

The Assembly met at 1:30 p.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRESENTING PETITIONS

Mr. McPherson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to present a petition on behalf of people all throughout Saskatchewan regarding the closure of the Plains Health Centre. The prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioner humbly prays that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to reconsider closure of the Plains Health Centre.

Mr. Speaker, the people that have signed this petition, many of them are from Whitewood and of course Esterhazy, but many also from Regina itself. I so present.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd also like to rise today to present petitions of names from throughout Saskatchewan regarding the Plains Health Centre. The prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioner humbly prays that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to reconsider closure of the Plains Health Centre.

The people have signed from all throughout southern Saskatchewan plus the city of Regina, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And once again I rise today to present petitions of names from throughout Saskatchewan regarding the Plains Health Centre. The prayer reads as follows, Mr. Speaker:

Wherefore your petitioner humbly prays that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to reconsider closure of the Plains Health Centre.

The people that have signed the petition, Mr. Speaker, they're from Regina. They're from Whitewood. They're from Grenfell and Balgonie, from Stockholm, from Lebret, from Radville, from Wolseley. They're from all throughout Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, and I so present.

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I also rise today to present names of individuals throughout Saskatchewan regarding the closure of the Plains Health Centre. The prayer reads as follows, Mr. Speaker:

Wherefore your petitioner humbly prays that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to reconsider closure of the Plains Health Centre.

The people that have signed this petition, Mr. Speaker, are primarily from Arcola and Carlyle, but also Regina, Manor, Kisbey, and a few other communities. I so present.

Mr. Gantfoer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise as well,

presenting petitions on behalf of concerned citizens about the closure of the Plains Health Centre. The prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioner humbly prays that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to reconsider closure of the Plains Health Centre.

Mr. Speaker, the people signing this are throughout rural Saskatchewan, particularly the southern part of the province and the city of Regina and Moose Jaw.

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today too to present petitions of names from people throughout Saskatchewan regarding the Plains Health Centre. The prayer reads as follows, Mr. Speaker:

Wherefore your petitioner humbly prays that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to reconsider the closure of the Plains Health Centre.

Mr. Speaker, the petition is signed by a number of people in Regina, and also I notice that Liberty is on this list as well.

Mr. Aldridge: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also rise today to present petitions of names from throughout Saskatchewan regarding the Plains Health Centre. And the prayer reads as follows, Mr. Speaker:

Wherefore your petitioner humbly prays that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to reconsider closure of the Plains Health Centre.

And the people who have signed this petition, Mr. Speaker, are from Hodgeville, Morse, Success, Gull Lake, Vanguard, and a number of them from Swift Current.

READING AND RECEIVING PETITIONS

Clerk: — According to order the following petitions have been reviewed, and pursuant to rule 12(7) they are hereby read and received.

Of citizens of the province petitioning the Assembly to reconsider closure of the Plains Health Centre.

In addition, the petitions for private Bills have been reviewed and are hereby read and received.

Of the St. Paul's Hospital, Grey Nuns of Saskatoon praying for an Act to amend and consolidate their active incorporation;

Of the Sisters of Charity, Grey Nuns in the province of Saskatchewan praying for an Act to amend and consolidate its active incorporation;

Of the Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities in the province of Saskatchewan praying for an Act to amend its active incorporation; and

Of Luther College in the province of Saskatchewan praying for an Act to amend the active incorporation.

NOTICES OF MOTIONS AND QUESTIONS

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I give notice that I shall on Wednesday next ask the government the following question:

To the minister responsible for Public Service Commission regarding employees and positions cut in the recent budget: (1) what is the total number of jobs and/or positions eliminated in the recently delivered provincial budget; (2) please provide a breakdown of the number of jobs lost by branch, department, or arm of government; (3) please provide a breakdown of jobs by department and community as well as the total payroll lost per community as a result of these eliminations; and (4) what percentage of total jobs in each community does the elimination of these positions represent?

Thank you.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure here today to introduce to you and to all members of the House, seated in your gallery, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Yogi Huyghebaert. Yogi ran as the PC (Progressive Conservative) candidate in Wood River constituency in the last election.

Among other things Yogi has experienced, he was the squadron leader of the very famous Snow Birds for an unprecedented two tours of duty, Mr. Speaker. He is retired now but he's so busy, he told me a few minutes ago, that he was going to have to go back to work so he could get weekends off.

I would ask all members of the legislature to join with me in welcoming him here today.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McPherson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to join with the Leader of the Third Party in welcoming Yogi to the legislature here today. It's good to see him. I didn't recognize him up there in the gallery at first, but also say hello to all of Yogi's family who campaigned so hard for me, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Regional Science Fairs

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, today I'd like to congratulate all the budding young scientists across Saskatchewan for their participation in regional science fairs.

Eleven science fairs will be held across Saskatchewan this spring. Foam Lake Composite School hosted the Parkland regional competition on Saturday. This competition sparked a tremendous amount of interest on behalf of the students in the

Parkland area. This was demonstrated by the high quality of projects submitted. All the students who were involved seemed to be keen and extremely enthusiastic about their entries.

It was my pleasure to present the plaques and certificates to the overall winner, Robin Blazeiko from Foam Lake, for his project on well water oxidization.

My compliments to the chairperson, Graham Farrell, and the co-chairperson, Nevin Halyk, and all the staff and students at Foam Lake for their wonderful hospitality. I would also like to congratulate SaskEnergy and the executive of the Saskatchewan association of science fairs for encouraging widespread involvement in schools across the province.

It is projects like these that give valuable incentive in developing the imagination and skills of Saskatchewan students. I encourage the Department of Education to continue funding for this worthwhile competition. Congratulations to all participants, and especially those who were declared winners in the various categories.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Tourism Industry Association of Saskatchewan Awards

Mr. Kowalsky: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also want to speak about winners today.

Many of the new jobs that are being created in Saskatchewan come from tourism. And the Prince Albert region is doing its part to help create employment in this industry.

I'm pleased to report that recently at the seventh annual Tourism Industry Association of Saskatchewan awards, awards were presented to the Prince Albert region, and the Prince Albert region was well represented.

My compliments to the Prince Albert Credit Union who won the Most-For-Host award which is given to a business which has done the most to train staff to provide service through the TISASK (Tourism Industry Association of Saskatchewan) training program.

My compliments also go to the first nations and Metis people, to the Indian Friendship Centre, who won the Metis and first nations people's culture award.

I also want to congratulate other Saskatchewan winners as well. Rookie of the Year was picked up by Rose Bush Acres Heritage Co-op in Watson. The individual Hospitality Excellence award went to Dea Roland of the Country Inn & Suites in Saskatoon. The TISASK President's Award of Merit was won by Beatrice Magee of Gull Lake. She operates a country vacation farm and was recognized for dedication to promoting tourism.

Other winners include SaskTel, Museums Association of Saskatchewan, Western Development Museum, Lakeside Leisure Farm Bed and Breakfast in Meota, Charlie Baker of North Battleford, and the media award was picked up by 980 CKRM and MX 92.1 in Regina.

The Speaker: — I'm sorry, the member's time is expired.

Cypress Hills Timber Wolves

Mr. McPherson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I rise today for two reasons. Firstly as a proud father of a hard-playing novice hockey player, no. 22; and secondly to congratulate the team he plays for — that being the Cypress Hills Timber Wolves. A few weeks ago, Mr. Speaker, these boys played a hockey tournament in Regina, and of course, they handedly won the tournament.

From there they went on to Saskatoon where they also played in a tough tournament but handedly won every game and took the tournament there also. But, Mr. Speaker, this past weekend they were in Calgary and played teams from Lethbridge and Edmonton, many from Calgary, and I think one or two B.C. (British Columbia) teams but they handedly won the Calgary tournament also.

This team of boys from small towns in the south-west — Consul, Eastend, Shaunavon, Kincaid — this team has yet to lose a game in their first season. And I would ask that . . . well I think, Mr. Speaker, it really shows when given an opportunity, what people in rural Saskatchewan can really put together. And I would ask that the Assembly congratulate these boys today.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Newspaper Inquiry

Mr. Van Mulligen: — Mr. Speaker, I note with interest that in response to a request by John Solomon, the Member of Parliament for Regina-Lumsden, the House of Commons Industry Committee will conduct an inquiry into the recent take-over of Saskatchewan's biggest daily newspapers by media giant Hollinger Inc.

Although a great deal of attention has been paid to the sad saga of 25 per cent job loss at the Regina *Leader-Post* and the Saskatoon *Star-Phoenix* following the take-over, it is the issue of corporate concentration in a key and vital industry that is potentially the most troubling for Saskatchewan people. This is an industry where, for the good of democracy, many voices must be heard and not as a chorus singing the same song.

Mr. Solomon and the Commons Industry Committee are to be commended for their initiative which I am sure has the support of all members of this Assembly. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

New Business in Elbow

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today too, I would like to recognize and congratulate a new business that has opened in the village of Elbow in the constituency of Arm River. Bill Buckton, an Elbow area resident, has gone into the bussing business. He presently owns one bus and is licensed to operate it within Saskatchewan. Mr. Speaker, he is also applying for a licence that would permit him to travel out of this province as well.

Mr. Buckton reports that since November of 1995 when he began chartering his bus he's been kept extremely busy with sports trips for skiers and hockey teams. Having a number of the local hockey teams advance into the provincial play-offs certainly has been a boon to his new enterprise. Mr. Speaker, this is just another example of how that entrepreneurial spirit of Saskatchewan can flourish when it is free from government interference.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

PAMI Wins Defence Contract

Mr. Johnson: — Mr. Speaker, on Friday the Minister of Economic Development announced that PAMI, the Prairie Agricultural Machinery Institute in Humboldt, won a defence contract from the federal government. The contract will involve testing and evaluation of replacement components for armoured personnel carriers. These small, tank-like vehicles which provide safe transportation for Canadian troops during peace-keeping missions require replacements of some parts. For some time we have been aware and proud of the work of PAMI in evaluating agricultural machinery.

But, Mr. Speaker, this contract demonstrates the ability of PAMI to diversify. It provides stability for PAMI workers. It will make use of the former Dana Radar Base, and it is one more example of a Saskatchewan operation diversifying to fit the needs of today. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Local Residents to Attend Olympic Games

Mr. Trew: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It would be very hard for me to be prouder than I am this day. Very few people get to go to the Olympics. The best of the best only. In Regina Coronation Park we have not one of the best of the best, but two, Mr. Speaker.

Today's news is joyously announcing the dedicated commitment to her sport has earned Andrea Schwartz a chance to compete in Atlanta on Canada's swim team. This news is hard on the heels of Andrea Schwartz's recent win as the SaskSport Female Athlete of the Year. Well deserved and well done, Andrea Schwartz.

The other best of the best, Mr. Speaker, from Regina Coronation Park constituency, is Bree Burgess. She's been chosen to attend the Olympic Youth Camp in Atlanta during the '96 Summer Olympics. Bree Burgess is the only Saskatchewan resident chosen by the Saskatchewan High Schools Athletic Association and the Canadian Olympic Association. I join Bree's parents, Lori and Spence Burgess, in simply being happy and very proud for Bree, the best of the best.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

World's Largest Bunnock

Ms. Murrell: — Mr. Speaker, because we are not allowed to bring exhibits into the Assembly, I'm going to try to describe it,

and it is not April foolery. Picture if you will, a horse ankle enlarged 98 times, then at the base of this 32 foot high structure, imagine a tourist booth promoting information about our rural districts and our province.

I have just described the world's largest bunnock, situated in the town of Macklin at the junction of Highways 33 and 14. Bunnock means bone in Russian. Bunnock is a game played with 52 bones representing soldiers, guards, and throwers.

The statue of the bunnock reminds townspeople and tourists alike that Macklin hosts the world championship bunnock tournament every August — a tournament that last year attracted 176 teams, drew approximately 2,500 people to Macklin, and generated approximately a quarter of million dollars in economic activity during one weekend.

There are many challenges to this game. On August 2 to 4, all are invited to witness first-hand, skills never before imagined by the ordinary sports fan. Just one hint of the special nature of the game of bunnock — originally the game was a favourite pastime at the second day of a wedding. All members are welcome to see the appropriateness of this game for the day after. Or better yet, enter a team and enjoy the weekend festivities. It's fun for everyone.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ORAL QUESTIONS

Crown Construction Tendering Agreement

Mr. Gantefer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I questioned the Minister of Labour in this House on March 26 about a recent tender put out by SaskTel. I pointed out that the lowest bid using union labour is \$60,000 or 20 per cent higher than the lowest bid from Alliance Energy Ltd. which uses non-union labour.

The minister responded by stating, and I quote: sometimes bids put in "are almost vexatious in nature."

Mr. Speaker, I have received a copy of a letter that the president of Alliance Energy addressed to the minister, and I would like to send copies to every member of the cabinet. Mr. Speaker, this letter assures the minister and his government that his company tender was, and I quote: "prepared in good faith and with a willingness for our firm to do the work."

Will the minister explain why he has such an obvious prejudice against firms using non-union labour?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Anguish: — I'd like to thank the member for his question. I appreciate that he's sending around an explanation note. I would point out that the particular bid and the contractor which the member refers to was not qualified under the terms of the bid that was put out, or the tender that was put out. The bid came back in, did not meet the qualifications of the request for the bids, and therefore was not taken in as part of the

competition, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Gantefer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The bid was fully compliant with bid bonding and all the rest of the normal practices. The only thing lacking was the union-only preference.

Mr. Speaker, the Finance minister indicated in Thursday's budget that Crown corporations and government agencies will invest over \$630 million this year on capital projects. Given the fact that the example I just highlighted showed union preference will result in a 20 per cent increase in costs, will the minister explain how many tax dollars will be unnecessarily wasted if his government continues to use union preference as the rule instead of fair and open tendering?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Anguish: — Well, Mr. Speaker, I point out to the hon. member that this government is not in the practice of wasting taxpayers' dollars. In terms of safeguarding the public purse, this administration and the administration in the '70s before it have the soundest record in financial management of any province in Canada or any political party or any government in Canada.

I question the hon. member's figures when he starts talking about hundreds of millions of dollars involved in the bidding process. I point out again to the hon. member that earlier this session he pointed out that we have wasted some hundred million dollars or more, when in fact the reality is all of the projects that fell over the past construction season under the Crown Construction Tendering Agreement only amounted to about \$15 million in total.

So I'd tell the member, quit bandying figures about that don't have any basis to them. Get on with the job like we're doing — preparing Saskatchewan for the future.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Gantefer: — Mr. Speaker, the 630 million comes from the budget address, page 7, if you'd care to check it.

Mr. Speaker, Alliance Energy is 100 per cent Saskatchewan owned. Its employees are all Saskatchewan residents, pay Saskatchewan taxes, and feel they should be given the opportunity to work on government projects if they had the lowest qualified bid. Alliance Energy president, Paul McLellan, writes and I quote:

It is with this in mind that we tendered this project, and not to be an annoyance as you inferred. I feel that you owe our firm an apology, given your comments.

Will the minister stand and apologize in this House today for his comments?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Anguish: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I accept that the member opposite gets the figure from the budget. I think people should be happy that there's that much construction going on within Saskatchewan this year, plus all the private

sector work that's going to be going on.

