

The Assembly met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRESENTING PETITIONS

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I have a petition to present on behalf of farm families across Saskatchewan. The prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to demand that the federal government work with Saskatchewan to put in place a farm aid package that provides real relief to those who need it and that the provincial government develop a long-term farm safety net program as it promised to do when it cancelled GRIP against the wishes of farmers.

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

Mr. Speaker, the signatures on this petition come from the communities of MacNutt, Langenburg, and Churchbridge.

I so present.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have petitions to present today on behalf of the Saskatchewan disenfranchised widows. The prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to have the Workers' Compensation Board Act amended whereby benefits and pensions are reinstated to disenfranchised widows and whereby all revoked pensions are reimbursed to them retroactively with interest to April 17, 1985.

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

These petitions, Mr. Speaker, come from the Regina, Moose Jaw, and Qu'Appelle areas of the province.

I so submit.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also have petitions to present this morning. The prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to demand that the federal government work with Saskatchewan to put in place a farm aid package that provides real relief to those who need it and that the provincial government develop a long-term farm safety net program as it promised to do when it cancelled GRIP against the wishes of farmers.

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

The community signatures, Mr. Speaker, are from the community of Langenberg.

I so present.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As well to present petitions. Reading the prayer:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to end its unfair tendering policies and immediately cancel the Crown Construction Tendering Agreement.

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

Mr. Speaker, these petitions are signed by individuals from the communities of Humboldt, Carmel, Tompkins and other communities in the province.

I so present.

Mr. Gantefoer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too rise on behalf of people in the province concerned about the unfairness in the Crown Construction Tendering Agreement. The prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to end its unfair tendering policies and immediately cancel the Crown Construction Tendering Agreement.

The signatures on this petition, Mr. Speaker, are from Saskatoon, Martensville and Vanscoy.

I so present.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also have a petition to present today.

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to abandon any plans to reduce acute care or close any more hospitals in the North-East Health District.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

The people that have signed this petition are from Carrot River and Arborfield.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I too rise today to present petitions on behalf of people in Saskatchewan who would like to see the Crown Construction Tendering Agreement scrapped. And the prayer reads as follows, Mr. Speaker:

Wherefore your petitions humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to end its unfair tendering policies and immediately cancel the Crown Construction Tendering Agreement.

The signators on this petition, Mr. Speaker, are from Saskatoon and area.

I so present.

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm proud today to rise in this House to present a petition on behalf of the people of this province. The prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to call on federal and provincial governments to dedicate a significantly greater portion of fuel tax revenues toward road maintenance and construction so that Saskatchewan residents may have a safe highway system that meets their needs.

Mr. Speaker, this petition has been signed by the good folks from Govan and Duval and Strasbourg areas.

And I so present.

Mr. Aldridge: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too rise to present petitions on behalf of citizens who are concerned about the state of our highway system and lack of concern for maintenance and construction to them. The prayer reads as follows, Mr. Speaker:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to call on federal and provincial governments to dedicate a significantly greater portion of fuel tax revenues toward road maintenance and construction so that Saskatchewan residents may have a safe highway system that meets their needs.

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

Mr. Speaker, those who've signed these petitions this morning are from communities of Moose Jaw and also from the Moose Jaw district.

I so present.

Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also have petitions from good people of Saskatchewan, and the prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to call on federal and provincial governments to dedicate a significantly greater portion of fuel tax revenues toward road maintenance and construction so that Saskatchewan residents may have a safe highway system that meets their needs.

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

The signatures on these petitions are from Bienfait, from Estevan, Lampman, Kindersley, Francis, and Regina. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Hillson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I present petitions this morning praying that the entrance to the city of North Battleford and specifically the Highway 40 intersection with the Yellowhead be removed and relocated in order to relieve congestion and the dangerous condition at the city of North Battleford entrance.

Your petitioners this morning come from Battleford, North Battleford, Wilkie, and Denholm.

I so present.

Mr. McPherson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I join with my colleagues here today in bringing forward petitions regarding the poor state of Saskatchewan highways. The prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to call on federal and provincial governments to dedicate a significantly greater portion of fuel tax revenues toward road maintenance and construction so that Saskatchewan residents may have a safe highway system that meets their needs.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

Mr. Speaker, the people that have signed these petitions are from the Glentworth, Mankota, McCord, Shaunavon, and Eastend areas of the province.

I so present.

Ms. Haverstock: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise once again on behalf of Saskatchewan citizens who are most concerned about the education of children with learning disabilities and I'll read the prayer:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to provide essential funding and ensure the delivery of scientifically proven diagnostic assessment and programming of children with learning disabilities in order that they have access to an education that meets their needs and allows them to reach their full potential.

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

The signators today, Mr. Speaker, are all from Pelican Narrows. Thank you very much.

Mr. Goohsen: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy today, Mr. Speaker, to rise to present petitions on behalf of the people from the Leader community and I will read the prayer:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to reach necessary agreements with other levels of government to fund the twinning of the Trans-Canada Highway in Saskatchewan so work can begin with the project, and set out a time frame for the ultimate completion of the project with or without federal assistance.

I'm happy to present this, Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the people of Leader, as I've said, and also from Fox Valley. And I so present.

READING AND RECEIVING PETITIONS

Clerk: — According to order the petitions presented at the last sitting have been reviewed and found to be in order. Pursuant to rule 12(7) these petitions are hereby received.

NOTICES OF MOTIONS AND QUESTIONS

Mr. Hillson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I give notice that I

shall on day no. 15 ask the government the following question:

To the Minister of Finance: regarding the education and health sales tax, what is the department's estimate of the total annual value of cross-border shopping done by Saskatchewan residents in PST-free Alberta; what is the department's estimate of the annual revenue lost on provincial sales tax for cross-border shopping purchases made by Saskatchewan residents in Alberta.

And if I may, Mr. Speaker, I also give notice that I shall on day no. 15 ask the government the following question:

To the Minister of Finance: regarding the fuel tax, what is the department's estimate of the total annual value of cross-border shopping refuelling done by Saskatchewan residents in Alberta; what is the department's estimate of the annual revenue loss on fuel tax for cross-border fuel purchases made by Saskatchewan residents in Alberta.

Mr. Goohsen: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I give notice that I shall present the government with the following question:

To the Minister of Agriculture: how many grain elevators do your officials believe will be remaining in Saskatchewan by the year 2000 and by the year 2010; what assistance are you offering to those willing to purchase branch lines; how many branch lines are being negotiated for by those willing to purchase them; how many of those do you estimate will be remaining in operation and operational; and what impact do you predict there will be on communities where branch lines are not converted into private operations.

And I so present.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Mr. Thomson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It would appear that we are joined by a few guests this morning in the Assembly and I would, rather than introduce starting at the back corner of the room, I would like to introduce a group of grade 12 students who are joining us here today.

It's a tradition that this group of grade 12 students from Campbell Collegiate join us every year to watch the budget come down. It's an important part of their studies as they watch the practical application of our democracy.

Today there are 46 students in the west gallery. They're joined by their teachers, Dan Fletcher and Debbie Soroka. And I would ask all members to join with me in welcoming them here today.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Haverstock: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed a pleasure of mine to introduce an individual today to you and through you to all members of the Assembly, an individual noted for his witticism and intellectual gymnastics on the floor of this very Assembly, and not only here but in the Senate as well. He is the incomparable Senator Dave Steuart who was first elected in a by-election in 1962, then re-elected in

1964, 1967, 1971, and 1975 — who nicknamed himself landslide Dave because of his habit of winning elections by a whisker.

I ask that Dave Steuart stand and be recognized and please have all members of the Assembly join me in giving him a very warm welcome.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to join with the words of the former leader of the Liberal Party in Saskatchewan and the member from Saskatoon Greystone in welcoming Davey Steuart, although I noticed that even today when the hon. member from Greystone asked Mr. Steuart to stand up and be noticed, like when he served in the legislature, he refused to do that.

The truth of the matter is I have a great deal of fond memories, and some not so fond, in serving in this House with Mr. Steuart. Ross Thatcher was sitting as the premier, and big physique, and Davey, you could just barely see him across the deputy leader's chair. But boy when he got up, you could sure hear him. And you could sure feel him. And what the member from Greystone said is bang on. A person with wit, intellect, principle, a commitment to this province, a commitment to this country. I know I am probably approaching that period in political life when things never quite are as good as they used to be, but I want to say in those days they were titanic debates with Dave Steuart, Al Blakeney and a number of the members of the House. Their policy and ideology were at the centre of what we were doing in trying to build a great Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, on behalf of all of the members on this side of the House and all of the former members who would be here, it's so great to see Dave Steuart looking so well and I'm told last night in such fine fettle that you stole the show again. It's great to have you back and many, many more years of good health.

