mr. Neudorf: -- If I might, in the spirit of Easter, on a rare occasion I would like to concur with the Government House Leader.

The Assembly adjourned at 12:56 p.m.