We should all be proud, we should all be positive about that. What the member has to do, Mr. Speaker, is sit down and do his homework because not all those projects fall under the Crown Construction Tendering Agreement. The projects that fall under the Crown Construction Tendering Agreement is a process that is working well. We want to look at it from time to time. We believe it will work well. And certainly a contracting firm like the one he mentions in the private sector that's non-unionized has lots of opportunities to do work not only for government, but also the private sector in Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Highway Maintenance Depots

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, this NDP (New Democratic Party) government may have paid the people of rural Saskatchewan the ultimate insult on budget day by referring to the closure of highway maintenance depots and putting the safety of rural people at risk, as "streamlining". In total, 26 of these depots will close, including Craik, which is in the constituency I represent, of Arm River. It will leave vast stretches of highway at the mercy of the weather.

Will the Minister of Highways, and in his absence, the Premier, explain why he and his government have chosen economics over the safety and well-being of the people of rural Saskatchewan?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — Mr. Speaker, the member is sadly mistaken when he . . . in his interpretation of what's happening in Highways in this budget. What is happening is there are huge efficiencies that are being recommended by our officials in the department. That is, by better use of equipment, better use of buildings; that the savings can be used to do what Highways should be doing, that is building roads and putting pavement down.

So I want to assure the member and the people of Saskatchewan that any savings and efficiencies that occur in the Department of Highways as a result of the changes in the budget will remain in Highways to build roads and put pavement down, which I think is the role of the Department of Highways.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Highways and members of the NDP cabinet obviously have never driven in the rural areas during a severe storm like many parts of Saskatchewan are encountering today. If they had, maybe they would be understanding why there's such a big concern among the families in our villages and towns, including the farmers. And I guess in the NDP cabinet they don't include the Premier because we all know that he travels in a bubble.

This government has allowed our rural roads to deteriorate to a point where many can easily be classified as hazardous. Now this same government is closing down highway maintenance

depots which will make roads impassable in severe winter conditions.

Will the minister explain what study has been done to show that closures of these depots will not threaten the safety of our rural residents, and will he table a copy of that study today in the House?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — Mr. Speaker, I want to say to the member opposite that if he had the time this afternoon, he might want to get a hold of his federal counterparts who have taken hundreds of millions of dollars out of the transportation system of this province by cancelling and taking away money through the Crow benefit.

And I want to say to the member opposite that if he were not being sanctimonious today in his own self-righteous way of saying spend more money but cut taxes — and we hear every day the member from Wood River saying spend more in health, and other members saying cut taxes. And what we know is that that is hypocrisy at the height — we know that if you were in government, what you would do; very similar to what's happened in Ottawa. You'd be cutting health care, you'd be cutting education, and you'd be running a deficit all at the same time.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Municipal Government Amalgamation

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it looks like the on again, off again talk of municipal amalgamations is back on again. At the SARM (Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities) convention the Premier told delegates, I don't know where this notion of amalgamation got going; perhaps it was something that I accidentally said. Well you remember, Mr. Premier, their reaction to that comment.

Well the Minister of Finance accidentally said it again on Friday just after she accidentally cut the funding to municipalities by 25 per cent. My question is to the Premier. Mr. Premier, this is no accident. Isn't this funding a deliberate attempt to force municipal amalgamations? Haven't you already gone back on your word to the SARM convention?

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, the answer to the question is simply no, we have not gone back on our word. The funding for the '96-97 budget remains as promised in last year's budget of 1995. In the current year, we'll be working with the local governments, with the municipal round table, to examine efficiencies and ways and means in which to eliminate overlap and duplication. We want to do it in a consultative mechanism, consultative basis, and a partnership basis with our local governments. Many — most of them — recognize the need to do this.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, in Saturday's newspaper we see the Finance minister lecturing

municipalities on how they have to become more efficient and change.

Madam Minister, municipalities are already the most efficient form of government — they have to be after the amount that you've offloaded to them in recent years. Smaller municipalities are already cooperating with one another, and in the case of cities, as Doug Archer points out, the mayor of Regina: who is Regina going to amalgamate with? There simply isn't room to absorb another 25 per cent cut here, Madam Minister. That's going to mean tax increases and it's going to make your no new taxes look like a bad April Fool's joke.

Madam Minister, where do you get off lecturing municipalities about cutting administrative costs after you and your government just recently expanded cabinet and have given each one of your MLAs (Member of the Legislative Assembly) a pay increase?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — I thank the member opposite for the question. What I would say to the member opposite is this is nothing unusual. Why do you not ask your Tory counterparts in Alberta why they virtually eliminated funding for municipalities over a certain size? Wait to see what your counterparts in Ontario do to municipal funding.

Mr. Speaker, it was pretty simple. We went to Saskatchewan people and we said, how do we handle the federal cuts to health, education, and social programs. They said to us, protect our health, education, and social programs from the federal cuts and lessen funding to other areas. And they also said that they anticipated there was need for change at the provincial level where we've saved \$50 million in administrative cuts. And they also said they wanted to see some change at municipal level. So we will work with municipalities to make the changes required to take this province into the next century.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

SaskTel Union Job Action

Mr. Goohsen: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my question today is to the minister responsible for SaskTel. Madam Minister, could you provide us with an update on the job action by SaskTel employees which we understand were in a position to go on strike as of last Saturday, and have been talking about things like working-to-rule and job actions and those things precluding possibility a complete strike.

What are you doing to ensure that the public safety is not compromised through the disruption of telephone services. What steps are you taking to deal with the current job action? And what steps are you taking to prepare the people of Saskatchewan for the possibility of a full-scale strike which might affect things like 911, fire, and ambulance services in our province, especially with this spring storm that's blowing today?

Hon. Mr. Anguish: — I'd like to thank the hon. member for his question, Mr. Speaker, and provide him with the

information he's requested.

It is true that last week SaskTel employees gave their required 48-hour strike notice. They were in a strike position as of 5 o'clock on Saturday afternoon. The management at SaskTel have been having discussions with the union that represents the employees. We feel that things are proceeding well. The best route to resolve this is to be back at the negotiating table. There are talks that are going on at the present time.

We feel that a full-scale strike can well be averted and there are contingency plans in place by the management of SaskTel.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Goohsen: — Well, Mr. Speaker, I have a supplemental for the minister. Minister, it's obvious from your answer that what you're saying is you're doing absolutely nothing. If you had any plan, you'd be outlining it for us.

Now we agree with things like SaskTel should be having the opportunity to negotiate for their salaries and so forth and so on, and that you have to protect the taxpayers from increased costs and things like that, like wages and pensions. And we agree that you have to take some time to talk about these things. But you don't have to do them at the expense and the peril of the people of Saskatchewan.

Now it seems to me that it's pretty hard for you to be telling unionized employees that you can't afford wage increases when you and every one of your NDP MLAs have just taken a \$4,400 pay increase for yourselves.

Now, Mr. Minister, isn't this really a double standard? Doesn't this compromise your bargaining position? How can you go to a bargaining table and bargain in good faith and tell people they should take less while you've taken so much more?

And if you're going to be telling SaskTel employees that you can't afford pay hike increases, which is obviously why you've got a strike, shouldn't you be setting the example first of all . . .

The Speaker: — Order. The member has had an extremely long preamble and I'll ask him to just put his question directly. Order. I'll ask . . . order. I'll just ask the member to put his question directly now.

Mr. Goohsen: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I did present my question which was, very simply: don't you think you ought to set the example by showing that you're going to repay your pay increase so that you can bargain in good faith?

Hon. Mr. Anguish: — Mr. Speaker, if the members opposite haven't noticed, this government wants to take a very proactive approach in resolving management-labour disputes within the province. The last thing anyone wants to see — the public, the employees, the corporation itself — the last thing anyone wants to see is a strike situation. We try and be proactive. We try and provide mediation, conciliation to get the parties back together at the negotiating table. And that's the best place to resolve disputes.

The disputes, I predict, will be resolved. There is nothing that we are going to have happening that will put Saskatchewan people at peril either physically or financially. We're managing the situation. SaskTel and the union are discussing the situation with each other.

We feel the situation is well in hand, and I would point out to the member that the best place to negotiate is not on the floor of the legislature; it's to leave it to the parties involved, in this case, the CEP (Communications, Energy and Paperworkers Union) local that represents SaskTel employees and the management of SaskTel.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

SaskTel Re-engineering Project

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my questions also have to do with SaskTel. In this month's edition of the *Briarpatch*, employees say recent problems at SaskTel have been caused by what they call the greenhouse approach.

In other words, employees were forced to work in a stressful, segregated condition sanctioned by Symmetrix's \$2 million re-engineering program. And it's not just the left-leaning *Briarpatch* magazine that listed these concerns. The *Western Report* published a similar article in late February, also talking about the greenhouse approach.

Will the minister confirm that the SaskTel workers are not necessarily striking over wages and benefits, but because the workplace atmosphere at SaskTel is completely intolerable?

Hon. Mr. Anguish: — Well I point out to the member opposite in response to his question that there are a great deal of workplaces today that are stressful for the employees who work within them, not the least of which are issues of deregulation, the North American Free Trade Agreement, the Free Trade Agreement.

In fact the NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement) . . . the Prime Minister of the country, who represents the party opposite, the Liberal Party of Canada, said that, during the election campaign, he'd tear up the agreement. Right after the election, what did he do? He signed the agreement. So don't look to us for causing stress within the workplace.

As I mentioned to the questioner in the previous question, is that we are trying to be proactive to reduce stress in the workplace, to have greater harmony through bringing the parties together and having a better understanding. If anyone's done a great deal to cause stress within the workplace, it's the cousins of the members opposite in Ottawa who have foisted on places like Saskatchewan and other provinces a whole new set of rules that are causing problems in the workplace. We're trying to resolve those problems in the interests of Saskatchewan people, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Bjornerud: — Mr. Speaker, I agree with the minister opposite, but most cases upper management doesn't cause the

stress as we are seeing in this case.

Mr. Speaker, through an access of information request, we have learned that SaskTel paid professional consultants \$164,493 last year alone to conduct focus groups — over \$160,000 of a glorified public opinion poll. Obviously the government didn't trust the \$2 million consultants, so they even wasted more taxpayers' money on these focus groups.

Mr. Speaker, with SaskTel now having to do its part in balancing the provincial budget, why did the government have to spend over 160,000 on focus groups when they'd already spent \$2 million on a destructive re-engineering process?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Anguish: — Well I'd like to thank the hon. member for his question. I'd like to provide the information as best I can.

This is a decision of management, the SaskTel board. There are mechanisms set up to try and find the best ways of dealing with the situation that the Crown corporations find themselves in today. As I say, many of the situations are far beyond our control because of decisions made at the federal level with deregulation, the Free Trade Agreement, that are in effect, and we have to deal with those.

But we're not going to sit back and allow those things to hold us down, those initiatives that have been taken by other levels of government. What we're doing is we're preparing for the future to deal with times that can put people and companies under a great deal of stress. We feel we're managing it well. We feel that the SaskTel board is competent. We feel that SaskTel management is competent. We feel the SaskTel employees are competent. We're going to work this through together to prepare for the next century, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Tax Relief

Mr. Aldridge: — Mr. Speaker, when the Finance minister delivered her government's fifth budget last Thursday . . .

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Aldridge: — She boasted that there were no new tax increases. Of course this myth was quickly proven wrong by municipal leaders from throughout the province. The minister also boasted about the fact that last year's trial reduction of the aviation fuel tax resulted in an 80 per cent increase in business for Saskatchewan aviation fuel dealers as well as more jobs. This one case clearly demonstrates how lifting the stifling blanket of taxation can have economic benefits for all involved.

Will the minister explain when she and her government plan to bring forward a plan that will spell out additional business and personal tax relief?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — I thank the member opposite for the

question, and if people in Saskatchewan expected a budget that would bring tax relief, they got one. The *Star-Phoenix* believes so; in their editorial they say:

Saskatchewan taxpayers are certainly getting what they asked for from their provincial government. They got a modest tax break; their social programs were left intact; and the government has cut its overall spending.

But, Mr. Speaker, what I want to draw people's attention to is exactly what's going on here with these members opposite. This one here is going to dramatically cut taxes. Don't worry about that. This one here is going to dramatically increase funding for health beyond what we've done. This one over there is going to dramatically increase funding for education. Now when it's the Liberal Party, one possibility is they haven't spoken to each other yet, so they don't know that they're contradicting each other.

But, Mr. Speaker, the more realistic answer is these people would take us back to the Devine era — cut taxes, spend more money, and run deficits. We balanced the budget; we'll continue to balance the budget.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Aldridge: — Mr. Speaker, when asked to comment Friday on the fact that a family of four in Saskatchewan earning \$50,000 a year is paying the highest personal income tax in Canada, do you know how the minister responded? She pointed to a budget table indicating that a person earning \$75,000 pays the third highest amount of taxes in the country.

Well, Mr. Speaker, this might be April Fool's Day, but I can assure the minister the average person in this province does not make an annual salary of \$75,000. Will the Minister of Finance come down to earth and make a commitment to tax relief for the average Saskatchewan resident?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Mr. Speaker, what the budget tables show, and what the Saskatoon paper had in a headline: Saskatoon, the cheapest place in Canada to live — whether you make 25,000, 50,000, or whatever. But again, the members opposite don't have anybody to blame now for their problems. They can't blame the member from Greystone for their problems. They've got to get their act together. If this one wants tax cuts and this one wants massive spending increases, tell the people of the province it also means deficits.

This government is committed to protecting our social programs; to tax relief as we can afford it; and to continuing to balance the budget and pay down the debt of the province.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Aldridge: — Mr. Speaker, what the government opposite forgets is that because they've stifled economic activity in this province, they've driven down the real estate values; hence Saskatoon is a cheap place to live. That's the one and only

reason.

Mr. Speaker, the Finance minister stated in delivering the budget last Thursday that, and I quote: "One of the best ways to create consumer confidence is to ease the tax burden".

If the minister truly believes this is the case, and her reduction in the aviation fuel tax proves this theory, why will she not provide something more than a promise of another study?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Mr. Speaker, to the member opposite, as I say, when it's a Liberal question, you've got to start by correcting the facts. First of all, Nesbitt Burns in their commentary on our budget — and I had a conference call with them this morning as well — says economic growth in Saskatchewan for 1996: 2.6 per cent, well above the Canadian average.

I would also say to the members opposite that in this budget there was, as there has been in every one of our budgets since 1991, targeted tax changes to promote jobs. One in this budget affected truckers; the truckers association saying this is a good win for us, we're pleased the government understood our situation. It will be a sustainable opportunity for companies that service the trucking industry in this province.

Mr. Speaker, this government is committed to targeted tax reductions. But we're also committed to preserving our social programs and balancing the budget. What the members opposite have to do is face the fact they have contradictions — massive tax cuts, massive new spending. The only way to square it is deficits. We will continue to balance the budget and protect our social programs.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

SaskEnergy Rates

Hon. Mr. Anguish: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's with a great deal of pleasure that I'm able to rise today on behalf of the minister responsible for SaskEnergy to bring news to the House about SaskEnergy's 1996 rates.