Thank you very much.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to add my words of welcome on behalf of the Liberal caucus to Senator Davey Steuart but also I would like to welcome all the people who have taken the time to be with us here on this very important day. We have members of parliament, we have community leaders, we have mayors, we have . . . we have people from the civil service who have joined us here today and I would like to, on behalf of our caucus, welcome each and every one to the Assembly today, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Very quickly, I too would like to welcome all of the people from Saskatchewan who have taken the time to be here for this very important occasion. On behalf on the official opposition caucus I too would like to welcome the Senator. It is nice to have you here in the House and I look forward to the kind of atmosphere that we will have today. I'm sure it's charged and I'm sure that everyone here will be rewarded. Thank you very much.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Average Weekly Income

Mr. Whitmore: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On budget day, Mr. Speaker, I have some good news which will help explain the good news that we expect to hear in a moment from the Minister of Finance. Call me the warm-up act.

StatsCan just released some information about average weekly earnings across Canada. Very interesting information, Mr. Speaker.

For instance, across Canada . . . average weekly earnings across Canada decreased by nearly \$4 from December 1998 to January of this year, which placed it about the same as January a year ago.

Except in Saskatchewan. Average weekly income was down in every province but ours where it increased by \$15 over January 1998, by \$3 over December 1998. That is up, not down. A 2.8 per cent increase this year, half a per cent a month, the highest rate in Canada.

This means, Mr. Speaker, that in Saskatchewan there are more jobs, there are more well-paying jobs, and there are more full-time jobs, Mr. Speaker.

Good news to start the day of good news. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

War in Yugoslavia

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As we sit here today to listen to the budget, squabbling over which government department should get a few more dollars, there is a war taking place in Yugoslavia. The skies in Kosovo lit up as American B-52 bombers and Canadian CF-18s launched attacks on Yugoslav army barracks, missile sites, and other key Yugoslavian military positions.

Mr. Speaker, thousands of people have fled their homes only to return to find them destroyed. We are all too familiar with the atrocities that war brings. Families are torn apart and lives are lost.

Mr. Speaker, it is our duty as elected officials to recognize that there's so much going on in the world outside of the Saskatchewan borders. Mr. Boris Yeltsin said himself that with these air strikes from NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization), could follow a potential world war.

That is the magnitude of this problem, Mr. Speaker. And on behalf of the official opposition I would like to extend our deepest sympathy for those families in Canada and Yugoslavia, and to our brave soldiers who are fighting to keep Canada safe. Most of us in this room have a family member with memories that include the last world war. Now again we have to worry that our children will also know the pain of war.

Mr. Speaker, for a few moments this morning on this budget day let's put the world in perspective. The economy is not the only global concern. Peace, security, and freedom are the foundations of humanity. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Saskatoon's Workforce and Tourism Receive High Rating

Mr. Koenker: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Two good news items from Saskatoon this morning. First, a recent poll conducted by the Saskatoon REDA (regional economic development authority) unearthed a valuable resource in our city, namely the quality of the Saskatoon workforce, and more importantly the work ethic that is found in the city of Saskatoon — rated superior by each and every sector of the economy there. Whether it was ag-tech, food processing, information technology, manufacturing, or transportation, each sector of the economy pointed to the workforce and the work ethic as the reason for business locating in Saskatoon.

And secondly, last year Saskatoon had a record year for conventions and attendance. Although conventions only increased by 5 per cent, attendance increased by 62 per cent resulting in a \$29 million going into the city's economy, an increase of \$9 million over 1992 which was the previous record year.

Because of this success and the increased interest in Saskatoon as a host city, Tourism Saskatchewan is now going to market Saskatoon in other provinces and in the US (United States). Mr. Speaker, both Saskatoon and Regina are establishing themselves as valuable and viable resources for our province. I say well done to both cities.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Air Travel for Government Ministers

Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When the Post-Secondary Education minister was flying with the president of the University of Regina Students' Union to go hear the DesRosiers report, the minister explained that the first priority for the executive plane was for cabinet ministers, and the second priority was for private citizens travelling with the minister. The other day the Deputy Premier said that the policy on the plane was not to let space go to waste.

So, in the interests of helping the government in that matter and affording the cabinet an opportunity to meet some of their constituents, Marlin Belt, a Safeway employee who lives in the Deputy Premier's riding is generally available on short notice to trips to Vancouver to visit relatives.

Tom, a University of Regina student, is looking for someone to share gas with to Edmonton on the week of March 29th. Chris, a University of Saskatchewan student, is looking to split gas expenses with a non-smoker to Calgary once a month. Tamara, a U of R (University of Regina) is looking to share costs on a trip to Winnipeg any time in April for at least two days.

While this is by no means a comprehensive list, I'm sure each and every one of them would travel executive air if they felt

they were doing their little part for Saskatchewan government policy. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Job Losses

Ms. Haverstock: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I know that the government would far prefer that this simply be a good news day, but unfortunately I was passed a note just shortly after 10 o'clock this morning that indicates that some 40 highly qualified professionals in Saskatoon as of today will no longer be employed by their employer. Their employer is Kilbourn Lavalin, as most people would know, that is an architectural engineering firm. And those two different kinds of professions, Mr. Speaker, are directly correlated with growth — economic growth in a province.

It is with great sadness that this news has come forward, and I'm sorry that it had to be on a good news day.

Entrepreneurs 2000 — Small Fruits Processing Facility

Hon. Mr. Wiens: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Farmers are again showing us the way to build Saskatchewan. We have all heard Paul Martin, the journalist, speaking about how we hooked the world on Saskatoon pie in 1986 and then left them hanging.

In response to this farmers have begun planting small fruits, now about 1,000 acres here in Saskatchewan and in response to that we're going to see a new processing industry about to emerge.

And once again Entrepreneurs 2000, the REDA in the Rosetown region has recognized this opportunity. Entrepreneurs 2000, which has since its inception helped create 100 new businesses and 300 new jobs, is doing it again. With a development grant from Economic Development they will work with growers to create a facility to clean, chill, freeze, and store small fruits. Entrepreneurs 2000 and growers will also be exploring new product and marketing opportunities.

This is just another example of how innovation and hard work is changing the face of Saskatchewan. So put another mark on the wall for farmers, for the rural communities that are their home, and for the rural diversification that is continuing to build our province.

And chalk up one more business success for Entrepreneurs 2000. Congratulations.

Moosomin Chamber of Commerce Banquet

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, all across this province we have many communities that are working so hard for their existence. But last night I had the privilege of attending a banquet in the community of Moosomin, put on by the Moosomin Chamber of Commerce — just a good and prime example of what chambers of commerce are doing across this province, and how they promote their communities, how they sell their communities to the province and to the world beyond.

As well, Mr. Speaker, for the crowd that was in attendance, the Moosomin chamber had a special treat. They brought in our

own, Saskatchewan's own Sandra Schmirler. The crowd was certainly thrilled by her exploits. As we all know Sandra is not only a provincial, she's a national, international, and an Olympic medallist and winner, fine winner, and representative and spokesperson for the world of curling.

Mr. Speaker, what the Moosomin Chamber of Commerce did last night is well ... And all communities maybe in Saskatchewan need to take heed that if you work together and if you promote your community you can certainly build it as we build our province. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Saskatchewan Business and Industry

Mr. Trew: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know the member from Saskatoon Sutherland was correct. Saskatoon is a great place to do business. The member from Rosetown-Biggar is rightly proud that his constituency is becoming a centre of food processing industry. How about my town, Mr. Speaker? Well we're right in the hunt. In fact in one way we're leading the pack.

A recent study by KPMG which studies the costs of doing business in the G7 countries reveals a couple of simple but revealing facts.

Fact one, Canada is the least expensive of all the G7 countries in which to do business.

Fact two, in all of the cities in western Canada and the western US, Regina is listed as having the lowest average business cost. Not Calgary, the promised land for members opposite, not Edmonton, not Winnipeg — Regina.

Facts, as they say, speak louder than hollow rhetoric. Third place by the way goes to Saskatoon.

Some of us are proud of Saskatchewan, and we're proud that Saskatchewan is the best province in the best country in the world.

