

EVENING SITTING

SPECIAL ORDER

ADJOURNED DEBATES

MOTION FOR COMMITTEE OF FINANCE
(BUDGET DEBATE)

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Cline that the Assembly resolve itself into the Committee of Finance, and the proposed amendment thereto moved by Mr. Gantfoer.

Ms. Lorje: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, when we rose for our supper break at 5 o'clock I was commenting on the various measures that there are in the budget such as the 1 per cent reduction in sales tax, the income tax decrease, the continued emphasis on debt reduction, the increased health care spending, education spending and highway spending.

One thing that I did not mention which is extremely important, and I do want to emphasize it right now, and I hope that other members will do more justice to it than I'm able to in the brief time allotted to me this evening. But I am very pleased that this year we were also, as well as doing all these other fine things, we were able to bring about a 26 per cent increase in the funding going to poor families through the Child Benefit plan and various other measures.

And I think this is extremely important because having grown up on social assistance myself, after my mother was widowed when my father was killed in a car accident, at age 5 I know that for people to escape the welfare trap they need two things in equal measure. They need a sense of dignity and self-worth, Mr. Speaker, and they also need a sense of duty, a sense of social obligation, not simple dependency.

So we have to move beyond dependency towards dignity and duty and I believe that the increased funding for the Child Benefit plan will allow us to have those measures very firmly, very materially in place so that we can hopefully start to see a real solid end to the blight of ongoing dependency on welfare for people who could go out and get a job. And I say that because I recognize of course that the majority of people who are on the social assistance caseloads in this province right now are either children or are disabled people or people who for various reasons, including their child care duties, are not able to obtain a job outside the home.

Mr. Speaker, when we broke at 5 o'clock I was just at the point of saying that in my opinion the Sask-a-Tory party opposite is trying to plant in the minds of the people of Saskatchewan not this collective sense of purpose of going forward and doing something with moral purpose for our children and grandchildren, but instead they're trying to get people to slide into this individualistic mentality of oh, all those things are okay but what did you do for me today? And I think that's a very, very dangerous place for people to get.

And I do hope that people will be able to take a look at this budget and see within it not only measures that might

individually help them or their own individual concerns or bailiwick, but they will also take a look at the whole budget in its entire perspective and understand that what we have tried to do, through a judicious balancing act I would suggest, is to satisfy the dreams, the aspirations, needs, and concerns of all of Saskatchewan citizens, not merely a very narrow group.

Mr. Speaker, I have many more things I want to say about the budget, but before I do, I do want to address one very important issue from my point of view. While I'm doing this I would ask that you listen very carefully, and I know you always do, you are always most attentive. It makes making a speech in this House a pure pleasure and joy, Mr. Speaker, knowing that at least one member is listening to my every word.

But I want to address a statement that was made in this House last week by the member from Saltcoats. And I'm very mindful that there is a certain word I'm not suppose to use, so the word I'm going to use instead is misrepresentation.

Mr. Speaker, I want to quote from the *Hansard* of March 22 in the evening, if I may, during the address in reply to the Throne Speech. The member for Saltcoats said this, and I quote:

I was really interested, Mr. Deputy Speaker, with the member for Saskatoon Southeast. (That would be me.) The member for Saskatoon Southeast, Mr. Deputy Speaker did an MLA (Member of the Legislative Assembly) report here in the summer. And her MLA report made the comment that farmers don't pay taxes. That was right in her MLA report. The member for Saskatoon Southeast doesn't have a clue what she's talking about, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I will admit that there are some things I don't have a clue about what I'm talking about. I cannot carry on a terribly well-informed debate and discussion about nuclear fission for instance, and I'm not terribly well versed in the paranormal. But I can tell you that I do not make statements like the member for Saltcoats is accusing me of.

First of all, I didn't have an MLA report put out last summer, so — whoops — there's one slight factual error in what he was saying.

Secondly, I believe — and I would ask him to correct me if I'm wrong — but I believe that what he was really referring to was not a summer report that I wrote but a January 1999 report. Now in January of 1999, I was still a columnist for the *Saskatoon Free Press*. For almost two years I wrote a weekly column for the *Saskatoon Free Press*. I very much enjoyed it. I thank the publishers, Bill Peterson and Paul Martin for the great risk they took in letting me make my relatively opinionated statements from week to week. And I very much regret the passing of the *Saskatoon* and the *Regina Free Press*.