Mr. Speaker, as you will know, SaskEnergy utilized the 45-day public notification and review process for their 1996 rate proposal. That process included four public meetings and a 1-800 toll free line to gather customer input on the rate proposal.

I'm pleased today to announce that the government has approved SaskEnergy's rate proposal — a proposal that will decrease and realign natural gas rates for all utility customers. The rate adjustment, which is effective retroactive to January 1, 1996, is mainly due to the \$13 million in lower natural gas costs to SaskEnergy for 1996. Customers will be credited with the gas cost savings for January, February, and March, on their April natural gas bills.

Mr. Speaker, this adjustment will cut the average annual natural gas bill to homes and farms by 2.4 per cent or 15 to \$23 depending on their natural gas consumption. The decreases to homes and farms include both a reduction in charges for natural gas and a 40-cent increase in the basic monthly charge.

This rate adjustment also includes a decrease of 7.7 per cent for small commercial customers. Those customers, Mr. Speaker, include, among others, restaurants, convenience stores, and churches.

I'm also pleased to announce a decrease of 13.7 per cent to large commercial customers. Those customers, Mr. Speaker, include, among others, hospitals, nursing homes, and schools.

Mr. Speaker, we are also announcing a decrease of 16 per cent to small industrial customers, including small manufacturing firms, large office buildings, and hotels.

This is the second year in a row that SaskEnergy has reduced its rates. Mr. Speaker, the rates for all customer classes have been realigned to move their prices more in line with the actual cost of providing the services to them.

Mr. Speaker, as I noted previously, this decrease is mainly due to lower gas costs to SaskEnergy. The corporation buys gas from independent producers and the natural gas costs are the largest component of SaskEnergy's total annual costs.

As members of this House will know, natural gas is one of the commodities that experience the greatest price fluctuations on the market, resulting in rapid price increases or decreases. SaskEnergy's rate-setting process therefore is becoming increasingly market responsive with price changes being passed on to the customers through rate adjustments.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan's natural gas rates remain competitive with the other provinces in Canada, and I am confident that SaskEnergy's rates will further encourage investment in Saskatchewan and continue to enhance our competitiveness. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McPherson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to begin by thanking the minister for sending the advance copy of the ministerial statement well in advance, and I wish other ministers would do the same.

Mr. Speaker, I guess whenever we have good news and there's cuts in any of the utilities, we all have to join in in congratulating whoever and for whatever the reason the cuts show up. I guess today there would be a few different groups that would deserve some of the thanks.

And that would be the official opposition, to begin with, for the months of continued pressure, of continued pressure, Mr. Speaker. I recall raising this very issue in the House on different occasions, regarding other jurisdictions throughout Canada that in fact had made this same move or similar move months ago. And it was in fact the Saskatchewan utility that held off for some time, and perhaps they shouldn't have. But nonetheless, we do appreciate whatever cuts there can be for the consumers

of the province.

And we wait with bated breath for the day when SaskPower, SGI (Saskatchewan Government Insurance), SaskTel, STC (Saskatchewan Transportation Company), and other utilities and corporations will follow suit, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Goohsen: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In our party we have said, as you well know, that we will give credit where credit is due and try to straighten things out where they need change.

So to give credit where credit is due, I wouldn't really want to look at the official opposition nor would I want to look at the government. I would rather look at the well-head price of gas, which has gone down. And we're glad that the system is built in such a way that it can, at some time, perhaps a long time, at least after a long while, get back to the consumers.

Unfortunately though, Mr. Speaker, the minister alludes to the fact that these reductions might increase for us the potential to get new industry. Well in the same breath he said these rates vary up and down. He's glad that now they've gone down he can pass the saving on. The reality is though that the well-head price of gas could go back up very quickly and he will have to raise it. So there is nothing in this process that will encourage anybody in industry to come to Saskatchewan because this is not the problem with our province.

Most certainly we think that the minister has done the right thing, to reduce this cost at this time. However, we would remind the government that if they had placed into place a utility rate review commission, such as we had recommended last year and introduced legislation on, then in fact we would now have this saving already passed on to the people two months ago.

And we might also point out that while we see a 2.4 per cent decrease for farmers, and we're happy about that, there's also then tied a 40-cent increase, so we're not really sure what the bottom line is here. But we do see, of course, that the cost of power has gone up by an average of \$10 per bill for farmers, which more than ate up any saving in the gas.

And of course then again, I have people phoning me and telling me that their natural gas bills, because we've had such a stressful, cold winter, have sky-rocketed. So the small decrease has really not helped very many people because we've had to burn so much gas just to stay warm.

I'd also like to remind the minister that in this program he has a unique opportunity to pass on the opportunity for people in areas to use gas that don't, at the present time, have it. And yet they've totally ignored the opportunity to put gas into those places that haven't got it. I refer to Frontier, Saskatchewan, where a large groups of farmers would like to have natural gas delivered to their farms. And the minister has totally ignored those people and their request to have those lines put in at a reasonable cost, so that they too can become consumers and to help to make this process work.

So, Mr. Speaker, we would remind the minister that the people

of Saskatchewan need attention. We would remind the minister that the well-head costs should be something that are reflected in our prices. And we would congratulate him for reflecting those things that have gone down, but we encourage him to do a better job of being more reflective of the needs of the people of this province.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 63 — An Act respecting the Saskatchewan Pension Annuity Fund

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I move that first reading of a Bill respecting the Saskatchewan Pension Annuity Fund be now introduced and read the first time.

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

Bill No. 64 — An Act respecting Pensions for Public Employees

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Mr. Speaker, I move that first reading of a Bill respecting Pensions for Public Employees be now introduced and read the first time.

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

Bill No. 65 — An Act to amend The Superannuation (Supplementary Provisions) Act

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I move that first reading of a Bill to amend The Superannuation (Supplementary Provisions) Act be now introduced and read the first time.

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

ORDERS OF THE DAY

WRITTEN QUESTIONS

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — Thank you. I rise to table question no. 28.

The Speaker: — The answer to question 28 is tabled.

The answer to question 29 is converted to motions for return (debatable).

SPECIAL ORDER

ADJOURNED DEBATES

MOTION FOR COMMITTEE OF FINANCE (BUDGET DEBATE)

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Ms. MacKinnon that the Assembly resolve itself into the Committee of Finance.

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to join in the budget debate here this afternoon and talk about the events that have unfolded with respect to the budget and people's thoughts on it.

Saskatchewan people have sacrificed a lot to balance the budget in Saskatchewan. We all recognize that. They've had to bear the brunt of numerous tax increases — sales taxes, fuel taxes, income taxes, deficit surtax fees, and the like.

But, Mr. Speaker, the budget is balanced and we have to and we do give credit, as the member from Cypress said, we do give credit where credit is due. It is balanced and we certainly agree with balancing budget. We don't agree with how it has been done, but the fact that it is done I think is important.

People in Saskatchewan now, however, pay much more for power, for telephones, for natural gas, for vehicle insurance — way more than they did a few short years ago. The bottom line, Mr. Speaker, is that Saskatchewan people are paying more for everything and receiving less in programs and services than ever before.

The average Saskatchewan family of four is paying 5,300 more dollars today in government taxes, utilities, and fees than they were four short years ago — \$5,300 more for a family of four in this province. That's a pretty hefty increase, Mr. Speaker. And it has hurt. It has hurt the people of this province.

But in the end, Saskatchewan families were willing to sacrifice now to secure their future and the future of their children later. That is why Saskatchewan families deserve a big pat on the back — because they have balanced the budget; they have paid the price.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Boyd: — They also deserve something else from this government that they refuse to give them, Mr. Speaker, and that's a reward for their efforts.

Taxpayers in this province have been promised many rewards from the NDP members across the way. They've been promised tax relief since the NDP were in opposition, and there has been no tax relief. Instead, there has been tax increase after tax increase heaped on families that cannot afford it any longer.

This budget states that the NDP are going to review Saskatchewan's tax system to assess its fairness and effectiveness, and that the government will report its findings back next year.

Well, Mr. Speaker, it's disappointing that the government wants to review and review and review again, and not take any action on tax relief for Saskatchewan families. After all, the NDP government has been in power now for about five years. Wouldn't you think that a tax system review should be completed by now? Once again the bottom line is that tax relief

is desperately needed and another review is simply nothing more than an excuse for the government to put it off for another year.

Taxpayers have been promised by the members opposite that any cuts to government spending would come at the top. That's what the Premier said in his \$30,000 televised infomercial. That's pretty hard to see that when the Premier and all of his NDP colleagues refuse to forgo a \$4,400 windfall this year, and the increase was never intended to be paid to them. An increase, Mr. Speaker, that is unjustifiable and they know it.

Instead of doing the right thing and not accepting the money, all 42 government MLAs are taking the money, Mr. Speaker, and they're running with it. But as the saying goes, you can run but you can't hide. And I assure you members opposite, that when the voters of Saskatchewan get an opportunity to mark an X once again, we will be reminding them of it every single opportunity we can.

They will remember, Mr. Speaker. I think instead of playing fast and loose with the numbers as the Premier has tried to do by saying it only amounts to about a 600 or an \$800 increase instead of 4,400, they're really simply standing in front of television cameras and spouting lame excuses why the NDP need the money, their members. I suggest government members take a close look at what they're doing.

(1430)

They'd better, Mr. Speaker, because I think Saskatchewan taxpayers are. It's pretty hard for the average working person out there to understand how the same MLAs who are saying sorry, we have to cut jobs in this province, programs, and services, and by the way there's no tax relief in sight, at the same time all of those NDPs are slipping the money into their own pockets. People are cynical, Mr. Speaker, and they have every right to be.

One individual wrote a letter to the editor in the March 28 edition of the *Star-Phoenix*. And, Mr. Speaker, there was very harsh words. And I want to quote from the letter that was printed in the paper. The quote is the following:

With regard to the NDP MLAs' recent theft of public money, I suggest that every taxpayer in this province hold back \$4,300 of provincial tax and nonchalantly explain that, because it is a "bump" and "one-time thing," it somehow doesn't matter.

The statement pretty well sums it up. The NDP have begun to think that the rules are different for their MLAs than they are for taxpayers. And that is a dangerous thing. That's the slippery slope to losing the next election, I would suggest to you people. They have completely lost touch with the average person out there and the average taxpayer in this province.

You see taxpayers actually were willing to believe you, Mr. Premier, when you promised cuts would start from the top. Everyone, I think, was supportive of that. Everyone believed that you were going to actually do that. Unfortunately the Premier knew all along that he was dangling a carrot in front of

the public in order to sell his upcoming budget. Taxpayers didn't expect what the Premier meant when he said that tax cuts would start below his caucus and proceed down from there.

The Premier almost promised to cut the size of his cabinet during his televised address a month or so ago. A few days later, when questioned by reporters, he had no idea when those cuts would take place. He threw out 12 months or 18 months or 24 months. He threw out so many numbers, Mr. Speaker, that everyone thought he was just joking in the end. Once again he knew exactly what he was doing when he nonchalantly threw out his promise to look at cutting the size of cabinet.

Unfortunately for the NDP across the way, taxpayers aren't interested in playing your little games any longer. They're not interested in empty promises. They're interested in a government that acts on the promises that they've made. Mr. Speaker, taxpayers are interested in the truth, and unfortunately this government has not given them that. The members opposite have made many, many promises as well.

Recently the Finance minister raised the hopes of the business community in Saskatchewan and the general public by stating that a reduction in the provincial sales tax will be coming in the not-too-distant future. The business community was excited about that and hopeful that her statements meant a possible cut in this budget, Mr. Speaker, not some distant budget.

I guess individuals attending the meeting should have asked her for a definition of what she thinks not-too-distant future is, because later we all found out that there is no such plan in place, and a reduction won't come for years, Mr. Speaker — I suspect a couple of months before the NDP call the next provincial election. And all of a sudden all of the reviews will be completed, and there will be some sort of tax relief at that point.

Overall, Mr. Speaker, this budget is not a good budget, but is not a terrible budget either. From history we have learned that the philosophy of the members opposite is to tell us that we're all going to get a big kick in the head and instead when they kick us in the shins, we breathe a sigh of relief.

For instance, the NDP promised, Mr. Speaker, a 2 per cent increase to universities the year prior and during the election campaign. And then after the election, all campaign promises are off and instead we probably have to slash education spending is what they said. And then they freeze university operating grants this year and then cut them next year.

Or how about the promise to increase K to 12 spending by 2 per cent as well as the Education minister's promise to cover all costs of any boosts to teachers' salaries and benefits. Well instead of a 2 per cent increase, K to 12 gets \$2 million which won't even cover the increase in teachers' salaries and benefits. And the K to 12 system will have to slash teachers as a result of that budget — and programs — once again.

I remember a time when the member from Riversdale — and I'm sure you will as well, Mr. Speaker — while he was the leader of the opposition, sitting on this side of the House, said in the legislature, don't let anyone tell you that the money isn't

there for health and education. The money is there.

Well, Mr. Premier, where is the money today? Where is the promise that you made to the people of Saskatchewan? Where is the so-called increase that you were promising with respect to education funding, the K to 12 education institutes, universities, SIAST (Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology)? Where is your promise today?

Just a little reminder of a couple of things the Premier said, before sitting in the Premier's chair, about education funding. The funny thing, Mr. Speaker, is that the member was making those comments after universities received a little over 2 per cent in funding at the time. Here's one comment:

... I think every one of us in this House understands that these cut-backs to higher learning university education by the government opposite are not only an attack on education and the opportunities ... (for the) youth ... (of) tomorrow, but it's really an attack on one of our largest economic engines in our economy in Saskatchewan.

Hansard May 7, 1990, made by the now Premier, Mr. Speaker.

Or how about this one that he made:

... what do you suggest the president of the University of Saskatchewan do? Should he increase the professor-student ratios? Should he increase the tuition ... by 10 per cent ... (or) 20 per cent or 40 per cent or (even) higher? What courses or college should (be eliminated)? ... What precisely do you think Dr. Ivany should do in order to pick up the funding shortfall due to your budget decisions a few weeks ago?

Again, May 9 ... or pardon me, May 7, 1990.

Mr. Speaker, the member added that the NDP would give education a top priority — March 21, 1990. And I think this one's probably my favourite, Mr. Speaker, although there are many, many to choose from. The member said the former government was cutting back on their own responsibilities for education and loading up on the local property taxpayers, and that's wrong. How about standing up and facing your responsibilities for the children of tomorrow? That was one of the comments that the Premier has made. He made that back in 1990, April 19.

Well how about it now, Mr. Premier? The sky was going to fall because the university received an increase of a little over 2 per cent at that time in funding, close to 3 per cent. And you said nothing about the short five ... that 5 per cent, anything less than 5 per cent was unacceptable. The members across the way should remember the same questions from the member of Riversdale posed a few years back.

How about standing up for your responsibility for children, for taxpayers, and for everyone else in this province? How about fulfilling your promises that you've been making for the last number of years? How about cutting from the top? How about handing back the \$4,000-plus bonus that each one of you are going to receive? How about leading by example?