Some of us, Mr. Speaker, are proud of our towns and our province and especially the individuals who combine their knowledge, ability, ideas, and efforts to make our towns such great places to live and work. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ORAL QUESTIONS

Taxation Policy

Mr. Gantefer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Finance. Mr. Minister, every family in Saskatchewan is hoping to hear a long-term plan for significant tax reduction in this year's budget. That's what the Saskatchewan Party has laid out in our election platform — a 2 percentage point cut in the PST (provincial sales tax) over two years and a 20 per cent cut in personal income tax over four years.

Mr. Minister, your NDP government (New Democratic Party) has given Saskatchewan the second highest taxes in Canada. We need to see Saskatchewan's tax rates more competitive with other provinces, especially Alberta. We need to give Saskatchewan families some hope.

Mr. Minister, will we see a long-term plan for real tax reduction in today's budget?

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, answering on behalf of the government, what I want to tell the member opposite is that what we've seen since 1991-92 when we assumed office . . . and I might remind the House that when we assumed office on November 1, 1991, the government of the day fled the Chamber without even having passed the budget, so we had to pass one in December of 1991 and then introduce a new one in May of 1992. And we had a consistent plan to do the first thing — reduce and eliminate the deficit. And we were the first government anywhere, provincial or federal, in recent history in Canada, to do so because we had that determined plan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Then we said, then we said we have a balanced approach to dealing with the surplus dollars. Roughly speaking, one-third for debt; roughly speaking, one-third for tax reduction, your point; roughly speaking, one-third to maintain the infrastructure — health care, roads, education, and the like for the province of Saskatchewan.

That is our game plan. That is sustainable. Your game plan is a return back to the 1980s. Your so-called tax cuts would put this province back into the hole \$2 billion. No wonder you slipped into third spot in the provincial interests in the political polls. Nobody is buying that old back-to-the-eighties line of yours.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Gantefer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the Premier's government didn't balance the government; the people of Saskatchewan balanced the budget because you took an extra billion dollars in taxes out of their pockets every year. Mr. Speaker, that policy has made your job creation record dead last in Canada. Over the last 12 months thousands of jobs were created in every province in Canada except Saskatchewan.

You know, Mr. Premier, you once said that high taxes are the silent killer of jobs. Well, you're killing business, you're killing jobs, you're killing hope. Mr. Premier, when will you stop all this killing? When will you come up with a meaningful, long-term tax reduction plan for the people of Saskatchewan so that jobs can be held in this province?

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member missed the point of my first answer, let me repeat to him in more simple terms. I have said that there is a game plan that this government is now implementing ever since we balanced the budget, and that is what to do with the surplus dollars.

And what we're doing with the surplus dollars is we're devoting a large chunk of them to a specific — in your words — game plan for tax reduction. We removed two points off the sales tax; removed two points off the income tax. We removed

various other tax benefits to promote industry and economic development. And we did so because we had inherited from you and your administration a situation where today, Mr. Speaker, and members of this House, where today we pay \$2 million a day — \$2 million a day — in interest payments on the public debt, thanks to your reckless, wild spending in the 1980s.

No, we're not going back to the future. We're building a 21st-century-ready Saskatchewan where there's economic growth, tax reduction, and optimism and hope.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Funding for Health Care

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Premier.

Mr. Premier, today's budget is expected to contain a lot more money for health care and almost all of it is coming from Ottawa. The Saskatchewan Party would ensure that all dollars flowing through Ottawa would go to front line services and patient care.

But more money is not the only answer. The NDP spends more every year on health, but health care in Saskatchewan keeps getting worse and worse. Less hospital beds, less hospitals, and less nurses, and less confidence that the system is really going to work when your family needs it.

Mr. Premier, does today's budget contain a long-term plan for improving health care? Or is it just a short-term fix to get you through the next election?

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, it is good news that the federal Liberal government has now decided to reinvest in health care — \$2.5 billion doesn't match the withdrawals but it's a good step and I commend the Prime Minister and I commend the federal Liberal government for doing it.

And I want to tell the House, the minister will be making his speech in a moment, but every penny of that share from Ottawa to the provinces is going to be put back into health care. Plus wait till the budget — to exactly what we're going to add on top of that in terms of investment and reinvestment in health care.

But I just want you to say . . . you asked, do we have a game plan. We do have a game plan as I just outlined. The question is do you have a game plan? And the answer is you do have a game plan. Under the statement of your leader, Elwin Hermanson, quote:

Saskatchewan Party Leader Elwin Hermanson couldn't guarantee his party would keep the doors open at all 36 hospitals with low average daily bed usage rates.

Yet this, he said this — now, Mr. Speaker, you see how they react when they get a dose of truth in them — he says, an evaluation would be done first, a Saskatchewan Party evaluation would be done first to decide how to best serve communities.

I say we've got a plan. You're plan is to Americanize two-tier

medicare and destroy medicare. That's not our plan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Premier, is there anyone in Saskatchewan that really believes that health care has gotten better under the NDP? No.

What have we got for a record? Hospital closures, bed closures, record waiting lists, nursing shortages — that's the NDP record. And then the Associate Minister of Health says there's going to be fewer hospitals in Saskatchewan.

You have mismanaged health care and money alone is not going to solve the problem. We have to ensure that money is going to be used to improve the system, to keep hospitals open in places like Carrot River, Hafford, or in the Moose Mountain District. And it's not just to pay for more communications officers to spread your propaganda.

Mr. Premier, what are you doing today with the budget to ensure that Health dollars are being spent properly on front line services and patient care instead of administration?

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, again the Minister of Finance will be announcing this to the House and the people of Saskatchewan very shortly. But I want to repeat again what I just said in response to the last question. Every penny of Saskatchewan's share of the 2.5 billion from Ottawa goes into health care — from Ottawa, from Ottawa ... (inaudible interjection) ... Now hold it.

But what is your leader and what does the Sask-a-Tory party believe in? Your leader came back from the united alternative conference in Ottawa. He said he liked the united alternative conference and then he said this, quote:

Hermanson also likes one of the new party's first proposals to have the federal government (note these words, Mr. Speaker, to have the federal government) surrender its responsibility for health care to the provinces.

You know what that means? If Ottawa surrenders ... (inaudible interjection) ... Right on, the member from Canora says. If Ottawa pulls out of health care, no Canada Health Act, no \$2.5 billion from Ottawa for health care, and yet you stand up saying, we need more money.

You don't support more money. You support zap — a five year freeze on health care. Zap — there's not going to be any increase in health care at all. You are going to try to finance this so-called pie in the sky by zapping the nurses and the doctors and freezing and two-tiering Americanize ... (inaudible) ... Zap, that's your approach — that's not our approach.

We have a game plan. You do not have a game plan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Financial Support for Farmers

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister ...

The Speaker: — Order, order. Now hon. members will recognize that the hon. member for Saltcoats is not located far from the Chair and I'm having much difficulty being able to hear him put his question. I'll ask for the co-operation of all members.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Finance. Mr. Minister, it is now clear that the NDP and Liberal government's farm aid program is a dismal failure. And most people expect this year to be even worse for our Saskatchewan farmers.

Mr. Minister, last year you were scrambling at the last minute to come up with money to help farm families, even though the Saskatchewan Party started warning you as far back as last May.

Mr. Minister, are you putting a little more thought and planning into this year's budget? Is there anything built into this year's budget in case the farm crisis gets even worse, or is the NDP going to abandon our farm families once again?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, I find this very interesting with respect to the Sask-a-Tory party. They are advocating \$2 billion roughly speaking in tax cuts; they say that they want more money for agriculture, as the hon. member says ... member from Cannington says he wants more money from health care.

I suspect somewhere along ... (inaudible interjection) ... You didn't say that? No more money. So the answer is you don't want any more money for health care. You've said I wasn't listening, so thank you for clarifying — no more money for health care. Zap, you're frozen for health care.

In the meantime their leader, Mr. Hermanson, goes down to Ottawa and he says to anybody who would listen to them, he says, don't believe the Romanow ... don't believe the administration in Saskatchewan, don't believe the Minister of Agriculture; they got money coming out of their ears; they can pay. What kind of an assist is that to the farmers in the province of Saskatchewan?

They go down to Ottawa to tell Ottawa, stick it to the farmers. I tell you if this game plan in farm aid is ruined, it is because of your interference, your paperwork, and the lack of your support behind all of the farmers in order to get top dollar from Ottawa, which is what we needed. You hurt the farmers of Saskatchewan, not us.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Funding for Highway Maintenance

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my question is to the Minister of Highways or the Premier, if he would prefer to answer it.