All of that is by the by though, Mr. Speaker. What I want to do is talk about the column that I wrote referring to farmers and taxation. Now the headline on that column from January 24, 1999 . . . now how could I forget that? That was my birthdate for heaven's sakes.

On January 24, 1999, when I turned 29-plus-several years, the

headline was, "Preferential tax breaks deserved." The body of the column, 600 words, and I won't read it all into the record, but the column refers to two groups in Saskatchewan society whom I feel receive and deserve PST (provincial sales tax) tax breaks. Those two groups, Mr. Speaker, are treaty Indians and — oops — farmers, that they receive tax breaks.

Now, Mr. Speaker, what I was saying, I was first of all trying to correct the belief that some people in Saskatchewan have — and it is very unfortunate that they have this belief — that Indians don't pay any taxes. I know that there is at least one political party in this province that's running around saying, elect us, elect us, and we'll make sure that those Indians pay their taxes.

It's a nice, neat divisive form of getting people to find a scapegoat and distracting people's attention from main and major issues. But it simply is not true.

What I was stating in this column, Mr. Speaker, was some of the facts. First of all, we have very many Aboriginal people, First Nations people, in this province. It is unfortunate that not yet do all of them have full employment, but I am confident, with various measures that our government and the First Nations governments are putting in place, we will, hopefully in the short term not the long term, see full and fair and dignified employment for Aboriginal people.

But we do have within this province three clear groups of First Nations people. We have treaty Indians, we have non-status Indians, and Metis. Mr. Speaker, in the column I'm making the point that over half the Aboriginal population, meaning the Metis people and non-status Indians, pay PST just like everyone else does. It is only treaty Indians who do not pay PST. And the amount of tax that is forgone by the treaty Indians not paying PST amounts to probably an estimate of 9 to \$11 million dollars. Mr. Speaker, we more than make up that 9 to \$11 million supposed loss in not levying PST on treaty Indians by virtue of the fact that we do levy gasoline and tobacco taxes on reserves and we take in about \$11 million in revenue there.

I will just for the sake of the House and for the sake of clarity also say that this is currently being challenged in the courts and the whole situation is in flux right now. We're waiting to see what the courts may say on this, but clearly there is taxation revenue that the provincial government does get from all First Nations people including treaty Indian people.

But this supposed tax break is something that happened way back in 1937 and various governments — Liberal, Conservative, CCF (Co-operative Commonwealth Federation), and New Democrat — have endorsed it since that time. When the PST exemption for Aboriginal people — for treaty Indians — was first brought in, at the same time there were exemptions for farmers. So that . . . because there was a recognition that both groups are important, and we need these kinds of stimulation for the two groups for different reasons. With respect, Mr. Speaker, to what I said — not in my MLA report, but in my column for the *Saskatoon Free Press* — with respect to farmers and taxation. This is what I said:

Farmers don't pay PST on farm machinery and repairs. That's a \$62.9 million exemption. There's another \$102

million because fertilizer, pesticides and seed are PST exempt.

And any of you who are going to plant a city garden this spring will know also that as well as farmers being PST exempt for fertilizer and seeds, so too are gardeners.

I go on to say, Mr. Speaker:

Farm fuel tax exemption adds another \$120 million as tax incentives to encourage farming.

In total the seven per cent . . . (It was 7 per cent at the time; I'm very pleased that we've now dropped it down to 6 per cent.)

In total the sales tax brings in about 730 million.

If Treaty Indians paid PST, it would likely bring in only an extra \$9 million. That's because most Indians don't make a lot of money. Consequently they don't spend a lot of money on things that are taxable.

So there you have it (I go on to say, quoting again from my column) — two large groups in Saskatchewan get a break on PST. There's roughly the same number of people in each group. Treaty Indians benefit to the tune of \$9 million. Farmers have an exemption of almost \$285 million. Both groups are valuable to Saskatchewan. Indians were the original owners of the land, farmers till it today.

So I hope, Mr. Speaker . . . I noted that the member from Saltcoats was listening very attentively. I hope that he will now understand I did not say, farmers don't pay taxes. I did not put it up in an MLA report. I wrote the column for the *Free Press*, and I was merely talking about one, narrow, tax exemption that farmers get and comparing it to one, narrow, tax exemption that treaty Indians get. In my opinion, Mr. Speaker, it is time in this province that we moved to reach out a hand in brotherly and sisterly love and stop trying to pit groups against each other. We should not be pitting farmers against Indians or anyone else.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(1915)

Ms. Lorje: — And any party that tries to get elected on the basis of hate politics, divisive politics and misinformation is not conducting themselves in a proper and a tolerant way, I would suggest, Mr. Speaker.