Mr. Speaker, if the Premier and his colleagues would just take the lead and prove to Saskatchewan families that they are serious about their commitments, I'm sure they could salvage, even yet, a bit of their credibility, although I think it would take a lot of work. The members opposite wanted so badly for this issue to go away because they know that they are getting just slammed in the public on this issue, Mr. Speaker, and they know it. Everywhere we have travelled in the last few weeks, people come up to us and constantly address us about their concern about this, Mr. Speaker, and I'm sure that the NDP MLAs are finding exactly the same things in their own constituency.

Mr. Speaker, the NDP made all kinds of promises prior to the budget. There's one promise however that I'm pleased to see that the NDP has kept, and that's to hold the line on some of the taxes here that we are faced with, like sales tax, the fuel tax, and income tax. I hope this means that the members opposite have finally realized that, no matter what, Saskatchewan taxpayers cannot afford another penny to the provincial government. I hope this means that members opposite finally understand the meaning of diminished returns because we are there, Mr. Speaker.

I hope that this also means that the members opposite won't be reaching again into the wallets of taxpayers through massive utility rate increases, because the general public gets a little nervous when the members opposite say there will be no tax increases since the promise is usually followed by a big hike in telephone rates, in natural gas rates, power, or vehicle insurance rates in this province.

The important point to remember, Mr. Speaker, is that while the government says there will be no new taxes, all of us will feel, in this budget, a tax increase regardless. Municipalities will be feeling the pinch, Mr. Speaker. Education will be hurting, Mr. Speaker. Municipal governments will struggle to maintain a frozen level of funding and get prepared to deal with a \$20 million reduction next year.

For example, think of what the slash means to the city of Regina alone. Right now Regina receives about \$11 million in revenue sharing from the province. SUMA (Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association) has already said that a \$20 million reduction next will mean about a 30 per cent decrease in their funding — 30 per cent decrease.

So municipal governments will have nowhere else to go but to the property tax base to fill the gap in. But then, Mr. Speaker, the NDP will be happy because their service district Act will be in place, and a new level of government bureaucracy it creates can now take over running these municipalities, and they can say, we didn't make any of those decisions; someone else did it before us.

Mr. Speaker, it's sad to see the members opposite renegeing on promise after promise. I want the members opposite to know that though I understand that there are challenges in government — NDP members have often spoken about federal cut-backs, federal transfer cut-backs, and I know the effect that they are having on the people of Saskatchewan — however, much as I

appreciate how hard it is to meet the challenges in government, I also know that a government's priorities reflect in its policies. And, Mr. Speaker, this government's policies are, as my daughter would say, way harsh — way harsh on jobs and small business and on Saskatchewan people.

The NDP have no trouble binding the hands of school boards with increased costs through workers' compensation, labour standards, and other pro-union legislation, and refusing to cover the costs of new contracts with teachers. The STF (Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation) says the NDP budget will, and I quote, Mr. Speaker: "do serious damage to the quality of children's education." That's from their own news release of March 28.

If that's the case this year, just imagine what further damage will be done to the K to 12 system or post-secondary education institutes in next year's budget. Further teacher lay-offs, cuts to university programs and quotas, possible elimination of entire colleges, bigger classrooms with higher teacher ratios — that is what we can expect from this budget. That's the budget that was supposed to protect education; at least that's what they promised.

And now we can expect that our university students graduating this year again will head to other provinces to find work because there's none here in this province.

The NDP have no trouble telling small businesses to create jobs, but they almost make it impossible for businesses to survive. NDP hikes to the PST (provincial sales tax) are way out of line. Union-preference tendering is unfair and costly. You've got far too many nuisance fees to businesses. And again pro-labour legislation forced on our province has cost Saskatchewan people jobs.

Mr. Speaker, there are just a few examples the members opposite are . . . of saying one thing and doing the other. Maybe there is a legitimate excuse, Mr. Speaker. Maybe the editorialists are right, and maybe the NDP do suffer from mad cow disease. That would explain a lot of things around here, Mr. Speaker. That would explain a lot of things around here, Mr. Speaker. That would explain a lot.

The bottom line here is, is that the government has failed to cut from the top down. They've failed to provide a short-term or a long-term job creation strategy. And, Mr. Speaker, down the road, we'll all have our taxes increased as a result of this budget.

(1445)

It all comes down to priorities, Mr. Speaker. And as far as I'm concerned, the government has its priorities in the wrong place. It's evidenced in this budget, in the NDP policies and legislation. It's how they say one thing to everyone and do exactly the opposite in every way.

That is the reason why, Mr. Speaker, more than ever that is the reason why, Mr. Speaker, even though the budget had some good points about it — and I pointed them out — that's why I cannot support this budget being brought forward.

And that is why, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to move the following amendment, seconded by my colleague from Cannington, the following amendment to the motion:

That the words be added after the word "finance":

And that, in considering the 1996-97 budget estimates, this Assembly demand that MLAs' take-home pay be reduced by an amount equivalent to the one-time windfall MLAs will receive in 1996 as a result of delay in the implementation of the McDowell report, which amounts to approximately \$4,000 for each Regina MLA and \$4,400 for each non-Regina MLA.

And I would move that following amendment, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Order. I've not had the opportunity to review the amendment beforehand. I'd just like to take a moment to reflect on its acceptance.

Order, order. On reviewing the wording of the amendment, there is one word which is troublesome, which I will provide the hon. member the opportunity to change if he wishes, and that's the word "demand." If he would change the word to "require."

Mr. Boyd: — Yes, I would be prepared to accept that, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: — Order, order, order. Order.

The division bells rang from 2:50 p.m. until 3 p.m. Amendment negatived on the following recorded division.

Yeas — 5

Boyd	D'Autremont	Toth
Heppner	Goohsen	

Nays — 33

Van Mulligen	Mitchell	Lingenfelter
Shillington	Anguish	Atkinson
Tchorzewski	Johnson	Whitmore
Kowalsky	Koenker	Trew
Scott	Nilson	Serby
Stanger	Hamilton	

The Speaker: — Order. I will ask all members to come to order. And we know that the votes are not debatable, and nor is interference in the process of taking the vote. I'll ask the cooperation of all members.

Murray	Langford	Wall
Kasperski	Sonntag	Jess
Flavel	Murrell	Thomson
Aldridge	McLane	McPherson
Belanger	Bjornerud	Krawetz
Gantefoer		

Mr. Whitmore: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I would like to spend a few short minutes of the time of the legislature today to talk about the budget that was presented . . .

The Speaker: — Order. The Speaker is finding it impossible to hear the hon. member for Regina Northwest engage in his debate and I'll ask for the cooperation of all members of the Assembly.

Mr. Whitmore: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is certainly pleasant to see when the opposition do not wish to hear good news and they're more concerned about other issues, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I want to talk about the budget that was presented here last Thursday in this House by our hon. Finance minister. Mr. Speaker, we are talking about a budget that has set the cornerstone for the protection of cornerstones in the province of Saskatchewan for the next four years, Mr. Speaker.

This has not been an easy budget, Mr. Speaker, for the province to determine, in terms of this government, to put forward this budget. In order for us to have a balanced budget, in order for us to protect those cornerstones that are important to the people of Saskatchewan — health, education, and social services, Mr. Speaker — Mr. Speaker, a budget that was presented here on Thursday is one that the people in my riding, Saskatoon Northwest, will like.

Mr. Speaker, there are no new tax increases. To the people of Saskatoon Northwest this is very important. Also, Mr. Speaker, these people have spoken what they want protected, as I said — health, social services, and education, Mr. Speaker. This government went out and consulted with the people in terms of dealing with these difficult decisions.

Mr. Speaker, I too tried to get the people of my constituency to participate in this consultation process. And we sent out the questionnaire to 500 people within the riding, Mr. Speaker, to find out their feelings of what's going on. This is taking democracy to a new step, to a new level in terms of discussion, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Whitmore: — And couched in that discussion that has taken place in terms of the consultation process, Mr. Speaker, which was outlined by the Minister of Finance, was the federal offloading that has taken place in this province, Mr. Speaker, to the tune of, this year, of \$114 million. And by the year 1999 to the year 2000, Mr. Speaker, to the tune of \$242 million, Mr. Speaker.

But we did not take an attitude, Mr. Speaker, of going out and hacking and slashing and making these hits direct to — in terms of the federal offload — to health, social services, and education, Mr. Speaker.

We took a different approach. We didn't take the Mike Harris approach. We didn't take the Ralph Klein approach. And when one looks at the model in Alberta, we see now that Ralph Klein

has blinked and said: I've gone too far. He has gone too far in health care, and rescinded some of the action that he has done, Mr. Speaker.

We protected those cornerstones, Mr. Speaker. In health, we provided the shortfall in funding and made sure there wasn't a cut of \$47 million, but we put \$47 million of new money in there just so our budget stays even and the people have the health care system they deserve in this province, Mr. Speaker. Social services, Mr. Speaker — 52 million new dollars to cover off the shortfall left by the federal government, Mr. Speaker — \$52 million; again, new money. Post-secondary education, Mr. Speaker — \$11 million of new money that we have provided to protect these institutions up against the buttress of what the federal government was doing, Mr. Speaker.

Yet, though, we hear from the opposition, Mr. Speaker, the question of tax relief. The Leader of the Third Party went on and on about tax relief; the Finance critic of the official opposition went on and on about tax relief. Mr. Speaker, if we'd had the \$114 million that we had today, if we could hang on to the \$242 million we will lose in 1999 and the year 2000, we could provide meaningful tax relief to the people of Saskatchewan. We could further lower the debt in this province, Mr. Speaker, and do it without suffering the pain that we're doing right now. As I say, this has not been an easy budget but we have protected the cornerstones, Mr. Speaker.

In protecting the programs, in finding the new money for this budget, Mr. Speaker, we went out and we dealt with problems that we had to deal with in terms of dealing with the administration costs of government and the way government is run. We found \$50 million to cut from government without cutting programs, dealing with the question of employees and how to restructure and redefine government and how we can best provide those services to people, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, job loss is tough, but we took an approach, Mr. Speaker, that was humane and it was compassionate. We instituted programs that protected our employees, Mr. Speaker, as best we can when dealing with the question of job loss. We provided . . . working with our employees, particularly those who represent those employees, the Saskatchewan Government Employees Union — working with them to develop a system by which we could do this, Mr. Speaker. Yes, we will have 582 fewer positions, as outlined in the budget, Mr. Speaker, but with that, with a package of early retirement, with a package that understands the sensitivity of those people that need to move.

I know in one case, in a case in Melfort, Mr. Speaker, there was an employee of the Department of Agriculture and it was difficult for her to move. But we work within a system, Mr. Speaker, where this person now could move over into the Department of Justice and fill a vacancy, Mr. Speaker. Doing so allowed us to do the budget reduction, it allowed us to solve a problem in Justice, and it also showed the spirit of cooperation that now exists within departments to deal with the serious issue of reducing government, Mr. Speaker.

And this is an important task. And I give full credit to our employees and their representatives of dealing with this issue,

Mr. Speaker, and I'm proud of how we went about doing it. As I said, job loss is not easy, but we picked a very humane way by which to do it, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, when we talk about that question of the elimination of the jobs, the other factor that was involved in the government decisions was to make sure the public impact was minimal, to make sure that services are provided to the people of Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker. And this has been the overarching theme in terms by which we make sure that government works effectively, that services are provided.

I think a fine example is that where we found the efficiencies of approximately \$6 million out of the Department of Highways. And that money is being put back into maintenance and construction, Mr. Speaker, which is vitally important to the province. In light of the changes that are coming in this province regarding the grain transportation system and the difficulties our road system will have, it's important that we invest as much of our resources that we can, Mr. Speaker. But they are limited.

And we are faced with another problem, with another download, in terms of the change in the western grain transportation payment by which this province will lose \$300 million a year. We could build a lot of roads, Mr. Speaker; we could improve a lot of roads, Mr. Speaker, for \$300 million a year. But we don't have that, and we will have to deal with that as a province.

But I tell you here and now, this government will fight to its utmost to remind Ottawa, the federal government, of its responsibilities to this province. We will not simply lie down and let the federal government do what it's going to do to this province, Mr. Speaker. We're fighting back now with this budget.

But at the same time, Mr. Speaker, this province has been ready in terms of the action we have taken in the last four years, in terms of our budget approach . . . allowed us to prepare for this. It has allowed us to have the ability to deal with these unforeseen circumstances. We've been able to get control of our own financial resources, which are vital.

And if there's an underlying theme about this budget, it's taking control. It's paying the debt down. By the end of this term, \$2.4 billion of the debt will be paid down. We will be in control, Mr. Speaker, to make further decisions that are positive for the people of Saskatchewan. We will not be at the mercy of the banks and the bond people in terms of what we do, Mr. Speaker. So this is important.

So as I said, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we're pleased with this budget we put forward. It shows the compassion that we need as a government. It shows the four-year plan and where we're going to be. And people know that we have the credibility of meeting those targets.

So I'm very pleased to have the opportunity today to speak on behalf of the budget, and I will be supporting the motion supporting the budget, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Kowalsky: — Well thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I had an opportunity to be in Prince Albert this weekend. And during that time, I just took some time to go and speak to some business people, people who belong to the chamber of commerce, some professionals in education, some professionals in health. I took opportunity to speak to my neighbours and to some elected officials from municipalities and from the health board.

And I have to say, Mr. Speaker, that the question I posed to them was of course about the budget. I wanted to get their feedback. I wanted to get some feeling whether they felt that the consultation that we had gone through was something that had been worthwhile. Did we react in a way that they were expecting us to as a result of the consultations?

(1515)

And I can say, Mr. Speaker — and I'm very pleased to be able to say — that in general people that I spoke to were very impressed with the budget delivered by the Minister of Finance last Thursday. They were largely impressed for three reasons, Mr. Speaker.

The first reason was because we shielded the health, the education, and the social service programs from the impact of the federal budget. And the second reason was because they saw that we provided no tax hikes in this budget. And thirdly, they were impressed by the fact that we set up a balanced budget and promised to balance it in the future.

Mr. Speaker, shielding the health, education, and social services programs from the federal gouge was not an easy task. In fact if we had passed it on to the people of Saskatchewan, those people who are most vulnerable in Saskatchewan, those that are receiving social assistance in some form or other, would have received \$51.9 million less. That would have been a drastic cut to them, to the people who are most vulnerable.

If we had passed on the cuts, the federal cuts, to health care, our health boards and our health program in total would have received \$47 million less this year, if we'd passed that on.

If we'd passed on the cuts from the federal budget, our education system would have received \$15.1 million less, Mr. Speaker, less than they did.

The people that I talked to were impressed by the fact that we listened, that we took to heart that education, social services, and health were crucial to our way of life and that we back-filled the gouging that was left by the \$114 million shortfall of the federal Liberals.

Mr. Speaker, I mentioned that they were impressed by the fact that there were no tax hikes. In fact they were quite impressed by the statements that they heard about the continuation of the aviation fuel tax reductions. They like to see the continued reductions to the manufacturing tax that we brought in last year. They were appreciative that every citizen who pays income tax will have their deficit surtax reduced \$150 this year, a full \$150,

and applies for a two income family. That would come up to \$300.

People in the trucking industry are interested that we're responding to making things more equitable for them, particularly those who are working on interprovincial trucking. This news that there is no tax hikes and that we are continuing with the tax reductions is very reassuring to our business community.