The Speaker: — Order, order. Now the Chair must ask for the co-operation of all members of the House. But also for our visitors to the Assembly, visitors may not be aware, but it is

prohibited to participate in the proceedings of the Assembly and I'll ask for the co-operation of all members.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I can appreciate the Premier's exuberance with the crowd he's brought in to wait for the budget speech. And, Mr. Speaker, when you look at the record of this government, and Mr. Speaker, to the Premier — I would have to suggest if you went and if you drove on the highways of Saskatchewan rather than flying over them, Mr. Premier, you would find that Saskatchewan highways are a mess. So is your NDP's management of Saskatchewan highway system.

Three years ago, Mr. Speaker, this Premier, this government, promised the people of Saskatchewan they would put \$250 million into fixing Saskatchewan highways. To date, they are \$70 million behind that commitment. Mr. Premier, are you going to live up to that commitment in today's budget? Will we see \$250 million dollars finally committed to upgrading Saskatchewan highways?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, the hon. member obviously has . . . is the pattern now of the Sask-a-Tories, not quite telling the complete picture if I can describe it that way in parliamentary terms. The promise made by the former minister of Finance is that this government is going to spend \$2.5 billion dollars on Saskatchewan highways over 10 years — over 10 years.

And we're doing it, and we're doing it without a penny of assistance from the federal government. And we're doing it in the light of getting rid of the deficit where the province of Saskatchewan people had the highest per capita deficit of any province in this country. And we're doing in on top of something else. You remember how you did away with the gas tax? You remember the Tory caucus, you did away with 350 bucks . . . million dollars — just like that. You remember how you sold off the highways equipment? Just like that. You gave it away. In the result with no money for highways. In the result with no equipment to repair highways.

The member gets up and he has the gall to say, guess what, there are a few potholes that are around here. You know what the biggest pothole is around here? The \$15 billion debt that you left and it went right straight through the hole of Saskatchewan finances. Shame on you for asking that question today.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A further question to the Premier who has obviously gone to the cupboards and pulled out the blame-thrower again. He's blaming everybody else but himself.

Mr. Speaker, in fact Mr. Premier, Mr. Premier, last year a young woman came to the legislature with a 10 pound hunk of asphalt that had come through her windshield, that had flown up out of one of your crumbling highways and almost killed her. In every other province, people say it's time to hit the road. In Saskatchewan, the road hits you.

Mr. Premier, when are you going to become serious and put some money in. People aren't looking for 10 years down the road. They want to see a serious commitment beginning today, that you're going to honour that promise rather than making a promise that's hither to and yonder.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, it's a sad thing to watch what's happening to the Sask-a-Tory party. A party in the process of drowning politically. Not pleasant, not pleasant what's going on in the consequence. Today's poll on CKRM shows now, the Saskatchewan Sask-a-Tory party running third behind the Liberals. Not my poll, that's a University of Calgary poll. Remember how they were telling us two or three months ago how things were so strong in rural Saskatchewan and now the truth comes out.

The hon. member opposite says he wants more money for highways. I'm telling you that this government's commitment at \$2.5 billion is an unprecedented commitment for highways in the face of the fact that you brought this province on the verge of bankruptcy, on the verge of bankruptcy.

And I say to you, hon. member, if anybody says out here that somebody is hitting the road, I tell you who's hitting the road, who's hitting the political road, is this collection of dead of the night Liberals and Tories, called Sask-a-Tories. Good bye and good luck. You're hitting the road, not this government.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Funding for Health Care

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today should be a day about priorities, but this government's record on health care is pathetic. They failed year after year to make health care the number one priority that they should have. They've laid off 600 nurses and now they're begging them back to work. They've closed 53 rural hospitals and turned them into phone booths, Mr. Speaker. And according to the Associate Minister of Health, they're going to close even more.

Mr. Speaker, we continue to see waiting lists grow — 3,000, 6,000, 10,000. When will it ever end, Mr. Speaker? Mr. Premier, how in the world can you defend your government's pathetic record on health care?

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, our spending record on health care, I stand to be corrected by the Minister of Finance when he speaks momentarily, but I believe that you will see the largest amount of money dedicated to health care to the province of Saskatchewan in the history of the province of Saskatchewan since 1905.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — And we're doing it in the face of federal cutbacks — I've announced and acknowledged and complimented the Prime Minister on reinserting the 2.5 billion — but from 1995 until this year, cutbacks at \$6 billion. We're doing it in the face of that.

And we're doing it in accordance with the principles of the Canada Health Act. We're doing it in accordance with what Tommy Douglas and Woodrow Lloyd and all the men and women who fought for medicare believe in. We're doing it in accordance with those principles.

But not you folks. Your leader Jim Melenchuk here, the good doctor says on November 27, 1997, private surgical clinics should be permitted to open in the province to reduce hospital waiting lists. Do you know what that amounts to? Canada Health Act out the window, two-tiers.

What do you say? What do you say? You say in a report to BBS (Baton Broadcasting System) on the 1997, quote: "Harvey McLane," the news reporter says, "if there are people that are prepared to pay in a private clinic, then I think we have to let them pay."

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. McLane: — Mr. Speaker, the government can throw all sort of dollars at an ill-conceived health reform model, and it doesn't work. And here's a quote from a health care worker in the Rockglen area, Mr. Speaker, that will bear out what we're trying to say, and I quote:

I have been working in the health care field since 1965 with 25 years as a combined lab plus X-ray technician, presently working back as an aide as there is no longer full-time lab and X-ray services in Rockglen due to health care reforms and our doctor leaving. Due to losing all acute care beds, there is a threat of closing the facility altogether (Mr. Speaker). I see a lot of staff taking sick leave due to a heavy workload that is being forced upon the nursing staff. I feel we had better health care before health care reform was dreamed up. I strongly feel that we are going backwards.

Mr. Premier, that's what the people out in the country are saying about you. And how can you justify what you've done? You admitted in the Throne Speech that you made mistakes. Is doing what you did to towns like Rockglen one of the mistakes that you made in health reform?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, there is no enterprise of men and women, especially in the area of government, that is free of mistake or error. We all make that. But we have not made the mistake in supporting the reform of our health care services, which provide the best possible health care this province can afford, which leads the nation right now of all of the provinces. And I can attest to that, having met with all the premiers.

And I want to say this. When I'm out there fighting for health care, here's what I get. I chaired the premiers' conference — it was my pleasure — this August, 1998, right here in this province. We come out with a headline that says, "Premiers make health care top issue." Top issue — all of us united on it.

What does your leader say? Quote:

Liberal leader Jim Melenchuk acknowledged that his party . . . made health care its number one priority. "But (he says) you simply can't ignore all the other things. You have to look at highways, infrastructure and rail line abandonment."

In fact, the headline says, "Saskatchewan opposition parties go ahead and start province-bashing." You don't defend us; you're province-bashing us.

I say the alternative is not the fact that we made mistakes. Judge us against what the alternatives politically are. And they are two-tier, they are Americanization, they're doing away with the Canada Health Act, the destruction of medicare in Saskatchewan, and we won't allow it. No, not as long as we're here — never.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Health Care Workers

Mr. Aldridge: — Mr. Speaker, we have more questions for the Premier from health care workers. This one comes from a health care worker in Herbert and I quote:

I know of health board members going back and forth to Regina for meetings given good pay. It's hard not to be resentful when making 9.50 an hour working alone at nights and having lost my pension plan. I love my work. The elderly I care for have enriched my life. It saddens me to see how governments can so easily step on us working folk who are asking for a fair chance to make ends meet and give quality care to those we serve.

So, Mr. Speaker, my question to the Premier is, how can the Premier say his health reforms have been worth it when he's had to step all over working folk like this health care worker from Herbert in order to accomplish his aims?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, we value very much, and I don't think all of us or perhaps many of us say enough times, the importance of the health care workers. Whether it's nurses or doctors, any part of the persons who works in that system is absolutely valuable. And they should be compensated fairly. They should be compensated in accordance with our capacity to compensate.

We're in negotiations right now with nurses and with other health care workers with the objective of getting a fair, freely collective-bargained agreement. That is our approach. I think we can succeed. They're difficult negotiations. We'll see how the next few days unfold. But we're committed to providing that kind of respect and that kind of remuneration.