So, Mr. Speaker, I apologize for the digression, but I did feel that it was important to read that into the record. I don't mind being quoted, but I really don't like being misquoted. It kind of offends me.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I want to go back to what the Sask-a-Tory party is saying about our budget, and they quite clearly have listened to what the chamber of commerce has put out as its wish list and how they are trying to lobby and influence government, and you know this is a democracy and they have full rights to do that. But what the Saskatchewan Party is saying is that people don't want a sales-tax cut; they want an

income-tax cut. Now this is a big surprise because quite frankly this is . . . we're almost to the month of April. April 30, everybody has to have their income tax forms filled out in this country. So clearly income tax is the thing that is uppermost in many people's minds.

I do though want to point out that when we were debating what kind of a tax cut we would bring in, in this budget, we had some fairly spirited discussions within our caucus as to whether or not with the available revenue room that we had, whether we should put it into a PST cut or an income tax cut or a combination of the two. What we finally decided, as you can see, Mr. Speaker, from this budget, is we decided to do a combination of both.

There's a couple of reasons for that, Mr. Speaker. First of all . . .

The Speaker: — Order. Now all hon. members know what the Chair is going to say. And so we'll save everyone the time and the burden of listening to the remark of the Chair urging all members to save their remarks to put them on the record. And we'll return to the hon. member for Saskatoon Southeast.

Ms. Lorje: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I said . . . Now I realize that the member from Kindersley is betraying a slight bit of envy. Whenever I start to talk about the discussions that we have in caucus, that's when he starts chirping, and it's fairly apparent he would like to be part of a cohesive caucus that forms government.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Lorje: — Quite frankly, if he carries on the way he is, he isn't even going to be part of this Legislative Assembly . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . I hear that one hon. member is suggesting that chains to his desk might help.

Mr. Speaker, in the confidentiality of our caucus room, as we debated what kind of a tax cut we would implement this year, we did decide that we would do both. Now I know that it might have been nice if we brought in a 2 cent or 3 cent PST reduction but quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, what we are after is sustainable tax cuts and we want people to recognize that we are going in the right direction with respect to taxation. We're very mindful of the province to the west. We know that Alberta has no sales tax, but we also know that Alberta has a health care premium.

The Speaker: — Order.

Ms. Lorje: — Mr. Speaker, the people of Saskatchewan with this 1 cent sales tax reduction will see an overall savings of approximately \$102 million. That is \$102 for each man, woman, and child in this province. On top of that, there is an income tax reduction and I think the savings are projected to be in the neighbourhood of around \$200 for each family of four earning \$50,000. So, Mr. Speaker, we brought in approximately \$300 of tax savings for the people of Saskatchewan. What's more, Mr. Speaker, we brought those savings in almost immediately and they are sustainable. The PST came into effect midnight on Friday. The income tax will come along when the federal government rejigs its tables.

In addition, because we were listening to what the chamber of commerce said about wanting a 10 per cent income tax decrease, in addition what we are doing, which I think is extremely important and will have far reaching effects, we are moving to redesign the tax system so we can in effect de-link it. Now when I say de-link it, I am not referring to the member from Regina Elphinstone. I am referring instead to the fact that we do not want to have to move our income tax system lockstep with the federal government.

There is another government in Canada that also is moving to de-linking their tax system and that of course is our esteemed neighbour to the immediate west, the province of Alberta. But, Mr. Speaker, the province of Alberta got a lot of press when they announced that they were going to bring in their flat tax system. But what people didn't stop and focus on when the Alberta treasurer, Stockwell Day, announced this . . . I think quite frankly what he was really doing was shooting the first salvo off the bow in terms of his leadership campaign for the United Alternative, or as some people would say, the untied alternative. What was not pointed out so clearly was that Alberta taxpayers this year will be receiving a tax benefit of — how much?

An Hon. Member: — Zero.

Ms. Lorje: — No, not zero, but certainly nowhere near the approximately \$300 that you will get in Saskatchewan. Instead, they'll be getting a tax break of \$50 — \$50. And their \$50 and their much-wanted flat tax system — oh great and revolutionary, leading the way in all of Canada and all that sort of stuff. Guess what? That may or may not come in in the year 2003. And only if revenues justify it. So he's given himself an awful lot of whittle room.