The third thing that people were impressed with was the fact that we were able to do the back-filling to keep our social programs; that we did not increase taxes and yet at the same time that we were able to balance the budget.

We were able to balance the budget with a surplus, Mr. Speaker, a surplus of \$358 million. Not only was the budget balanced without the sale of the Cameco shares — because 350 of the \$358 million comes from the sale of the Cameco shares, and that will go directly to paying off the debt — but there is a built-in \$8 million cushion to balance the budget just the way . . . without the sale of the Cameco shares.

We are projecting, Mr. Speaker, four more balanced budgets with modest surpluses to pay back debt that was incurred during the heavy spending '80s. That, Mr. Speaker, is very reassuring to our youth, who do not look forward to paying back, or having to pay back, as a result of the heavy spending that was incurred during the '80s.

Mr. Speaker, when they looked at those three things, people told me that they were pleased, they were amazed. Some even said, how did you do it? How did you do it without massive lay-offs, as we're hearing in Alberta? How did you do it without having a strike, as happened in Ontario? How did you do it by having no tax increases?

That was a very significant and penetrating question, Mr. Speaker — how did you do it? And I want to explain just briefly how it was done.

First of all, Mr. Speaker, I want to mention that the decisions taken during the last four years of this government — that is, to keep the budget on track, to stop spending more than we were taking in — played a large part of it. The health reform initiatives that we undertook in the last four years played a large part of it. The planning for the future, the economic development and job creation plan, the *Partnership for Progress*, played a large part of it because without that we could not have absorbed the federal cuts, we may have had to increase taxes, and we might not have been able to balance the budget.

A lot of the credit goes to the people in Saskatchewan, the commercial enterprises in Saskatchewan, because retail sales are up in Saskatchewan. Manufacturing and agriculture value added is up, sales in energy and mines are up. The commercial aspect of Saskatchewan deserves a lot of the credit for this budget as well, Mr. Speaker.

The number of people working in Saskatchewan is up. As a result, our gross national product is increasing at a steady rate

and our tax revenue is up. That was one of the ways that we did it.

Mr. Speaker, another reason that it worked is a credit to all of the people of Saskatchewan, a credit to the Premier, a credit to the Finance minister, a credit to this government, and that is when we made the plan we stuck to it and we stayed on track. And we did not follow the advice of the Tories. We did not follow the advice of the Liberals who told us to sell Cameco at \$24 a share. But we stuck to it.

Mr. Speaker, how we did it provides a strategy which contrasts markedly with the strategy and the ideas of the Tories and the Liberals. We balanced the budget. We saved the programs, not on the backs of those most vulnerable and not at the expenses of the programs which really define our countries.

When you contrast what happened in Alberta where they eliminated the school boards pretty well unilaterally, where they slashed health jobs, where they still are continuing to have health premiums about \$800 a year per family, and where they are encouraging a two-tier health system, Mr. Speaker, that speaks volumes for this government. When you compare with what happened in Manitoba, in Tory Manitoba, where they forced a wage roll-back through an unpaid holiday system to balance their budget.

Mr. Speaker, these things I believe are important to pass on to the people of Saskatchewan and to pass on to everybody that we know, to point out the different ways that things have been done in Saskatchewan than were done in Alberta, Tory Alberta, in Tory Manitoba, and particularly how differently we're handling our budget than was handled by the federal Liberals.

The federal Liberals decided that they should reduce their federal deficit by an 11 per cent cut. And to do that, to make that cut, 75 per cent of the cut that they made was to the health, education, and social services fields. They capped the Canada Assistance Plan two years ago. They made changes to the unemployment insurance program. They offloaded social services . . . an area of social services, the area regarding the payments to aboriginals who live off reserves. And more recently this cut to the Canada Health and Social Transfer program.

Mr. Speaker, I tell you that there is not a heck of a lot of difference between the Liberals at the federal level and the Tories at the provincial level when it comes to commitment to keep health, social services, and education in place. The Sask Tories, we will recall, are the ones that caused the problem in the first place by burgeoning this debt to a \$10 billion figure which results in an \$850 million interest payment year after year after year.

What they were doing was wielding power without responsibility. That seems to have been the prerogative of Grant Devine; that seems to have been the prerogative of Brian Mulroney; it seems to be the prerogative of Tories throughout the ages.

Mr. Speaker, in Saskatchewan and in Canada, the Tories drained the treasury. They were consuming the wealth without

producing it, and the Liberals now are using that as an excuse to weaken our social programs. When you look at it, the Liberals in office in Ottawa today are nothing more than Tories in clean shirts; gentlemen who live by reducing funding to social programs while the Ottawa mandarins and the Ottawa Senate remain fully funded.

Mr. Speaker, I consider it my civic duty to talk about that and to remind people in Saskatchewan, and to pass on to our children and our grandchildren, the stark difference between the action of this New Democratic government and the Tory government previous and the Liberal government in Ottawa.

Mr. Speaker, I've explained a little bit about how we changed the program, how we balanced the budget, about how we did it without increasing taxes, and about how we did by back-filling the holes left by federal Liberals. And I want to just take, in closing, take a minute, by saying why we did what we did.

Mr. Speaker, there is a lot at stake and we are all stakeholders. There's a lot at stake in our country and the vision of our country and the vision of our province. What is at stake is what kind of a country it is that we want to live in. What do we want Canada to be like? Do we want it to be more like the United States of America? Do we want it to be more like Kuwait? Do we want it to be more like Mexico? Or what is it that we want?

Well, Mr. Speaker, I want Canada to be more like Canada. I want Canada to be the country that will continue to be called the best country in the world. And what is it that made us the best country in the world? It was our education program. It was our longevity, dependent on our health program, and it was our standard of living, Mr. Speaker, which means that we provided for all, even the most vulnerable.

Now to get that, you have to have a commitment. You have to have a commitment to education, health, and social services. You cannot use the right-wing philosophy which has a commitment to the market-place and is expecting the market-place to do everything. In the case of market-place, the market-place sets out an agenda where those who are poor, those who are vulnerable, those who are disadvantaged, make do with what they can afford, or they do without. That's the market-place unfettered. Our government believes that education, health, and social services, should not be at the vagaries of the market-place.

I believe, Mr. Speaker, that Canadians in general have rejected the idea that market forces should determine what goes on in such areas as health, education, and social services. So that, Mr. Speaker, is why we did it. And that, Mr. Speaker, is why I am going to be supporting this budget. And that, Mr. Speaker, is why I am proud that we did it.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(1530)

Mr. Gantfoer: — Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I take this opportunity with great pleasure to rise and give my thoughts on the budget that has been tabled this past week.

And you know I am torn between the advice my mother gave me some time ago when she said that if you can't say anything nice about something, don't say anything at all. And I know that if I was in that situation, I probably would only be able to speak for a minute or two and the whip of the official opposition and the House Leader said, no you've got to carry this longer than that. So unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, I'm going to have to give a few critical comments as well as some good ones.

First of all, the good ones, because they are shorter. One thing that I think it is very important to say and to quite happily state publicly, that it is important to recognize that this budget is balanced and that the history in the past number of years of hitting targets are indeed something that have happened in Saskatchewan.

And I say that particularly in counterpoint to the decade that we had before this government took office. And I for one have to say that in 1981 or so, I was just about had it in terms of the family of Crown corporations and the arrogance and the amount of out-of-touchness that the previous government had gotten. So that when Grant Devine came forward with a business team and friend of mine who lived down the street from me in Melfort, Saskatchewan, the former member from Melfort, Mr. Hodgins, I actually forgot the fact that my mother and father had raised me to be a Liberal and I voted Conservative.

An Hon. Member: — Shame.

Mr. Gantfoer: — Exactly what my mother said.

And I had great hopes that this was a new type of people that would take common sense in business and bring it to the provincial economy. And I have to say that I was absolutely, terribly devastated by what happened subsequently.

I cannot imagine that any government with any credibility at all could stand up and table a budget that says they're going to have a 500 or \$600 million deficit, and then after an election, when the figures actually come out, that it's 1.2 billion. I can't imagine that there would be something like a 5 or \$600 million whoops that happened.

And it didn't just happen once. It happened year after year after year. And I was totally embarrassed and ashamed. And my mother has forgiven me and I hope other people have as well, for making that one mistake.

And it's what motivated me to let my name stand in 1991. Because I absolutely believed that there had to be a change. And I couldn't buy into the philosophical direction that previous NDP governments were taking this province. Because I did look across and see that Alberta has been an expanding province, and I looked back 75 years when this building itself was built and our forefathers believed that Saskatchewan would be the centre of the western universe, and how much that we've declined under subsequent NDP governments. And so I wanted to put my stamp and to offer suggestions about what could happen if we had some credible people in government.

What has happened in this budget is just a continuation of a four-year plan of picking the pockets of Saskatchewan with absolute abandon as to what's going to happen and the

consequences from it. We simply have to understand that we cannot simply — although as I've indicated earlier, it's important to run numbers that are believable and consistent — we cannot simply look at the numbers. We cannot simply govern a province with a calculator, with no regard to what those decisions are making to real people.

And what has happened in many ways has been devastating to rural Saskatchewan, not because the numbers have been balanced, but because it's been done without any plan and any vision as to what is necessary. And there's a number of areas that are particularly troublesome. And I too this weekend went home to see what the people were thinking about this budget. And they did give you credit for balancing the budget. But they sat down and asked me, can you see a plan in what's going on? And I had to honestly say, other than the straight numbers, there is no plan.

And what happens is we lose track of what the impact of that straight number-crunching means to people. And I had the opportunity to talk to a lady who had her mother in Parkland Regional Care Centre in Melfort, which as many members will know, is a very specialized regional hospital in the north-east that provides particularly quality care for advanced stages of dementia and Alzheimer patients. And this lady told a little story, and I'm going to quote pretty liberally, if you excuse the pun, from it. Because I think it shows the story about what these kind of decisions mean to real people, and we as legislators must never allow ourselves to remove ourselves from that absolute commitment to the people we represent.

And the lady's name is Mrs. Anderson from Aylsham, and she talks about her mother and the difficulty she had finding a place for her mother to be looked after. And she talks about the Parkland hospital and she says, and I quote:

This unit serves the whole North East area of Saskatchewan. During the course of 1991 I visited 4 other locations that have special care facilities, namely Nipawin, Arborfield, Carrot River, and Tisdale. I was told over and over again that the level of care required by my Mother was too advanced for the services they were able to provide. This left only Parkland for us . . . it is not easy to find a place for people with advanced stages of dementia. I wonder if your Health District receives extra funding because of the fact . . . it does serve this large area and will provide care for these advanced dementia cases . . .

Primarily, (she goes on to say) you must understand how volatile these people are. I've been sitting in the common room with my mom and several other residents and witnessed many potential dangerous situations. Times when two male residents that are especially physically strong invade one another's space resulting in instant anger and a strong lashing out . . . times when residents who are pushing themselves around in wheelchairs, come too close to someone toes or legs . . . and again . . . the instant lashing out!

You see, these people seem to have lost their inhibitions . . . they have little control of their feelings, and actions . . . in their condition it seems that for every simple action

there is immediate and quite often negative reaction! You have no idea how frustration is locked into their very being.

Over and over I have watched my Mom, who I always thought was a rather gentle woman, when threatened lash out exactly as I've described above . . .

. . . if a loved one can invoke a fear response like this imagine what happens to the staff from time to time.

I think that staff reduction has resulted in a lack of adequate supervision . . .

She goes on to say and to compliment the Parkland people about the job that they were doing providing for her mother, that it was exemplary, and it gave her mother back some dignity. And she winds up by saying this in her note to me. She says:

. . . there are *two choices* . . . Do you believe that these people are entitled to live out the remainder of their life sentence with some degree of dignity? . . . or . . . would it be cheaper and more expedient to make further cuts to staff, thus increasing the need for increased drug therapy and increased use of restraint to control these people . . . this is the way it is done in many other institutions and private homes.

And she closes by saying this: these are choices that we have to make. And she winds up by saying this:

Remember, if you do this, that you indeed may be striving to maintain and enhance an Alzheimer's Unit that except by the grace of God may be needed for you or me in the space of a very short span of time!

And that's exactly the kind of human story that, I submit, Mr. Speaker, that we forget about when we just make fiscal choices. Fiscal choices may indeed be something that are difficult to do, but we cannot — we cannot — abstract ourselves for those human needs that are being made. And we have done that too much, Mr. Speaker, in the way we've approached our fiscal responsibilities.

Mr. Speaker, I cannot believe when I listen here and hear the Leader of the Third Party, with his self-righteous nonsense that's been going on in the month since this Assembly has convened, and I cannot believe that he truly can understand that the people of this province do not understand the mess that this province has been left in. That's true; I can't accept that there's that much naivety. But at the same time, I also can't accept the flippant blaming that's going on, by the government, of the federal government.

I always seem to remember that I only have two pockets in my pants, and I'm one taxpayer. And if the money comes out of the left pocket or the right pocket, it's still coming out of my pockets. And the federal government has inherited the same kind of amount of messes from subsequent overspending, and we have to clear the debts — no question. And it is absolutely ludicrous to think that Saskatchewan would be extracted or

isolated in isolation from that.

Our job as legislators in this province is to do the job for what we have been entrusted, and that's the governing of this province. And we will have to take responsibility for our own actions. And that's where we seem to forget, that we lose track.

I remember a couple of days ago where I think the member from Regina Victoria or Regina Coronation — I get these wrong, and I know I can't mention names, but I'll try hard — where he suggested that members in this House are numerically challenged. And I know that that's to be true because members opposite have difficulty even understanding the most simple mathematical formulas.

For example, we have documented on more than one occasion with the pipeline project in Humboldt, with the project for SaskTel fire alarm system, where the fact that this government's union-preference policy increases costs anywhere from 20 to 30 per cent. That's true. We've tabled those documents. We sent them opposite. It's there. That is the bald-faced, bold reality; it costs that much more when you have that kind of a policy. By the Minister of Finance's own statements in the budget speech — I believe on page 7 — she said, and I quote: there would be \$630 million of capital projects in this province this year. Six hundred and thirty times 25 per cent is 150 million, somewhere in that order, of money that's being spent needlessly. Now we have to address those kinds of issues; it's that simple. It's a very simple mathematical equation that no one seems to recognize as being a reality that we're facing. And we can't face it. We can't afford that kind of preference. It just won't work.

And you know, when the Premier said, well we've got to ask the people of this province to sacrifice because of the nasty feds, you know, we said okay, let's see where it's going to come from. He said it's going to come from the top. Well it's interesting that, from the top, out of an 80-person office, there's two people being cut.

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

Ms. Murray: — To introduce guests, Mr. Speaker.

Leave granted.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Ms. Murray: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the member from Melfort-Tisdale for the courtesy.

Mr. Speaker, it's a pleasure for me to introduce to you and through you to my colleagues in the Assembly, on behalf of my good friend, the MLA for Weyburn-Big Muddy, 48 grade 7 and 8 students seated in your Gallery.

This group is from Radville High School and they are here attended by their teachers, Lori Bjorklund — I hope I've pronounced that correctly — Brenda Norick, and Lori Larsen. They're also accompanied by their chaperons Beatrice Gilmore and Bev Pirio.