And that is consistent with what we're trying to do, and that is to build a 21st century health care system which will hold Saskatchewan at the very top of the Canadian pantheon of health care where we were in '61 and '62 and where we are right now.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Aldridge: — Mr. Speaker, this question is from a health care worker in Neville and I quote:

When I hear Regina has a shortage of nurses I can only feel for the patients. We nurses tried to tell the government back in 1994 and 1995 when all of the so-called changes started they were wrong. But did they listen? Now we know we were right; do they?

Mr. Speaker, she adds that she was laid off in 1995. Mr. Speaker, what does the Premier have to say to this nurse? Will you admit you were wrong? Will you finally admit that you are responsible for the nursing shortage?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, I say to the hon. member opposite that the policy of the government with respect to health care renewal has been articulated over and over again by myself today, and over the years. And I can say with authority it's been my privilege for 18 months, almost two years now, to meet with my colleagues in every other province and I know how far ahead we are.

And I know that when people like Michael Decter come in from Ontario, and others, here Alan Backman, University of Saskatchewan, and say that Saskatchewan's health care reforms are the model — the model — of this country, I'm going to accept those judgment calls before I accept a judgment call from the member from Thunder Creek. I'm going to accept that judgment all the time.

Have there been mistakes? Yes there have been. Can we do better? Yes, and we shall. But I tell you the difference — the difference — I repeat again, is your member, your seatmate; two-tiering; your leader of the Liberal Party, private clinics; two-tiering.

The alternatives? The Sask-a-Tory, valuation, do away with the Canada Health Act. Just, I ask all the nurses and all the doctors and everybody here to consider that alternative to ours, and they'll pick our alternative all the time, because we invented and defend medicare.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 201 — The Government Accountability Act

Mr. Gantefer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that Bill 201, The Government Accountability 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.

Bill No. 202 — The Balanced Budget Act, 1999

Mr. Gantefer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that Bill 202, The Balanced Budget Act, 1999 be now introduced and

read a 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

Mr. Kowalsky: — I am pleased to submit the answer to question 17, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: — The answer to question 17 is provided.

Mr. Kowalsky: — Also pleased to submit the answer to question 18, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: — The answer to item no. 2 is provided.

Mr. Kowalsky: — Mr. Speaker, I request that question 19 be converted to orders for return (debatable).

The Speaker: — The item no. 3, question no. 19, is converted for motions for returns (debatable).

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

COMMITTEE OF FINANCE

TABLING OF ESTIMATES AND SUPPLEMENTARY ESTIMATES

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleagues for their warm applause but at this point I want to announce that I have a message from His Honour the Lieutenant Governor.

The Speaker: — I'll ask members to stand. The message is as follows from the office of the Lieutenant Governor:

The Lieutenant Governor transmits estimates of certain sums required for the service of the province for the 12 months ending March 31, 2000, and supplementary estimates of certain sums required for the service of the province for the 12 months ending March 31, 1999, and recommends the same to the Legislative Assembly. (Signed) Honourable E.N. Wiebe, Lieutenant Governor, province of Saskatchewan.

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, at this time I'd like to move, seconded by the Premier:

That His Honour's message, the estimates, and supplementary estimates be referred to the Committee of Finance.

Motion agreed to.

MOTION FOR COMMITTEE OF FINANCE (BUDGET DEBATE)

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Mr. Speaker, today I am going to present a budget which will chart our course into a new century.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — And we have with us, Mr. Speaker, as has been mentioned, many special people today. But if I may be indulged just for a moment, I'd like to introduce a few very special people who I've asked to be my special guests today.

Starting with my wife Pauline, and I would ask her to rise.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — With us also is Erin Wier who's a student at Campbell Collegiate in Regina, and Erin is a national public speaking champion. And Erin don't judge me too harshly today. Welcome.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — And with Erin we have our good neighbours and friends from Saskatoon, Mary and Ruben Peters. And I welcome them here today as well.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — And finally our good friend, Ann Schulman, who's a registered nurse in Saskatoon and is the executive director of the Saskatchewan Institute on Prevention of Handicaps. Welcome.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(1100)

Hon. Mr. Cline: — And before I get into the body of my address, Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my constituents in Saskatoon Mount Royal for sending me here, my personal staff who do such a good job for me and the excellent public service we have in Saskatchewan, my colleagues here in the legislature on both sides of the House, and the thousands of Saskatchewan women, men, and young people who contributed their thoughts and ideas during the pre-budget consultation.

And what struck me, Mr. Speaker, during that pre-budget consultation was something we all know, but certainly I was struck by it again, and that is that people in Saskatchewan have a shared passion for doing things together. That is one of our defining strengths in this province. And, Mr. Speaker, I think it's fair to say that throughout the history of our province, pulling together has been the way that we have got things done.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — And it will be the way, Mr. Speaker, that in the new century we'll be pursuing our dreams. And our dreams are for Saskatchewan, a Saskatchewan where we will all enjoy the benefits of community and the rewards of individual effort.

And our role as government, Mr. Speaker, is to unite people in that pursuit. We can do more working together than we can do apart. And where we start, Mr. Speaker, is with sound financial management. Saskatchewan people pay their bills and they expect government to do the same. And in Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, balanced budgets are now the rule, not the exception.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — In the 1980s the government got it wrong. They mortgaged our future in favour of political self-interest. They drove Saskatchewan to the brink of financial and economic disaster and put in jeopardy the public programs that people in this province rely on, Mr. Speaker.

And that is why Saskatchewan people chose our Premier and his team to take over the government in 1991. Working together, Saskatchewan people took this province from the worst financial position in Canada to among the best. And today, Saskatchewan's record of balanced budgets is second to none. And I'm proud, Mr. Speaker, to rise today to present Saskatchewan's sixth consecutive balanced budget.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — And, Mr. Speaker, this budget contains a plan for three more balanced budgets, and that is nine straight years of balanced budgets. And that is nearly a decade of paying down the debt from the 1980s.

When former minister Ed Tchorzewski tabled our first budget, he said this:

Let us look forward to the day when we can tell our children that though we entered the 1990s plight by financial crisis, we made the difficult decisions. We turned a new page in our history and put this province firmly on the path to prosperity.

Mr. Speaker, and ladies and gentlemen, Saskatchewan people have made the difficult decisions and we are on the path to prosperity.

In the 1980s we saw how deficits, debt, and mismanagement led to higher taxes, less investment, fewer jobs, and economic stagnation. In the 1990s we've seen how balanced budgets, responsible management translate into growing confidence, more jobs, lower taxes, more investment, and more opportunities.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — And for most of this decade, Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan led Canada in economic growth. Last year employment reached the highest level in the province's history.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — As we move forward, Mr. Speaker, we're facing some tough challenges like low commodity prices and unstable international markets. But we're weathering this storm because our foundation is stronger than ever. And building on the strong foundation, our economy will continue to grow and diversify, creating more jobs and opportunities for Saskatchewan people.

We set a goal for our government and our province of creating 30,000 new jobs by the year 2000. Some said it couldn't be done but we're almost there already, and this budget sets out a plan to create even more jobs by continuing to develop our key

economic sectors, building our transportation network, and investing in training and education for Saskatchewan people.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Mr. Speaker, in agriculture our farmers are the best in the world. They've helped build our province, diversify our economy, expand markets, and develop new industries like food processing, agricultural bio-technology, and implement manufacturing.

Today we're facing unfair subsidy wars from foreign governments. We must stand with them and we will.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — To help them get through the recent slump in prices, we're providing \$20 million in loan assistance to Saskatchewan hog farmers and \$140 million to grain farmers under the Agricultural Income Disaster Assistance program.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — To better protect farmers, we expanded and enhanced our crop insurance program. We've reduced the cost of crop insurance by 40 per cent since 1996.

Recently we announced an \$85 million top-up for producers on their NISA (Net Income Stabilization Account) accounts. And we're improving NISA now to make the program even better for new and expanding producers.

In addition, this budget invests in research and development for new crops, new methods of farming, agricultural biotechnology, and value-added manufacturing and food processing industries. Last year we targeted nearly \$14 million to agricultural R&D (research and development) through the strategic research program and the technology adoption and demonstration initiative.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — And this year, Mr. Speaker, we're going to do more. We're going to invest 26 per cent more in agricultural R&D this year for a total investment of over \$17 million.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Mr. Speaker, the northern reaches of our province offer significant potential for development and growth. And here too there are challenges we must meet and there are challenges we will meet.

This year's budget invests more in economic development in the North. It supports northern industries like tourism, forestry, and Aboriginal business, and it introduces a new royalty structure for gold and base metals, for more exploration and development.