I would suggest that the members opposite might want to listen and change their, their platform, their way up, their political Viagra statement. And they might want to imitate the kinds of things that are being said in Alberta because they can promise all sorts of things but they don't really have to deliver them for three or four or five years.

Now, Mr. Speaker, this weekend after the budget was brought down, I decided that I would go out in my constituency and do a little door knocking, so I spent Saturday afternoon and part of Saturday evening and Sunday afternoon doing some door knocking in my riding. I was in the East College Park neighbourhood and the Lakeview neighbourhood.

And I want to give you a few quotes about budget reaction, Mr. Speaker, that my constituents, all of whom are extremely polite and none of whom would consider siccing a dog on me, I want to let you know the kinds of reactions that they gave me.

Mr. Speaker, one of the funniest reactions I got was from a gentleman who lives in Lakeview who is a retailer, he has a small business. Actually I think it's a fairly large business, he employs probably 50-some people, but I think it's still technically, since he's not a multinational. I think it's called a small business. He said to me, you know, Patti, he said, I thought this was a good news budget and a bad news budget. And I said what? And he said, yes, the good news was you dropped the PST by one percent. And the bad news was you

dropped the PST by one percent because now I've got to stay up till midnight rejigging my cash registers so I can pass the savings on to my customers. He was very pleased about the budget.

Other comments that I received . . . one woman said to me, oh, good news at last. And then we got into a discussion about the very difficult time it has been in this province since 1992 when we decided to wrestle that deficit down to the ground and the great sacrifice that the people of Saskatchewan have had to make. And so she recognized that we have turned the corner. We are making significant changes.

I want to give you two or three other comments — the positive comments. I will also mention the negative comments too because I think that's only fair.

I had a gentleman say to me, quote:

You're doing a good job. It's nice to see a balanced budget and the debt coming down.

Isn't that wonderful, Mr. Speaker. That gentleman obviously had listened to the budget speech. He knew exactly what was happening. He wasn't having his news distorted either by the Conrad Black media or the Sask-a-Tory party opposite.

Another woman said to me, the budget is very positive. I especially appreciate the extra money for highways. And when I questioned her, she told me that her husband works as a sales representative, and he often travels the secondary highways. At that point he came home and we got into a discussion about the state of the highways in this province, and he was very pleased to hear that not only is there \$235 million allocated in this year's budget for highways, but we have also increased revenue sharing for municipalities to do some partnering with the provincial government for road bed improvement.

The final comment I would like to share with you is a comment actually that I would direct specifically to the Minister of Finance. And this gentleman said to me, I liked the budget survey; it's a good process to involve people. I asked him about that. I said, well did you fill it out and send it in? He said, oh no, no. I didn't do that, but I really liked the chance to sit down and read it and read all the details, where the money goes, what it's spent on and everything. And it's so nice to have a government that gives that kind of information.

Mr. Speaker, we have been saying for eight years that we are trying to conduct an open and accountable, transparent government. And it was very nice to get that kind of spontaneous feedback from a gentleman at the door about what he thought about our process. And I would encourage the Minister of Finance to carry on that process in years to come because I am sure that we will be forming the government come the next election. So we will have an opportunity to refine and expand that budgetary consultation process.

Now, Mr. Speaker, as I said, I was door knocking in my riding on the weekend and I received numerous positive comments. I have to tell you, though, it wasn't all positive. There were some negative comments.

That's probably not surprising. Saskatchewan is probably the most politically sophisticated province in all of Canada and probably the most politically aware and urbane area within the whole of North America. People are intensely politically aware and active.

And so I did receive some comments. People who wanted, for instance, to have the chiropractic fees totally done away with. They don't appreciate the co-payment for chiropractic. I can certainly understand that. If I had a stiff neck — and luckily this place doesn't make me tense at all — the comments from the members opposite don't bother me. But you know, if I had to be seeing a chiropractor on a regular basis I would probably be lobbying for that kind of change too.

(1930)

But the main thrust of the negative comments that I received on the weekend had to do with income tax. Now this is not really surprising; this is what I would say the curse of the Quick Tax program. It is now . . . Most people I think when they don't go to an accountant tend to use a computerized program to calculate their taxes. And of course human beings being naturally curious, once they calculate their taxes they want to find out what they would be paying if they were paying taxes in other provinces.