Now you may be interested to know that your MLA's daughter broke her ankle while she was practising her figure skating over the weekend, but I understand she is resting comfortably. And I look forward to spending a few minutes meeting with you on my colleague's behalf.

So I would ask all members to join me in extending a warm welcome to this group from Radville.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

SPECIAL ORDER

ADJOURNED DEBATES

MOTION FOR COMMITTEE OF FINANCE (BUDGET DEBATE) (continued)

Mr. Gantefer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I was saying, it seems passing strange to me that when the Premier is talking about the downsizing and the sacrificing that we all have to make, that he makes a great sacrifice of two people out of an 80-person office. And I really understand how that's really a severe hardship. And at the same time 544-odd civil servants are wondering about the status of their jobs — because it isn't very good — I wonder how the government can sit and justify spending two and a half million dollars for hiring 42 executive positions.

I wonder how they can justify hiring a Liberal lawyer, Harold McKay, at \$11,000 a month. Because the point in this thing is not that it's a Liberal lawyer or not, is the taxpayers shouldn't pay \$11,000 a month for a job that the professional civil service and the department should be doing. It's almost an admission of incompetence.

And I don't understand how the government can justify these kind of cuts and expenditures and then justify hiring a radio talk show personality for \$70,000 a year just to get the PR (public relations) crunch going out to sell this absolute ludicrous message to the people of this province. I don't know how you justify that to the lady whose mom is in Parkland hospital and is worried by the fact that this budget will likely mean the end to that program.

(1545)

How do you justify those things to those people? How do you condemn that woman to a life of being sedated and restrained rather than being cared for in a compassionate way. It goes against everything that your history is bound on because you've gone totally on a fiscal agenda rather than a human agenda. And that is where the tragic flaw in your logic has come about.

We look at what's going to happen in rural Saskatchewan. And Parkland hospital is at great jeopardy. I know that, the people working there know that, and the people whose parents are there know that.

And what they don't understand is how on one hand we can glibly go and spend this money for the special friends of

government and not look after the real needs in a front-line, care-giving institution. I can't explain it to the people in my constituency while that's going on. I don't understand that. I can't explain these kinds of things.

And so what we find lacking in this primarily is a lack of vision. Right now we're told that in education there is no agenda, there is no amalgamations going to be forced of school districts. There's no amalgamation going to be forced on municipal government structures — nothing forced. Sort of do what you like.

And it reminds me of the way health care was approached. There was no plan except tightening the screws, tightening the screws, tightening the screws, closing hospitals in rural Saskatchewan, and give the people no choices to form health districts, which they did do. But there was no vision. The Murray Commission report had an excellent vision for this province and yet we did not look at it and study it seriously.

And now we're faced with repeating the same silly errors. What we've got to do now is step back and pause a while and say, where is the vision? Where are you heading with amalgamations of rural divisions? Where are you heading with amalgamation of school districts? Do they make any sense? Will they be discussed in this legislature and a plan tabled so that we can discuss it? Will there be a plan that's tabled so that we can discuss it with the people in our communities? Or are we going to have, over and over again, where there's just closures?

I got a letter over the weekend from a young lady from Pleasantdale, and I'd like to quote from it as well. She says, and I quote:

My name is Norma Quaroni.

I'm in grade 3 and I don't want our school at Pleasantdale to close. If you (the government) shut our school down Pleasantdale will not be the same community any more.

Pleasantdale school has some of the best teachers. They put lots of extra effort into helping us be like a big family. It's a small school with a big heart. I have just as many opportunities as pupils in bigger schools. Bigger schools are ok. But not always better. Some have big drug problems. At Pleasantdale the teachers teach in such a way they make school fun. Mr. Viczko is awesome. He is a principal who does lots of extra cool things to make the school run good.

I think I'm getting a good education. We have great programs for Remembrance Day, Christmas and the spring tea. Pleasantdale School is full of courage and understanding. They give us hope and help us . . . to learn. This year K-1-2-3-4-5 raised \$430 dollars for Telemiracle in 3 days. We have dancing, skating, gymnastics, piano lessons and other sports. I ride on the bus almost an hour getting to school. My little brother will be 4 when he goes to kindergarten this fall. How long would he have to go on the bus if we had to go to Melfort or Naicam? It would be too far to go for us to be in sports or after-school lessons.

Are you going to take that away from us? I like going to Pleasantdale School. Please don't close it. From Norma Quaroni (age 8).

And there is again the problem. We keep forgetting about the human reality. Here's a young girl who knows, and her family and her parents know, that she's getting good education.

And we have dictated that bigger is better; that amalgamation and centralization and regionalization and all the good buzz-words are better. They're not, Mr. Speaker. They are taking us further and further away from our roots as rural people in this province and that's what made this province something special, and that's what continues to make it something special. But we are in great jeopardy by having this fiscal conservatism, balanced-book mentality of jeopardizing the very roots on which this province was formed.

Mr. Speaker, there are so many things that rural Saskatchewan has to offer. All over the world you see the trends for regionalization and urbanization and all the rest of it, and to some extent we are actively encouraging that by the policies of this government. We are forcing people to leave their rural homes and move to the cities. But they're not just moving to Saskatoon or Regina; they're moving to Calgary and Vancouver and Toronto — all over the place.

And you tell me that the quality of life in these large centres is better? It's not. You know it and I know it and the members opposite know it, but what we don't admit is that the policies of this government are forcing the depopulation of rural Saskatchewan. They're killing opportunities for the people that are the backbone of this province, that made it special.

Mr. Speaker, this government needs a new vision. It needs to redesign how they approach Saskatchewan. They have to think about what the impact of their decisions are on real people and they have to know what the fiscal realities are. The member says they're doing that. Well, Mr. Member, if you would consider what you're doing: you're taking someone else's job when there's little opportunity for education students. Those are the things . . .

The Speaker: — Order. Order. Order, order. Now I simply want to remind the member that rules of debate in the Assembly require that debate is directed through the Speaker, and I'll ask the member to cooperate with that.

Mr. Gantefoer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would ask, Mr. Speaker, then, how a government can justify when one of their members takes jobs that are critical opportunities for graduating university students?

This morning when I was driving in from Melfort there was an interview by a professor at the university who said there are very few opportunities in education for full-time jobs — some part-time ones, but the opportunities for education students are very bleak.

And, Mr. Speaker, this government condones one of its members taking one of those scarce jobs from one of our children and I find that as a perfect example of why this

government is out of touch with the real folks that make this province special.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Gantefoer: — Mr. Speaker, these are the reasons why I have a fundamental problem. It's not the numbers. This government is to be commended because at least they can add and they know when the books are balanced. And it's arguable if they've done it in the right way or way or not, at least they're consistent in their performance in delivering what they said they would do as opposed to previous Conservative government that wasn't even within a shotgun blast on a barn wall near to it. It just didn't happen. And so they should be commended for that.

But Mr. Speaker, where they've fallen down tremendously is they've lost touch with the reality of this, the people that they represent, and in four years — three years, 1999 — the people of this province will indeed remember what has happened here and they will mark their X's. And, Mr. Speaker, because of those reasons I will not be able to support the budget.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Hamilton: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to enter into the budget debate this afternoon, although I was wondering, Mr. Speaker, if someone had not told the member opposite that April Fool's officially ends by noon on the day of April 1. For today, Mr. Speaker, he's beginning to seem to have a lapse in memory that today is the day that the Canada health and social transfer kicks in. It's going to affect everyone and I think the member opposite should know that it's going to affect the people he's talking about when he talks about keeping in mind the face of human consequence in the province.

Sherri Torjman of the Caledonian Institute of Social Policy says:

Beginning today and during the next two years, the Canada Health and Social Transfer will replace all the programs that have governed how Ottawa sent money to the provinces for health, post-secondary education, and welfare.

The single fund will be (reduced by) \$7 billion . . . (in the next) two years.

Mr. Speaker, that will have a major impact on the provinces. And how we've chosen to address the impact is to put our monies in to replace what Ottawa is taking out of health, education, and social programming in this province because we're concerned about the withdrawal of monies from Ottawa and what that means to our basic quality of life in our province.

The provinces will get, in return, more say on how the money is going to be spent. And in many cases we've heard from people who say what it means is that the standard for social programming in the country will be . . . you can't deny anyone social programming in the province they live. But we've had examples now of other provinces who've then chosen to send the responsibility to someone else by a one-way bus ticket out of their province, and in many cases the one-way bus ticket to

Saskatchewan, a province that has traditionally looked after its people in greatest need with compassion and care.

For the poor, Sherri Torjman says that this will mean that there will be work for welfare cheques that will be significantly smaller. For students, it will mean sky-rocketing tuitions, and in some cases they'll begin to have student loans in excess of \$10,000. For the sick, it could mean closed hospitals, extra fees and poor service.

For the member opposite to get up and not recognize that the impact that that would have if we had not chosen in this budget to back-fill for the federal Liberal government, Mr. Speaker . . . If Canadians don't see their faces in those crowds who will be affected by the Canada health and social transfer, she says to those people, understand that social programs will affect everyone. Everybody comes in contact with social programs because they do mean — in the province of Saskatchewan — health, education and social programs.

Mr. Speaker, so I therefore find it passing strange that the member opposite would stand up and say that this budget is the one that is going to affect the face of those programs, and refusing to admit to himself — I guess as an April fool's joke on himself — that you lay the blame squarely in the laps of the federal government who've chosen to withdraw 73 per cent of their budget dollars in the area of health, education and social programs.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Hamilton: — Mr. Speaker, this is the first time I'm able to enter into the debate and return debate to the throne speech or the budget speech, and so I also wanted to take an opportunity to respond to the member opposite, but also to take this opportunity to tell people that I'm very pleased to stand as their representative in Regina Wascana Plains in this Assembly. It's indeed humbling to know that they've put their trust again in me to allow me to serve in this Assembly as their representative.

And, Mr. Speaker, it's also another first because, as their representative, this is the first time I've had an opportunity to get outside of the city limits and campaign in one of the first urban-rural ridings. Therefore in the province, Mr. Speaker, Regina Wascana Plains is one of them. In being one of the four urban-rural constituencies, the people in Wascana Plains are predominantly middle income wage-earners, small-business owners, small-business operators, farmers or retired farm couples, and people who are employed in the public services. They are people who are employed perhaps as educators, health care professionals, civic employees.

These people, Mr. Speaker, unlike the members opposite in the opposite benches, are realists. And they know that these are not easy times to craft budgets. With a backdrop of shrinking transfer payments, with a backdrop of taxpayers who are saying they're suffering from stress and tax fatigue, and with the call for us to preserve the quality of services — add all that to the unenviable task of balancing interests in the budget and also balancing the budgets after the 10 years of the Tory legacy — they know that indeed it is challenging times to present a budget

to the people of Saskatchewan.

They also know that Saskatchewan people are caring people. And they know in many circumstances that they can say, there but the grace of God go I. And they would like assurances that we're looking after those who are most vulnerable in our communities.

Mr. Speaker, the budget we have before us, after months of hard work, extensive consultation, and much debate, can be summed up by a budget that is a budget of cooperation, of caring and compassion, and a budget of community and defining ourselves as neighbours.

(1600)

And it can also be summed up by the heading that we saw on budget day from *The Globe and Mail*. It said, "Again common sense in Saskatchewan"—common sense as we take our province into the next century.

So it became clear, Mr. Speaker, as I looked at the economic indicators that would form the backdrop of economic information to the budget, as I felt the blows as our people did in Saskatchewan from the federal government's withdrawal from some of its commitments to health and education and social transfers, and as I talked with a broad section of people not only from my constituency, but people from all sectors in the community — from business to labour, from seniors to young adults — that there were four major themes that were emerging.

And because we've worked long hours to claim this budget as our own, we all know that the four areas that we wanted to highlight in our budget were, the first one, building prosperity and jobs for the new century. The second was to preserve the cornerstones of our quality of life. The third, to look at ourselves and look at how we govern in the province of Saskatchewan and restructure and streamline those government mechanisms. And the fourth, to provide the freedom to choose and control our future — perhaps the most important legacy that we'll leave for the next generations in Saskatchewan.

I won't speak long on each of those areas, but I really did want to talk very quickly about jobs and the economy.

For in this budget, we're looking at support to small business that creates a vast majority of the jobs in the province by stimulating investment and job growth . . . And by continuing the 9 per cent investment tax on capital purchases for manufacturing processing; targeting those dollars that we can provide in a reduction in corporate tax rate on manufacturing and processing profits that's based on the level of business activity and the jobs that are created for Saskatchewan people in the province; supporting the growth of the small business sector by cutting through some of the red tape with one-stop centres to make it easier to complete the paperwork that's required to start up a small business; and by continuing to support communities through the REDAs, the regional economic development authorities; and by continuing to provide funding for community-based regional economic development organizations to help the tremendous potential in northern Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker.

In the area of compassion and cooperation, I think that many of the members will know that we've done a lot just by trying to find dollars elsewhere in our budget to make up for the lack of transfers in the Canada Health and Social Transfer that I talked about earlier.

But in doing that, we're also going to be developing made-in-Saskatchewan training and upgrading strategies, coordinating the Departments of Post-Secondary Education and Skills Training that would be most important in the creation of jobs in the province, and highlighting that portfolio by having a minister who will pay full-time attention to the important job of preparing our next generation for the new economy.

Mr. Speaker, and perhaps the most important one — and the one I would like to highlight for the next generation in this province — is that Saskatchewan will be the province that sets the course for the freedom that is unique, and that's the freedom to choose our future and where our program dollars and funding will go by providing balanced budgets and by lowering the debt that we leave for the next generation in Saskatchewan. We'll continue to balance our budgets for the next four years and continue to prepare our citizens for the new century, Mr. Speaker.

I'd like to thank, in an odd way, the members of the Conservative Party opposite because they've also helped us in crafting our budget . . . to look clearly at what we would not do as we present a budget to the people in Saskatchewan. And that would be to stand up in front of cameras and claim that yes, we support balanced budgets, but we would deliver nine years of whoops budgets that say whoops to \$1.2 billion of debt and deficit financing in this province each and every year they governed.

And to thank the Liberal members opposite as well, who are going to somehow indicate to us that they know how to craft a budget. And I would not craft ours in that way. I wouldn't begin by a statement of saying that in this period, we'll cut taxes, and somehow we'll see unprecedented economic growth, 8 per cent each year, because of that happening.

But in doing that, they're also going to spend more on programs and services. And in the same breath, they're apologizing to the people of the province of Saskatchewan for their federal counterparts, the Liberals in Ottawa, who are showing us that how they would do that and how they would try and begin to address their deficit would be somehow to improve the quality of life by cutting health, education, and social programs first. That's the plan I hear from the members opposite . . . and at the same time, Mr. Speaker, to still be running deficit budgets.

So I want to thank the members of the Conservative Party and the members of the Liberal Party for clearly defining for me what I do not ever want to see in a budgeting process in the province of Saskatchewan.

Who I do really want to thank, Mr. Speaker, is everyone who participated in the public consultation process, and those in my constituency who continue to provide me with feedback and with information on what they feel would be the important priorities for people in their communities.