Mr. Speaker, agriculture and resource industries will always be a crucial part of our economy but as we enter the 21st century, Saskatchewan people are making remarkable inroads in diversifying the economy and creating new opportunities.

Our targeted tax strategy is key to this kind of diversification. That's why we're working with business people to provide the competitive tax structure they need to grow. The success of this strategy is confirmed by manufacturing and processing companies all across the province, which last year employed over 31,000 Saskatchewan women and men — 31 per cent more than in 1992.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — And I'm proud of that progress, Mr. Speaker. And there's more proof in the film and video industry which last year doubled production since we introduced the Saskatchewan film employment tax credit.

We're also attracting new investment in broad-ranging research and development in biotechnology, information technology, and other highly competitive industries.

As part of our renewed emphasis on research and development, we're working with the University of Saskatchewan to bring the Canadian Light Source Synchrotron to the U of S campus. With this facility Saskatoon will be one of only 10 Synchrotron centres in North America and the only one in Canada bringing millions of dollars of new research to our province each and every year.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — We're also investing in other types of research to keep our economy strong and growing. This year's budget includes funding for the new petroleum technology research centre in Regina. This centre will design new ways to produce and refine Saskatchewan's vast reserves of oil for more jobs and growth.

And we'll continue to work with Saskatchewan's entrepreneurs and small business to make it easier for them to build on their ideas and hard work. Cutting red tape, reducing regulations, and partnering with regional associations around the province — these are all part of our plan to encourage small business. And I'm pleased to announce that in order to better provide access capital to start up small business, this budget doubles the funding available through the small business loans association program.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Agriculture, northern development, value-added industries, research and development, local economic development, and more support for small business — these are the keys to a prosperous, growing Saskatchewan.

The second part of our growth in jobs plan is about transportation. Saskatchewan must move goods to market, despite the huge challenge posed by changes in road and rail transportation. With the help of area transportation planning committees, communities, shippers, and producers, we are building the transportation system of the future. We're offering interest-free loans for local groups to purchase and operate short-line railways, and we're investing more to modernize our road network.

I'm pleased to announce that this budget continues the job of modernizing our transportation system by investing \$235 million in roads and highways.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Mr. Speaker, that is 40 per cent more than just four years ago.

But there's more, Mr. Speaker. There's more. In addition to the \$19 million in revenue sharing grants to municipalities to support roads, this budget includes an innovative new rural roads fund of \$5 million to bring rural municipal governments together with the Department of Highways to better meet our shared transportation challenges.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — And there's more, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to announce a new \$10 million provincial-municipal infrastructure program to help . . .

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — And that's going to help northern, rural, and urban municipalities address priority needs including highways and roads, Mr. Speaker. This new \$10 million provincial investment to be matched by local funds amounts to an 18 per cent increase in municipal revenue sharing, bringing total revenue sharing to \$66 million this year.

And in addition we will provide Saskatchewan municipalities with \$3 million through grants in lieu of property taxes, double last year's amount, as we committed to do in 1998.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Mr. Minister, the third part of our plan invests in the education and training of Saskatchewan's number one resource — its people. Our province has a strong record of providing excellent education and training opportunities, and we'll make sure the focus stays where it belongs — on people.

Today we have over 190,000 students enrolled in our kindergarten to grade 12 school system, over 30,000 students in universities, and over 23,000 people in provincial training and employment programs. The 1999 budget makes the largest investment ever in their future, which is our shared future.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(1115)

Hon. Mr. Cline: — To improve elementary education, operating grants to schools will increase by \$13.5 million this year. That's \$13.5 million more for pre-kindergarten programs, kindergarten to grade 12 curricula, community schools, school-based services, and access to computers and the Internet.

And this budget also provides a total of \$3 million this year to school boards through grants in lieu of property taxes — double last year's amount.

Last year we invested \$24 million in capital funding for over 100 school improvement projects. I'm pleased to announce that this year's budget invests another \$24 million in school capital.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Mr. Speaker, that is a two-year total of \$48 million to upgrade or build over 200 schools in Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — We're making a significant investment in the high quality education and safe, healthy schools we want for our children and our future. And as we enter the new millennium, annual funding for Saskatchewan's K to 12 system is more than \$550 million.

Mr. Speaker, when we took office in the 1990s, the beginning of the century, we were spending more money servicing the public debt than we were spending on education. And when we leave the 1990s, Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased and proud to tell you and all the members of the House and the people of the province, we'll be spending at least \$250 million more on education for our kids than interest serving the public debt, and that's what we should be doing, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Well that's K to 12 education, Mr. Speaker.

But in the new global economy, education must continue throughout a person's life. And post-secondary education and training will ensure Saskatchewan women and men have access to the opportunities they need to succeed. This budget increases operating grants for SIAST (Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology) and regional colleges by 9 per cent.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — It increases operating grants for Saskatchewan universities and federated colleges to \$184 million, an increase of 7 per cent over the last two years.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Like last year the budget provides \$3 million for the universities to revitalize and modernize scientific equipment and to make better use of shared resources. And like last year it invests in the rebuilding and upgrading of university, SIAST, and regional college facilities.

With this budget we are making a commitment to the University of Saskatchewan to rebuild the Thorvaldson and kinesiology buildings. We're supporting the SIAST redevelopment project to integrate campus facilities in Regina. And we're continuing to upgrade and renovate facilities at the University of Regina.

I'm pleased to announce that this year's budget includes \$23 million for these critical projects, bringing our two-year total capital investment in post-secondary facilities to \$46 million.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — And in addition, Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to announce we will target new funding of \$3 million to the College of Medicine at the University of Saskatchewan this year to make sure that we increase the number of doctors and surgeons in Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Mr. Speaker, our universities and the students who attend them continue to benefit as well from the province's efforts in research and development. The new Synchrotron, the petroleum research centre investment in agricultural R&D, and the 15 per cent R&D tax credit introduced last year will mean millions more dollars for funding and support of universities now and in the future.

In total, our investment in Saskatchewan's universities, colleges, and technical institutes this year will reach nearly \$300 million.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — That's in addition to the improvements we made in our student aid program. With these improvements, over 3,500 students with children have access to increased bursaries and study grants, thereby directly reducing the amount they have to borrow. Moreover, this year thousands of Saskatchewan women and men with students loans can deduct interest payments to reduce their income taxes.

For people in the workforce, education and training continue as well. We're making major changes to the way we deliver the work-related training needed for today's jobs. This budget will continue investing in adult basic education: JobStart, Future Skills, Quick Skills, apprenticeship, income support, and other training and employment programs through the Saskatchewan Training Strategy.

I am pleased to announce funding for these important initiatives will be \$206 million this year.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — In total, this budget invests over \$1 billion — our largest investment — in education and training to prepare Saskatchewan people for success in a rapidly changing, highly competitive, high-tech economy.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Mr. Speaker, investing in education and training, building our transportation system and developing our key economic sectors, that is how we will create more jobs and opportunities in the 21st century.

The strong foundation we created together in the 1900s also allows us to build a progressive inclusive society — one in which we care for one another and share responsibility for the well-being of all.

That is the Saskatchewan we grew up in. That is the

Saskatchewan we want our children and grandchildren to grow up in. And doing that means providing public services that matter to people — to help children and families in need, to provide for safety and security in our communities, and to ensure our health system is there when we need it. These are at the heart and soul of our quality of life.

Saskatchewan has a proud tradition of caring for children in need and helping families stand on their own. In the 1990s we led the way in encouraging the creation of a National Child Benefit to improve the lives of Canadian children.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — And we're working with people in every Saskatchewan community to do even more for children and families.

The Saskatchewan Action Plan for Children, one of this province's finest achievements, brings people in communities and governments together to provide among other things, school lunch programs, immunization programs, and expanded community education.

And today, Mr. Speaker, I am proud and pleased to announce a \$14 million increase for the Action Plan for Children bringing our total investment in this groundbreaking initiative to \$67 million this year.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan people believe no child should go hungry or go without the guidance and support of family and community. They also know the best way to prevent child hunger and need is by helping families become independent. Common sense says this: the best way to promote independence is to ensure parents have the opportunity and the dignity of a job.

And our building independence strategy put in place three additional measures to ensure that parents can work — a child benefit program to provide financial support for children outside the welfare system, an employment supplement for low-income families to help cover work-related costs, and supplementary health coverage to make sure children in low-income families have medical and dental benefits when their parents return to the workforce.