So I had people say things to me like, I want the flat tax gone, said one gentleman. Quote, he said, "I don't mind paying for health care but the flat tax is a killer." Another person said to me, I want the income taxes lowered more. Now this is not surprising and it's something that's a bit distressing that people are continuously concerned about the flat tax. Like them I would like to see us get rid of the flat tax too.

Most importantly though, Mr. Speaker, I wish we had never in this province got ourselves in a state where we had to have a flat tax. If we didn't have the debt, courtesy of the Sask-a-Tories opposite, we would have no flat tax. We would not have this deficit reduction tax that so many people dislike.

I think that, while I agree with my constituents that it would be nice to have the flat tax gone, I think that what we have to do is be realistic and focus on what is sustainable, what is doable, what is deliverable. In my opinion, this budget is sustainable, doable, and deliverable.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I want to refer to some of the comments the members opposite have been making, talking about our high rates of taxation. And it is true, as some critics say, that we have one of the heaviest income tax burdens in the country. In fact, Mr. Speaker, when you take a look, simply looking at the provincial income tax payable, Saskatchewan has the second highest personal income tax for a family of four with an income of \$50,000 of all provinces in Canada, save for the province of Newfoundland. At this point, Mr. Speaker, I'm tempted to be a little cynical and say, thanks heavens for Newfoundland.

But I think also though we should take a look at why we might have the second highest personal income tax in the country. And one of the reasons, Mr. Speaker, is \$725 million of interest on the public debt brought to us courtesy . . . \$725 million dollars in interest on the public debt brought to us courtesy of

the profligate spending engendered by the members opposite during the 1980s.

Last year we had to spend \$747 million dollars on interest on the public debt. As a very wise gentleman said to me in caucus one day, that is a whole jumbo jet worth of interest on the debt, Mr. Speaker. I think that that was an extremely apt simile.

Now as high as the interest on the debt is draining us, I would suggest, and reducing our flexibility to be able to either bring in the kinds of programs that many people would like to see or to reduce the taxes at the rate that many people would like to see, it is luckily coming down. The debt is coming down. It peaked at around 888 million in 1993.

The reason it's coming down is two-fold. First of all, no surprise, we live in a global economy. We're affected by what happens in the rest of the world, and the interest rates have come down. So we've saved a certain amount there.

Secondly though, Mr. Speaker, the interest on the public debt is coming down because we are paying off the debt. We have taken the debt from \$15 billion down to 11.6 billion.

Mr. Speaker, I think opposition parties tend to do what opposition parties are suppose to do which is oppose. So of course they're going to look for the weak point in any budget. More power to them, and I will admit that yes we do have the second highest personal income taxes in the country, but let's look at the whole picture, not just the income tax picture.

In total when you calculate provincial income tax; tax credits and rebates; health care premiums, and of course Alberta has a health care premium of \$816 a year for each family; retail sales tax, and of course our retail sales tax just came down so we now have the lowest retail sales tax of any jurisdiction that levies a retail sales tax; plus the gasoline tax — in total, Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan now is the fourth lowest in terms of tax revenue generated from the people — the fourth lowest in the country behind Ontario, Alberta, and Manitoba.

Now before we all rush out and get terribly envious about those three provinces I think there are some little facts of reality that we ought to take a look, a good hard look at. First of all, Mr. Speaker, in Ontario — where the so-called common sense revolution brought the income taxes down dramatically — in Ontario within a year premier Mike Harris has created a situation where there are now 80,000 homeless people on the streets of Toronto, 80,000 people thrown out of their homes. Mr. Speaker, that's almost the equivalent of 10 per cent of Saskatchewan's population living on the streets. That is a blight on the Canadian reputation.

I shudder to think what tourists coming to this country must feel about us when they see all these homeless people stretched out on Bloor Street or Yonge Street with their sleeping bags and their shopping carts. It is a travesty of social justice, Mr. Speaker. I don't want that kind of record. I don't want that kind of thing happening in this province. I quite cheerfully will pay my share of taxes in order to prevent that.

Mr. Speaker, in Alberta which has the second lowest total tax take in the country, they pay \$816 per year in health care

premiums for families. Not only that, Mr. Speaker, for those people who are not fortunate enough to have an employer picking up that tab, there are many people — I think it's in the range of 25 to 30 per cent — who are in arrears on their health care premiums. So that if they go to a doctor or to a hospital, a quarter of a million people in Alberta are under the threat that they may get turned away, that they may not receive any health care coverage. Mr. Speaker, that's not the kind of province that I want to see in Saskatchewan.