I want to thank the people that are very rarely thanked in this Assembly, Mr. Speaker; it's the people who spend hours and burn the midnight candle to prepare the background papers and the statements that we use to look at what decisions will affect the outcomes in the budget. And that's the people in Finance who spend hours and hours preparing the papers that will help us to decide and choose which direction we're going to go in the budgeting process.

And I want to thank the members of the cabinet who sit for hour after hour on the treasury benches. They're not seen, but they're certainly heard in the final outcome, and we thank them for the information they bring forward. And the people I also want to thank in the end, Mr. Speaker, are my colleagues who, during the time that the budget is presented to caucus, sit with us, challenge the assumptions that have been used to formulate the budget, hone the decision making, and finally develop the cornerstone of a budget that has been presented to the Assembly, Mr. Speaker.

What this budget does is truly give us and our children a unique privilege: the freedom to decide and control our future, our own future. Mr. Speaker, I now want to go on record as a proud supporter of the budget that is before the Assembly. Thank you very much for the time . . .

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Johnson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak in this debate and indicate right off that I'm going to be supporting the budget that is preparing for the new century.

Mr. Speaker, I want to comment on a few comments that have been put forward in this debate by different members previously and indicate why I think that they should spend a little more time reading the budget as it is written and understanding what is there.

Mr. Speaker, the person that I want to start with is the representative for the constituency of Thunder Creek. He threw out basically a challenge to the members opposite when he said that we should take and read page 74, and this is what he said. He said

Unfortunately while it (is said) . . . the total cut (from the federal transfer payments) is \$114 million on page 9 of the budget, on page 74 it goes on to say something different. If the members opposite would look (at) . . . that page — go ahead — (and) you'd soon notice that it points out that the total reduction in federal transfers is only \$43 million.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I took the time to open up the budget book and look at page 74, just to assess to see what the individual was talking about. And it's a real strange thing to read because I don't know what figures he subtracted or what figure he subtracted from what other figure in order to come out with 43 million. The closest I could come is forty-two million eight when I started subtracting figures, one which was basically talking about apples and another one about oranges, and if you subtracted the oranges from the apples, you ended up with that figure.

But if you look at page 74 under transfers from the Government of Canada, you can see that the total transfers from the Government of Canada, estimates for 1995-96 fiscal year — that's last year — the estimate was \$1.384 billion. The estimate for 1996-97, Mr. Speaker, is 921 million. So when you subtract the number of oranges from the number of oranges, not from the number of apples, you end up with 462.5 million less. I don't know where the member opposite got the figure of \$43 million, but I suspect, Mr. Speaker, it is the same way that he got the figures that when he tried to convince the Minister of Finance that there was no tax reduction in this particular budget.

And I suggest, Mr. Speaker, that the public should be very watchful of these members as they do their math because I suspect that grade 6 students would find it difficult to pass if they followed the same techniques in their math.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the budget book is something that I think a lot of people should spend a little bit of time, especially reading and understanding, especially if they're members of this House. It's not that difficult to take and get a few figures down so that you can remember them. And the members opposite might like to take the time and do that.

One of the things that we've said and that we've done is that we've supported the three major areas: health, education, social services. And, Mr. Speaker, those three areas would be covered off in the top four budgetary items this year if it wasn't for the interest payments on the deficit that was left to this government by the Conservatives.

Mr. Speaker, the first payment that was . . . or the expenditure by this government is on health care, at \$1.56 billion, with a little change — 252,000, if you want to look it up.

The second expenditure, Mr. Speaker, is for education, K to 12, and that's \$524 million, if you want to take and look it up in the budget book.

The one that I am not mentioning and will mention at the end is the interest payments. Social Services is then \$524 million. But Finance, the interest payments, is the one that really kicks a hole in whole operation. It's \$813 million. Mr. Speaker, if that \$813 million wasn't being spent on interest, it would almost totally cover the education from K to 12, plus the education and skills of \$344 million for education and skills, \$542 million for education.

And I think the members opposite should spend some time looking at the book and reading it so that they understand what it actually says.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the same day as the member from Thunder Creek tried the shuffle with the \$43 million, which I do not know where it comes from because it isn't when you are adding or subtracting figures, another member tried to convince the Minister of Finance that there was an increase of 12 per cent in the cost of electricity to schools. And I just sort of . . . I'd like to just read what he said. He said:

Madam Minister, those numbers don't add up and you're negotiating a salary increase on behalf of local school boards at the same time you're cutting your funding. At the same time, the school has been hit with other major cost increases such as your 12 per cent SaskPower rate hike. It doesn't make any sense. And people who are going to have to pay for it are the local taxpayers and the children in the classroom.

(1615)

Well, Mr. Speaker, I have a news release here of December 1, 1995. And it is a news release from the minister in charge of SaskPower, and it says in the second paragraph . . . in the last sentence in the second paragraph:

In addition, the government has directed that SaskPower reduce rates for schools, hospitals, nursing homes, curling and skating rinks by 2 per cent.

Mr. Speaker, I find that the members opposite have a tremendous difficulty with their math, and I can see why they can't remember numbers. And it would good for them to take the time to practice a little bit, reading what comes to them in news releases and learning the 10 numbers that we have — one to zero — so that they understand what they are and can remember and repeat them when they need them, Mr. Speaker. It's an interesting thing, Mr. Speaker, to see how these members opposite add and work.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to point out another particular thing from the members opposite in regards to that. And that is that I have here a news clipping that says:

Ten years ago, this kind of budget (referring to the budget that we've brought down) was politically unthinkable. Indeed 10 years ago the former Conservative government of Grant Devine was bringing in a budget that ended up with an operating deficit of \$1.2 billion.

To even say those words now, an operating deficit of \$1.2 billion, seems beyond belief. But, Mr. Speaker, it is that type of a budget that was brought in 10 years ago that today generates the \$813 million worth of interest that we must find the money to pay before we can do other things.

Mr. Speaker, the member from Kindersley stated today that he did not see that this budget was a good one. In fact, basically what I interpreted from what he was saying was that the budget should be . . . that the budget should change and do some things like it was being done under the Conservatives previously. And he was supported by his member from behind him, who indicated that they should go along with some grants for putting in gas services in rural Saskatchewan.

But, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to say I would prefer to follow the budget that we have, a budget which *The Globe and Mail* says, in a headline, "Again common sense in Saskatchewan."

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Johnson: — Now, Mr. Speaker, there's been some indication from the members opposite that rural Saskatchewan

is taking a beating. Well, Mr. Speaker, in some sense it is — a beating in the sense that if there are no children left there to teach, it becomes difficult to say why you should have a school.

But this government is implementing a province-wide 199 Bill to introduce this capability for SaskTel. In fact we're going to spend something like \$2.4 million to computerize the map of the province of Saskatchewan, which will be very important for rural Saskatchewan, far more important in rural Saskatchewan than in the urban centres, because this will allow the people who receive the call to direct the correct people to provide assistance. And so if you have a mapping system in place, it will work the best.

So, Mr. Speaker, this is technology of today, meeting the conditions of today, providing the services that we want today. And I think, Mr. Speaker, we should understand that health care in this province is delivered today in a major sense in some of the major hospitals. Over 70 per cent of operations and procedures of that type are provided in those hospitals.

So it's very important, Mr. Speaker, that we can get individuals who are involved in an accident to those hospitals. And one of the key things involved in that is having the ambulance know where it has to go to pick up the individual to take him there. So this particular item of the 911 is a very important item for rural Saskatchewan.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I'm not planning to spend a great deal of time but I want to talk a little bit about the forest area of the province of Saskatchewan. And what brings me to talk about that is a couple of news items that have been in the *Star-Phoenix*. This one, the one that is the Weyerhaeuser clear cutting too fragmented. Mr. Speaker, this is part of a study that is being done by the model forest, and a Thomas Bouman, manager of the Prince Albert model forest, said on Thursday, a three-year environmental study of the forest done indicates areas clear cut by Weyerhaeuser are too fragmented. That means there's too small and too many.

Well I happen to live beside the forest and have lived there long enough to — with this particular study report — to be able to say I've now seen directions to people logging in the forest make the full circle. They have gone a full circle.

As a young lad, I can remember my father talking about harvesting the trees in the forest and the problem that was facing him in that particular time was that he was delayed in doing the work because he had to wait for the forester to come and mark the trees because it was individual trees that he was taking out.

Well, Mr. Speaker, it was learned subsequent to that a few years later, that when you went in and cut individual trees and dragged them out what you did was you damaged the roots and what happened is that a majority of the trees that were left ended up having rot in the centre of the tree. And then they became less valuable than they were if you'd harvest all at one time.

Then, Mr. Speaker, the cutting changed — and I was involved in that myself — where you would take part of a bluff, a very

small clear-cut is what it would be. And as I had indicated, we're going now back through a full cycle. But this small cutting ended up demonstrating some real problems because then that . . . what would happen is other sections of the bluff would blow down, and you destroyed valuable timber by the procedure that was done.

There were other things that went along with that, Mr. Speaker, as to whether the cutting was done in a manner that left the cut very rough in appearance or that everything was slashed to the ground. And for some time in past, the idea was that it should be slashed very level to the ground, Mr. Speaker.

Just last year on a tour that I went through, it was pointed out that that was one of the problems with the clear cutting today, is that it was slashed to the ground very flat and didn't leave environment for the birds and that, things to land on, perches and that, and allow them then to harvest bugs from over the whole area.

So with the damage to the trees that were left standing, we've seen then the size of clear cuts to expand, and they expanded up to some . . . to a 1,700 hectares, a thousand-and-some-odd acres which then was changed, Mr. Speaker, rotated back to very small cuts. And we've gone the cycle around to where this study says that the cuts should be made fewer and larger and mimic what really was taking place in the forest, where when there was an intervention into the forest of fire or of something of that nature, that it was usually major in extent and covered a fairly large area.

So, Mr. Speaker, in pointing this out, I'd like to say that I think that people who are making the rules . . . because quite frankly the rules were not being made by those who were cutting but by people in government or people who were in a group that was pressing for change or pushing for a lot of things based, not on fact, not on the information available, not on the boreal forest of the province of Saskatchewan, but on temperate forests or on jungle-type of forest or hardwood forest and not the forest that we have in the province of Saskatchewan.

And from my perspective, I'm certainly glad to see that we've now gone the full circle, tried everything, have places in which we can look and see what really takes place and so that we will have a system in place that will make for a very economical harvesting of forest products and at the same time provide the best environmental plans possible.

So, Mr. Speaker, I see then in a paper of a couple of weeks later that Weyerhaeuser Canada said that it was one of the reasons . . . it says that one of the reasons the industry moved to disbursing their clear-cuts more widely has been in response to public concern about the large cut blocks. We're finding that the large cuts are nature's way. When nature creates a disturbance, it is apt to create a fairly large disturbance. We need to bring our forest practices more in line with natural occurrences.

And so, Mr. Speaker, I say to you that in this case we've gone full cycle and in doing so we should now be able to do it correctly.

I want to point out, Mr. Speaker, that as I listen in regards to this budget, as I listened to the members opposite, I find that there are some people around that remember . . . or I should say, have studied and realized that we've gone full circle as well with the economics. And it's in the . . . from the newspaper; let's see, from the P.A. (Prince Albert) *Herald*, I believe . . . or no, I guess it's the Saskatoon paper: "A far different view of government." And it says: "For a province like Saskatchewan where people were crippled by debt in the '30s and again in the '80s, it is a lesson worth learning."

And, Mr. Speaker, the cycle has made a full loop and I hope that most people take the education that provides. I will be supporting the budget, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Kasperski: — Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan people can look forward to the 21st century with a sense of confidence and security. Confidence because the future promises jobs, a balanced budget, reduced taxes, and a declining public debt. Security because these cornerstones of our quality of life — our health, education, and social programs — will be there for them, their children, and their grandchildren.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased on behalf of Regina Sherwood to rise today in the budget debate. And I will be supporting, on behalf of my constituents in Regina Sherwood, I'll be supporting the budget motion.

Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan people are known for a spirit of partnership and cooperation. We have many more similarities than differences. Mr. Speaker, I wish our members opposite would pay heed to some of these words and stress more our similarities than our differences. We have much more to gain through cooperation and partnership than through division and rivalry. The spirit of working together is one of essential values that define Saskatchewan people, Mr. Speaker. It is at the very heart of this budget and the very heart of the *Partnership for Growth* document strategy which was released by our government last month.

Mr. Speaker, the *Partnership for Growth* document contains 21 initiatives that will help this government build on the accomplishments of the earlier *Partnership for Renewal* economic strategy over the past three years. And both the *Partnership for Growth* document and this budget, Mr. Speaker, focus on opportunities for economic growth and job creation for Saskatchewan as we move towards the 21st century.

These documents outline how government, business, communities, farmers, co-ops, all the stakeholders of our society, can work together towards common goals. Mr. Speaker, it's important to nurture the small businesses that create most of the jobs in Saskatchewan, and this budget does that.

(1630)

There are a number of ways to help make things easier for small businesses, and here are some of these that are outlined in the budget and in the *Partnership for Growth*. Mr. Speaker, the

budget outlines plans to reduce the number of government regulations by 25 per cent over the next 10 years. It announces an education program for young people about the option of going into business for themselves. And it makes REDAs — regional economic development authorities — a focal point for the economic development strategy of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, the budget and our strategy for economic growth also recognize that increased trade will be one of the main sources of wealth creation in Saskatchewan in the 21st century. This fact is further demonstrated by recent reports in the *Sask Trends Monitor* which confirms these statistics.

1995, Mr. Speaker, was a record year for Saskatchewan, especially in non-traditional commodities sold to non-traditional customers. Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan manufacturers shipped \$4.7 billion worth of goods last year, also an all-time record. 1995 was the third consecutive year of substantial growth in Saskatchewan's manufacturing sector. It may be partly coincidence that the period coincides with the original *Partnership for Renewal* strategy, but I think it certainly proves that Saskatchewan people can accomplish anything we set our minds to when all work together to achieve the same objectives.

Mr. Speaker, because trade and export development are so crucial, the budget allowed for the establishment of a trade development corporation called the Saskatchewan Trade and Export Partnership Inc., known by its initials — STEP. STEP will help our exporting firms develop and expand their markets which will allow these firms to grow and create jobs and wealth for Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, tourism is another area with great potential for growth and job creation. This budget allows for continued cooperation among the provincial stakeholders to develop a provincial tourism strategy. There is enormous international interest right now in tourism related to our first nations and our Metis cultures, as well as in the areas of adventure tourism, eco-tourism, and agri-tourism, Mr. Speaker.

The *Partnership for Growth*, with the support of this budget, also includes a plan on Saskatchewan's existing strengths in agri-value, forestry, mining, energy, cultural industries, and information technology. Other significant initiatives include, Mr. Speaker, analysing Saskatchewan's business climate to see how we can be more competitive with other jurisdictions, commercializing new and emerging technologies, and matching training to job opportunities.

In addition, Mr. Speaker, the budget and our *Partnership for Growth* represents a renewed commitment to the objectives laid out earlier in the *Partnership for Renewal*, which included continuing with an orderly plan to balance the provincial budget and manage the debt, targeting tax reductions for business, helping form regional economic development authorities to coordinate development in their areas, and developing comprehensive strategies in Saskatchewan's key economic sectors.