This strategy has helped move more than 1,800 Saskatchewan families off social assistance in the last year alone.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — And we're going to continue with it, Mr. Speaker. Social assistance caseloads have been going down in this province since 1994. They're going in the right direction which is down, Mr. Speaker, and we're going to continue that work with Saskatchewan children and their families.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — By building independence we can keep reducing those caseloads, widen the circle of opportunity, and

make Saskatchewan a better place for everybody.

We also make it a better place when we ensure the safety of every person and the strength of every community. That means doing everything we can to reduce crime and make communities safer.

I'm pleased to announce that this budget increases funding to the Department of Justice by \$17 million, 8 per cent more than last year, so they can do the important job Saskatchewan people want them to do.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Last year we will target . . . no this year, Mr. Speaker, we will target \$218 million to the many vital services that keep our community safe, including the serious crime units, and our plan to deal with violent and repeat offenders. And we'll hold those few people accountable for their actions, who break the law, Mr. Speaker.

But, Mr. Speaker, as I've already outlined, Saskatchewan is doing even more to target the very roots of crime. We're sharing the responsibility for, and the benefit of, a better society by lowering poverty, enhancing education, and creating independence and opportunities. All of this is good news for Saskatchewan people.

But there is more, because the number one priority of this budget is health care.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Our belief in shared responsibility for health care and our belief in equal access to health care without discrimination on the basis of wealth, are basic values which define us as a society.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — In an age of change and uncertainty, it is important to reaffirm our commitment to those values. Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to announce that this budget contains the largest new investment in health care in Saskatchewan's history.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Saskatchewan's health budget will increase by \$195 million — 11 per cent more than last year.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — And every penny of that new investment will go to improved health services for people.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — First, we will shorten waiting times for surgeries. Acting on the report of the Task Team on Surgical Waiting Lists, we will serve more patients through expanded day surgery programs, provide 24-hour access to follow-up care and home districts, and invest in more operating room hours,

more surgical equipment, and better systems to prioritize the needs of patients.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Second, we will improve access to cancer treatment.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — I am pleased to announce that in addition to reducing waiting times for surgeries, this budget invests an additional \$3 million to cover more cancer drugs and new programs for cancer treatment and prevention.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Third, we will put more resources towards meeting the needs, the special health needs of women. This budget invests in women's health with increased funding for detection, prevention, and treatment of diseases of particular concern to women such as breast cancer and osteoporosis.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Fourth, we will do everything we can to recruit and retain the health care providers we need and make health care a career of choice for more people.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — As I mentioned a few minutes ago, this budget directs an additional \$3 million to the College of Medicine. That's a 15 per cent increase to make sure Saskatchewan people have the doctors and surgeons we need.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — And we're working to recruit and keep more rural physicians. Last year we provided rural practice establishment grants to encourage Saskatchewan-trained physicians to practise in rural Saskatchewan, and we'll do the same this year.

And we'll encourage more medical graduates to stay and work in Saskatchewan through the medical research resident bursary program. Through initiatives like these, we saw 70 per cent of Saskatchewan's new medical graduates practising in the province in 1998. That's double the number that stayed in the 1980s, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(1130)

Hon. Mr. Cline: — A strong, effective health system also means a commitment to the well-being of people who care for us — our dedicated professional health care providers. Since last year we've funded 200 additional nursing positions in communities across the province. Our government is determined to provide the best possible working conditions in compensation for nurses and other health professionals to support the vital contributions they make to Saskatchewan

people. This budget will allow us to move forward on this issue in a way that is fair to health providers and fair to Saskatchewan taxpayers.

And we will be targeting resources to train and recruit more health care providers for now and for the future. Shorter waiting times, improved access to cancer treatment, more women's health services, and better working conditions for health professionals to ensure better care — those are the priorities.

This budget also helps health districts to prepare their health equipment for a safe and smooth transition into the new century. I'm pleased to announce a \$50-million millennium fund for medical equipment and technology to make sure vital components of medical technology, such as heart monitors, keep rolling when the year rolls over from 1999 to the year 2000.

In addition to these important investments, I'm pleased to announce that this budget also provides funding for new hospitals in northern Saskatchewan — in Meadow Lake, Stony Rapids, and La Loche. Improved nursing homes and hospitals in Balcarres, Big River, and Unity. Continued work on the regional care centres in Battlefords, Melfort, Swift Current, and Weyburn. Expanded diagnostic capacity, including operating funding for the MRIs (magnetic resonance imaging) in Saskatoon and in Regina.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Expanded CT (computerized tomography) capacity including a portable scanner for southern and rural Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — New bone density equipment to aid in the early diagnosis of osteoporosis.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — More services in more communities such as cancer outreach treatments and kidney dialysis, expanded home care and mental health services, enhanced pediatric transport for critically ill infants, and progress on the Northern Telehealth Project to link health providers in the north to specialists in major urban centres.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Ultimately we must all remain focused on the most important part of the health system, the people who use its services. Mr. Speaker, our health districts must direct every possible health dollar into front line services. That is why we will continue to work with our district boards to lower administrative costs, freeing up even more dollars for front line services.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Saskatchewan people have been clear about what they want from our health system. This budget delivers shorter waiting times, better cancer treatment,

improved health services for women, better working conditions for health care providers, and improved health services right across this province.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — That is how our \$1.9 billion investment, the largest investment ever, will move our health system forward into the 21st century.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — And that is how we will remain true to the Saskatchewan values that laid the cornerstone for Canadian medicare in this Legislative Chamber 37 years ago.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Mr. Speaker, sound financial management is the foundation on which we are building our economy and our society. We promised to pay down the debt, to reduce the mortgage on our children's future. And we have.

In 1994 Saskatchewan's debt stood at almost \$15 billion. Today it is about \$11.5 billion, 23 per cent lower than it was in '94. And this budget sets out a plan to continue to pay down the province's debt.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — We promised to invest in people to improve the quality of life. And we have. There are those who say, we should slash taxes and slash or freeze spending. They're never very specific about the services they want to cut. Do they want fewer nurses? Fewer teachers? Or fewer miles of highway? We're never told.

Let us be clear. We want lower taxes, but we want to sustain public services and pay down the debt as well.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Others say we should have tax cuts, even if it means deficit and debt — sending the bill to the next generation. We on this side of the House are not among them. We are not in the business of buying people's votes with their children's money.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — And, Mr. Speaker, we promised to cut taxes as soon as the budget was balanced. And we have. We cut taxes every year since 1995, and we did it in a sustainable, affordable, responsible fashion.

Today I'm pleased to announce another sustainable tax cut, one that will further benefit Saskatchewan families, stimulate our economy, and create jobs for a bright future. Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to announce that, as of midnight tonight, the education and health tax will be cut from seven per cent to six per cent.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Mr. Speaker, that is three points off in three years. And that is \$300 million a year back into the hands of families, businesses, municipalities, educational institutions, school boards, and health boards right across this province.

In addition, in line with the tax changes announced in the recent federal budget, Saskatchewan income taxes will be lowered by \$30 million a year.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — I want to restate our commitment. It is to continue to cut taxes in a common sense, balanced approach that also includes debt reduction and improved services. Our record on this is clear, and there is a clear pattern for all to see.

In 1995 and 1996 we reduced income tax and eliminated income taxes entirely for 6,000 Saskatchewan people. In 1997 we cut the sales tax from 9 per cent to 7 per cent. In 1998 we reduced the provincial income tax rate from 50 per cent to 48 per cent. In 1999 we cut the sales tax again to 6 per cent.

Mr. Speaker, since 1995 provincial income taxes for the average Saskatchewan family have been reduced by more than 10 per cent.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — And since 1997 the sales tax has been cut by 33 per cent. And these tax cuts are here to stay.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — And we're going to do more.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — During the pre-budget consultation Saskatchewan people clearly stated that continued tax reduction is a priority. But they were equally adamant that tax reduction should not proceed unless and until it is affordable, and not at the risk of endangering essential public services, balanced budgets, and continued debt reduction.

They want a balanced, responsible approach to reduce taxes as finances permit. That is our record. That is our plan.

In addition to cutting taxes, we'll continue to make Saskatchewan's tax system simpler, fairer, and more responsive to the needs of Saskatchewan people and the Saskatchewan economy. We've recently obtained the agreement of the federal government to redesign our provincial income tax system as early as the 2001 tax year. We'll continue our consultations with Saskatchewan people on how to keep lowering taxes in balance with further debt reduction and enhancements to priority services like health and education. And I'm announcing today that over the next 12 months we will also consult the people of Saskatchewan on the design of a new system of income tax for Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Mr. Speaker, as we cross into a new

century, it is fitting that we look back with pride on what we accomplished in the 1990s and what we accomplished in the 20th century. Working together, Saskatchewan people have built a province of which we can all be very proud. We've built a progressive, compassionate, prosperous, and fair society. And a quality of life that is the envy of the world.

In 1995 our Premier inspired us with these words:

Once again, we have launched our great province on a journey for human progress. We've made a powerful beginning. But there is much more to be done.

He was right. It is the obligation of every generation to leave this world better off than they found it. And to do that, we must constantly build on our progress and pursue our dreams. In the Premier's words:

The dream of ending poverty and want. The dream of keeping our youth at home with the best possible training and education and jobs. The dream of better care for our parents and grandparents. The dream of a safer world.

That is what Saskatchewan is about. That is what this budget is about. Moving further along in co-operation, with compassion, on our journey to prosperity; to keep our province the best place in all the world to live, to work, and to raise a family.

(1145)

The motto of our province is "from many peoples, strength". We are many peoples, but we are also one people moving forward together as families, neighbours, and communities.

So, Mr. Speaker, I'm proud to move, seconded by the Premier:

That this Assembly do now resolve itself into the Committee of Finance.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Gantefer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy once again to respond the government's budget — the third time that I've had the very great pleasure of doing so in this Assembly.

Sitting here listening to the minister, I was struck by the quotes the Minister of Finance chose to finish his speech because I think it tells a lot about this government's record. And I think it says much about what we should expect from this government in the future, if, in fact, there is a future for this government.

The minister quotes our Premier speaking about his personal dreams for Saskatchewan and his vision from where he wants to take the province. The Premier used these words in 1995, and since then what have become of these dreams? Sadly, nothing much. The Premier's vision of 1995 has turned out to be a mirage. The dream has turned into a nightmare for many of our people in our province.

Let's just go through a few of those dreams that we heard of in 1995 and, once again, in this Chamber today. And I quote:

The dream to end poverty and want. The dream of keeping our youth at home with the best possible education and jobs. The dream of better care for our parents and grandparents. The dream of a safer world.

These words are the strongest reminder of an NDP government that has failed to live up to even its own expectations and a government that has failed to live up to the expectations of Saskatchewan people.

Why, after almost eight years of NDP government, are all these things just only dreams? The dream to end poverty. The reality is there are more homeless people in our cities today than when the NDP was elected in 1991 — more hungry children, more people unemployed, more people on welfare.

The dream of keeping our youth at home. Under the NDP, Saskatchewan has the worst job creation record in Canada. People are leaving, families are leaving, young people are leaving because they just don't see a future in NDP Saskatchewan.

The dream of better health care for our parents and grandparents. Is there really anyone in Saskatchewan who thinks that the NDP has improved health care? People are literally afraid they will get sick because they don't know whether the health system is going to be there for them when they need it.

The dream of a safer world. Under the NDP, Saskatchewan has one of the highest crime rates in the country — and one of the worse crime problems are right in Saskatoon in the Premier's own constituency — the highest break and enter rate, the highest murder rate, the highest violent crime rate, the highest rate of car theft.

After eight years of the NDP, these are still just dreams. And unfortunately today's budget also falls short.

Mr. Speaker, the Finance minister tells us that the government is strong. Thanks to the second highest taxes in Canada, a drain of the liquor cabinet, and massive welfare repayments from Ottawa, the NDP has managed to balance another budget.

Yes the NDP government is strong but Saskatchewan families are desperately hurting. And many of them are leaving for better opportunities that they seek elsewhere.

Many people will be asking if this is an election budget? I look at it more as a goodbye budget because this budget is void of hope, is void of vision, and it is void of leadership. There's no long-term plan for job creation, no long-term plan to cut taxes for families, no long-term plan to fix our highways.

With this budget, parents will continue to say goodbye to their children who will continue to leave this province for opportunities elsewhere. Families will continue to say goodbye to half of their paycheques every month because Saskatchewan will continue to have the second highest taxes in Canada. And we'll all say goodbye to any hope for better highways because the NDP has no long-term plan to fix roads.

As soon as the Premier decides to call an election, I think we'll

be saying good bye to the NDP.

Mr. Speaker, let me take just a few minutes to get into some to the specifics of this budget. Of course the thing the government will promote the most out of this document will be the one point reduction in the provincial sales tax. And of course we support this action. However, it's a very small step in the long road Saskatchewan has to travel in order to become competitive with our neighbouring province. In this budget the government has failed to spell out any long-term tax relief. It's an unforgivable failure on the part of the Minister of Finance. Compare this to what the Saskatchewan Party has proposed.

We have laid out a long-term and realistic plan for substantial and sustainable tax cuts over the course of our first term reducing the provincial sales tax to 5 per cent and reducing provincial income tax by 20 per cent over four years —that's our plan. And it's a plan that has been reviewed and endorsed by an international firm that the Deputy Premier describes as credible as it can be. Agree or disagree, our plan is there for all to see, and we get none of this from the members' opposite.

From this lack of a long-term plan to bring down not only the sales tax but income taxes as well, we can only assume that the people of Saskatchewan should not expect one shred of meaningful tax relief over the next three or four years, should the present government survive into a third term. It's unacceptable, Mr. Speaker.

Without a plan to reduce taxes, job creation in this province will continue to lag. Today we have the worst job creation record in the country. We heard the government talking about the 30,000 jobs it has created. It's absolute fiction, Mr. Speaker. The government is nowhere near meeting its target of 30,000 jobs — another dream unfulfilled.

The second major thing the people of Saskatchewan were looking for in this budget is improved health care. What have we got from the budget? Well certainly, thanks to increases in federal transfers, the overall budget has been increased. But will this automatically mean improved services? Frankly I don't think so.

Let's look at the facts. The present government has increased the health care budget every year, and services have deteriorated. While they were increasing the budget, hospitals were closing; while they were increasing the budget, front line workers were put in increasing distress; lineups grew longer.

There's obviously a much bigger problem inherent in the health care system than simply increasing spending. We have to get at the root problems of why it takes more money to offer fewer services to the people of Saskatchewan.

It is clear that there is not enough money in the health care system getting to front-line services. So while the Saskatchewan Party is committed to increasing the health budget, we also think we have to go beyond that and fix the problems in the system that's been created by this health care renewal. Because if we don't do that, there's no amount of money in the world that will fix the problem. It doesn't really matter if the health care budget increases if you have no access to a hospital or a doctor when you need the help the most.

Mr. Speaker, there are other areas where the government has fallen short of its funding targets. The NDP promised to spend \$250 million a year for 10 years, and they haven't come close to matching that — ever — and the highways continue to fall apart. Another promise, another mirage.

The Assembly adjourned at 11:58 a.m.

Mr. Speaker, using the NDP's accounting methods for a moment, which the Provincial Auditor disagreed with by the way, we are left with a razor-thin surplus. And to accomplish this, we've had to drain the liquor and gaming fund. We've had to drain the Crowns. The rainy day fund is gone, used up.

And, Mr. Speaker, let's not forget how the government balanced last year's budget by breaking its own balanced budget legislation. Under its own rules, money from the sale of Crown assets was to go towards reducing the debt — but that didn't happen. Instead the money was channelled into the General Revenue Fund to help the government cope with the fact that it had overspent last year's budget by hundreds of millions of dollars. Even the Deputy Premier said prior to this that such a move would likely be illegal.

But, Mr. Speaker, when it's all about political convenience, rules are the last thing on the government's mind. To them, rules are made to be broken when political expediency is the order of the day.

Mr. Speaker, the people of Saskatchewan still have their own dreams. They dream of a day when we can provide more for our youth than simply to train them and send them off to other provinces to make their lives and their futures. They dream of a day when they can retire comfortably in this beautiful province without worrying about being crushed by an unreasonable tax burden. They do dream of hope; they do dream of prosperity.

This budget offers none of that, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'll have a lot more to say about this document in the coming days as will the entire Saskatchewan Party caucus. We will get much more into detail about the taxes, about health care, about education, about highways, and all the other very serious issues facing this province that this government has failed to address. That's for another day, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, at this time I move to adjourn debate.

Debate adjourned.

Resumption of Budget Debate

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the member from Prince Albert Carlton:

That debate on the motion that this Assembly do now resolve itself into the Committee of Finance be resumed on Monday, March 29, 1999.

Motion agreed to.

The Speaker: — And before this House adjourns, I'll just advise our visitors it is protocol to remain seated until the mace is removed. And I'll ask that you observe the protocol as well.