Mr. Speaker, these actions have developed our partners, our businesses, our workers, cooperatives and communities, to help

create 10,000 jobs in Saskatchewan since 1992. Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan is on the verge of accelerated economic growth. And this same partnership of Saskatchewan people will result in the creation of another 20,000 jobs over the next five years. Mr. Speaker, this will accomplish *Partnership for Renewal* job target of creating 30,000 new jobs between 1992 and the year 2000. This budget facilitates the priorities of the *Partnership for Growth* economic development strategy.

Mr. Speaker, there is a host of opportunities opening up because of Saskatchewan's improving economic situation, and all segments of the economy have a role to play in capturing and building on those opportunities.

Mr. Speaker, the budget, like the *Partnership for Growth* plan, is a strategy for Saskatchewan business. It's clear that economic development must be a shared responsibility among all segments of Saskatchewan's society, which will continue to work together to achieve the goals of the *Partnership for Growth*, and this budget, and to ensure that Saskatchewan people have a prosperous and more secure future.

Mr. Speaker, in summary, building prosperity and creating jobs continue to be our number one priority.

Saskatchewan's economy is strong, and this budget supports further prosperity, security, and growth in our province through keeping our promise — our promise of continued lower taxes on families, continued targeted tax incentives for business, and cutting red tape and investing in our province.

Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the constituents of Regina Sherwood, I'll be pleased to support the budget.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Scott: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is certainly my pleasure to rise and speak in support of the budget that I view as fair, reasonable, responsible, and forward-looking.

Albeit fairly late, Mr. Speaker, I would like to use this opportunity, my first opportunity, to publicly congratulate you on being the first Speaker elected by ballot here in the Assembly and I appreciate the very fine job you are doing here for us.

Upon becoming a cabinet minister last fall in November, Mr. Speaker, I had the privilege of sitting on Treasury Board, so I've had the opportunity to observe and partake in the whole development of the budget process. It's a very intriguing experience; lots of long hours but nonetheless very informative and a great experience.

And I'd like to, in light of that, congratulate and thank our people in the Department of Finance for the many long hours that they have put in to working and developing the background for the budget and sitting with us to as late as 1:15 a.m. one particular morning.

And also I had the opportunity to meet and have input from the various government departments and various staff, and I would also like to thank them as well for their fine work in preparing

this budget. And last but not least, the public employees of Saskatchewan here do a great job and their commitment to Saskatchewan is very much appreciated by everyone.

Well, Mr. Speaker, some of the budget highlights are really highlights. For an example, we have a plan for four more years of balanced budgets and total debt reduction of \$2.4 billion by 1999. That will leave another 12 billion to go, but still nonetheless we're headed in the right direction.

Something that people really appreciate is no new tax increases. Also expenses are cut by \$230 million this fiscal year and there will be certainly more in the years coming as well. Our annual interest costs should be reduced by \$100 million by the year 1999-2000, so that is also very encouraging, as we are headed in the right direction.

Part of our budget is looking at building prosperity and jobs. And certainly some of the points that I would like to refer to are, continued reduction in the debt reduction surtax which saves people \$55 million annually in taxes or \$150 per working person or \$300 per couple in a two-income home.

We've also got targeted tax incentives to increase development, jobs. We're cutting red tape. This is evident in my department of Environment and Resource Management. People, for an example, recognize the environment is very important and are prepared to do things on their own and abide by the rules and regulations, so we're able to save some dollars in that area.

Up to \$238 million is being invested in our most important industry, which is agriculture, which is good news for the farm sector; \$630 million in capital projects in 1996-97 is also being put out. And there's support for regional economic development in a number of areas through the REDA programs.

The economic outlook certainly is encouraging for Saskatchewan. Our economic growth is projected to continue to average 2.5 per cent per year in real terms. And growth is again driven by exports and investments, and we certainly are really making great progress on exports and value added, again in the agriculture industry in particular. Jobs are very important to people, and we are looking at increased employment. We're forecasting another 21,000 jobs by the year 2000, and that is on top of the 10,000 jobs created since 1992. So jobs are important, and we are making great gains in that area.

Preserving the cornerstones of our quality of life through the pre-budget consultations, Mr. Speaker — health, education, and social services — were viewed as very important to people. And we have recognized that, unlike our federal counterparts. So we are putting in 110 million new dollars into funding health, education, and social services, and this is to basically back-fill the \$114 million that the federal government decided to cut out of health, education, and social services. And we are committed to preserving these services, and we are doing so by putting money where our mouth is, so to speak.

The budget provides, as I say, funding to replace the money taken out by the federal government; \$52 million is being added to social services, and that's exactly what was taken out by the federal government; \$47 million put back into health — added to health, I should say — and that back-fills the 47 million

taken out by the federal government; post-secondary education, we were able to back-fill 11 million of the 15 million cut by the federal government.

And we very seriously question the federal government's priorities when they cut health, education, and social services by 40 per cent and the remaining federal government departments by 8 per cent.

We also had to look at ourselves. People told us, reduce the size of government. So we have been cutting administration; we've eliminated duplication and overlap. This has been ongoing over the years. For an example, a couple of years ago we combined the Department of Environment and the Department of Natural Resources to make one Department of Environment and Resource Management, again reducing duplication and overlap.

And we're also delivering services more effectively, and as a result \$50 million in savings is being realized.

Total expenses, or I should say operating expenses per capita, to operate the government, is going to fall to \$4,300 per person. So basically the cost of running government is \$4,300 a person, which is down \$270 from 1991-92 and this is the lowest capita government spending for any government in the country. So we are appreciative of that. And it's again a tribute to our public employees for being able to do more with less.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I guess the real impact or the real message from people is found out in our constituencies. And despite the gloom and doom conveyed by some members opposite, I believe that Saskatchewan is thriving. And my particular riding of Indian Head-Milestone is a rural riding and I'd just like to touch on a few communities and provide information to show that these communities are doing very well.

Sintaluta, in the north-east corner of my riding, despite the train derailment last week, is doing very well and fortunately no one was injured in that derailment. I did observe the wreckage yesterday and it was quite an impressive sight to see the wrecked cars and what not, but fortunately no one was injured.

There's a very viable seed-cleaning plant operated by the Blenkin brothers in Sintaluta. They have a very good museum, it being an old community, agriculture community. And also Darlene Redding has a very attractive and interesting antique shop where people are able to purchase supplies and people, being along the Trans-Canada Highway, stop in there throughout the tourist season.

As most small communities, Sintaluta has a thriving co-op store and a credit union as well.

Just south of Sintaluta is the Carry the Kettle First Nation. And again the first nation is expanding and developing and it's really encouraging to see they have a health centre there now, a store which was recently opened, a very useful hall which is used for many functions, and they also sponsor rodeos and powwows throughout the year.

Further south again at Montmartre we have Dusyk Enterprises, a long-time John Deere dealer, well recognized, and they are

reporting very brisk sales since, really, throughout the fall and winter and into the spring here.

(1645)

Family-run businesses are important in rural Saskatchewan. Schmidt's Convenience Store is a very . . . is a hub of activity. You're able to rent movies, buy milk, and play pool and just about everything. It's a real attraction and a centre of activity for many things in the community. And they host things such as rock-a-thons to raise money for their local pool, and the recent rock-a-thon did raise about \$2,400.

Down in south-east corner of the riding is the town of Fillmore. And unfortunately Fillmore, like many other communities, was hard hit by a summer storm last year. Last June a storm did whip through the town and damaged many buildings, trees, but being rural Saskatchewan, people came together and helped — neighbour helping neighbour. The clean-up was under way within hours and the town is still thriving. There's a very successful seed processing plant there with several full-time employees.

Moving west to the town of Yellow Grass, Hennie's Lucky Dollar Store and Bonnie's Café are two of the businesses there which provide services, not only for the residents, for people travelling down the highway towards Weyburn. Unfortunately Yellow Grass lost its hotel a year or two ago through fire, but I'm sure that the facility will be rebuilt.

Moving up the highway to Lang, we have a new business there called Written in Stone and Geo-Ark Petrographic. And this new business is going to be using stones, which there are lots of in Saskatchewan, for various products, and these will be sold. And it's only the second of its kind in North America, this type of business.

In Milestone, a thriving community, I had the pleasure of attending a dinner theatre there last week in a brand-new hall which was constructed from the proceeds from the estate of Gertie and Elmer Hendrickson. And again these pioneers, recognizing the value of their communities, left their mark and donated their proceeds in their estate to the community. And that's certainly a tribute and will be greatly appreciated for many years.

Wilcox, the home of Notre Dame College, is still a thriving community and well-known throughout not only Canada, but abroad as well. And still the reputation of the Wilcox college is well-known and high standards are maintained.

At Kronau, Saskatchewan, about 20 miles out of Regina, we have a number of young families living there; commute to the city. And as a result of the people there, the school stays viable. Curling is a great pastime, producing provincial and national champion teams. And also Kronau is the home of . . . capital of the burrowing owl of Canada. And back in 1987 when we were celebrating the centennial of wildlife conservation and Prince Philip was here from England, we toured the site to observe the burrowing owls.

Other communities such as Sedley has a thriving auto-body

shop and a seed plant. And Vibank and Odessa again are pleased to welcome new families to their communities, both within commuting distance of Regina.

Odessa recently hosted the junior girls and boys broomball championships. And very fitting that both the Odessa junior girls' Flames and the boys' Bandits won both provincial championships. And they have since moved on to the provincials. So we congratulate the coaches, teams, and families of these two junior teams.

Kendal is a small community. However it has a store. Heidi Foord, restaurant owner there, and doing a thriving business and again providing a great service to the community.

McLean is the home to the Wood Country Building supplies. People from many miles around obtain building supplies at that facility.

The town of Qu'Appelle is the most, I guess, most recent riding to experience a devastating fire in my constituency. And, however, the town lost two or three businesses, but will certainly survive.

And speaking of surviving, Wilson's Store in Qu'Appelle celebrated its 50th anniversary last year, as being in business with the same owner.

Well Fort Qu'Appelle, in the Qu'Appelle valley, is a thriving community with many businesses and many opportunities. I live closest to the community of Indian Head which is a well-established farm community, rural community. At one time Indian Head was bigger than Regina, being established in late 1800s.

The PFRA (Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Administration) tree nursery continues to send out millions and millions of trees to people across the Prairies for shelter belts and farmsteads. The experimental farm at Indian Head, although due to cut-backs there's not near as much activity there, still does great work in researching agricultural products and weed control and such like.

The Saskatchewan Soil Conservation Association recently moved to Indian Head as their headquarters; Doug McKell, the executive director, and this too is very fitting with the research station there.

The number of people in a community have got together to form the Indian Head Agricultural Research Foundation, again working cooperatively with farmers and the experimental farm and the Soil Conservation Association.

There's some industries at Indian Head, including the Conserva Pak, zero-till machinery manufacturer. And Jim Halford, who lives a couple of miles from me, began this production about seven or eight years ago, and he now employs 18 full-time people and a number of part-time people on the farm, manufacturing these seeders which have been sent throughout western Canada, United States, and as far away as Australia.

Indian Head has a number of new businesses and we have

recently . . . will soon be having the official opening of a new RCMP (Royal Canadian Mounted Police) depot. The China Garden Restaurant is building a new facility — in fact moving into it this week — and to provide more room to accommodate the customers. Ken McCabe recently opened a Sports Hall of Fame at Indian Head, and last year we had a H & L Automotive Repair open a new building; a new Indian Head co-op building last year, and other businesses like Dragan's Drugs are expanding.

We also have the first Paterson Grain Company inland terminal located at Indian Head, and Agtech Seed Processing, again providing a number of jobs in the community.

So, Mr. Speaker, rural Saskatchewan is doing very well and we need to look at the positive things instead of dwelling on the negative things and I believe that the people of Saskatchewan will continue to be positive as we adjust and make necessary changes for the 21st century.

If I might say a few words about Environment and Resource Management, Mr. Speaker, which I am minister of. As I mentioned earlier, these two departments were combined a couple of years ago and back in the 1980s the environment was the number one issue on people's agenda. Although it is not number one in the 1990s, it still is very high on the list of priorities, and certainly we need a healthy environment if we wish to have a healthy place for to raise our children and continue having long lives which we are recognized for having here in Saskatchewan.

Well the Department of Environment is involved with regulating and monitoring activities such as mining, hazardous wastes, community waste disposal sites, air emissions, and such like. And as I mentioned earlier, Mr. Speaker, we are getting great cooperation from industry and communities. And we look forward to that because everybody realizes we do need a healthy environment in order to survive and prosper.

Some of the new initiatives in the department include used oil recycling and used tire recycling. SARCAN, which recycles pop cans, has been very successful. And basically SARCAN has proved to us if a recycling opportunity is there, people will participate.

And many farmers have tires and gallons and barrels of oil on their farms, which they've been storing up. So we look forward to the very near future where we will have a place to dispose of these things, and again contributing towards a healthy environment.

On the natural resources side of the department, we have forestry, fisheries, wildlife, and parks. And the new forestry resources management Act is going to be a very positive step as we move towards the 21st century. And we do have good cooperation with stakeholders, including the forest industry, trappers, first nations, and other groups concerned and interested in the forest.

We have a number of co-management agreements, which we have in place with first nations and communities in the North and we look towards working with these people and expanding

on them.

We're apparently in the process of doing an environmental impact assessment on the east side FMA (Forest Management Agreement) and we also have a forestry advisory committee which does provide very valuable input from the public as we look forward to managing our forests for the future.

Our fish and wildlife are very important to people. There's roughly 200,000 people that fish in Saskatchewan each year, and we have a fisheries enhancement fund and fisheries biologist, which we are working to enhance the fish populations in areas. And unfortunately some areas have been impacted by pollution, over-fishing, and it's up to us to work together to try and resolve these problems.

On the wildlife side of things we are working on endangered species, the whooping crane being a very notable success story. In 1941 there was only 21 whooping cranes in the world, and currently we have around 300 whooping cranes. So they've made a remarkable comeback. The burrowing owl, as I mentioned earlier, and other species are also in need of attention and we'll be working to ensure that these species don't dwindle into oblivion like some of the other species such as the passenger pigeon.

Wildlife management is always a challenge and we've certainly seen that this winter with the deer populations. Again we are going to work towards, cooperatively with SARM, farmers, and organizations to fix this problem in the future. And the conservation easement Act is a very positive piece of legislation which will be coming through, Mr. Speaker, where again landowners will be rewarded financially for preserving some habitat on their lands.

We have a parks advisory group in place to give us advice on parks. Our park system is very important to people, with 2.3 million visitors a year in our parks. And we certainly need to maintain our parks in the most economical and feasible way possible, and this advisory group will be coming forward with some recommendations later this month.

So, Mr. Speaker, I guess to summarize, quoting from the *Leader-Post* which we are very pleased to say has a positive editorial here, last Friday, and I quote:

Since its election in 1991 the NDP government has done a credible job of managing the province's finances. That tradition continues with Thursday's budget.

So, Mr. Speaker, it is certainly going to my pleasure to support this budget with pride and optimism as we move towards the 21st century. Thank you very much.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Assembly recessed until 7 p.m.