Now the third province is Manitoba. Manitoba, I think you can quite rightly compare the two provinces because we have basically similar kinds of economies and we've kept pretty lockstep, the two provinces. One year Manitoba's taxes may be slightly lower than ours, the next year they may be slightly higher, but Manitoba and Saskatchewan generally are on a par.

There is one significant difference though, Mr. Speaker, that the members opposite should always be aware of. In the province of Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, we have the population spread out over the whole of the province. It's not like somebody's taken a squirt of toothpaste along the US (United States) border and plunked down all the people. Instead we have . . . and successive governments, Liberals and Conservatives and New Democrat governments have attempted to keep . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. Now hon. members on both sides of the House need not shout across the floor. Order. And I will encourage all hon. members to extend to the hon. member for Saskatoon Southeast the courtesy of being able to enter into debate in an uninterrupted manner.

Ms. Lorje: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do apologize that I seem to be arousing the ire of the members opposite so frequently. And I also apologize that I have such a great cheering section on this side of the House — that so many members wish to engage in the debate.

But what I wanted to say was that the difference between Manitoba and Saskatchewan is in Manitoba the population tends to be concentrated around the cities of Winnipeg and Brandon; whereas in Saskatchewan we have a great many of our citizens living in so-called rural circumstances. We have a large farm population and that, of necessity, requires a very major commitment to the rural infrastructure — to the roads, the highways, elevator systems, rail systems, and so forth. I'm very proud that we do that, Mr. Speaker, and it's important that we maintain the rural population in this province, and we do that through raising government revenue and then having government programs. So I do hope that the members opposite will understand that.

Mr. Speaker, I want to — hopefully briefly if I don't get either applauded or jeered and get sidetracked — I want to move very quickly into a few comments both looking at what we've done and looking towards the future. I was not able to participate in the Throne Speech debate because we have so many members on this side of the House, and there just wasn't time for all who want to speak on the Throne Speech, so I want to address a few comments about what I view as the moral purpose that we have here in government as members of the Legislative Assembly.

And I want to start out, Mr. Speaker, by quoting from a book

called *The Gifts of the Jews* by a man named Thomas Cahill. Mr. Cahill wrote in his introduction to this book, he wrote:

We normally think of history as one catastrophe after another, war followed by war, outrage by outrage — almost as if history were nothing more than all the narratives of human pain, assembled in sequence. And surely this is, often enough, an adequate description. But history is also the narratives of grace, the recountings of those blessed and inexplicable moments when someone did something for someone else, saved a life, bestowed a gift, gave something beyond what was required by circumstance.

... But the great gift-givers, arriving in the moment of crisis, provided for transition, for transformation, and even for transfiguration, leaving us a world more varied and complex, more awesome and delightful, more beautiful and strong than the one they had found.

Mr. Speaker, I find that very inspirational and I think it fairly aptly describes what all of us on all sides of the House, whether democratic socialists or free enterprisers or something in between or something totally different, what we would like to do as members of a government. We would like to give a gift to the people that we are serving.

The gist of Mr. Cahill's book is that life is not just about enduring what the gods hand out to us; there can also be progress, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Cahill's quote applies to individuals, but it also can apply to governments. And just as Mr. Cahill, in recounting the history of Jewish people in his book, *The Gifts of the Jews*, talked about individuals and collectives, so too here in Saskatchewan we can talk about individuals like Tommy Douglas and Woodrow Lloyd and Allan Blakeney.

(1945)

And we can also talk about the CCF and the people of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, we have seen gifts of grace in this province. We have seen people who gave us something to help us cope with transition, to help us transform, and indeed on occasion to help us transfigure and rise above our daily living circumstances.

Mr. Speaker, the CCF and the NDP in this province gave us medicare; they gave us publicly-funded pensions. They gave us hospitalization services. They gave us labour standards and they gave us crown corporations. These are things that we can all be justly proud of.

Mr. Blakeney, following on Tommy Douglas's and Woodrow Lloyd's good examples, came along and with his government — also a good group of men and women — further transformed the face of Saskatchewan. He brought us the dental plan, the Potash Corporation of Saskatchewan, northern mining, the prescription drug plan. And then unfortunately we saw a halt in that process of transition and transformation.

But then in 1991 the Romanow government was ... Mr. Speaker, in 1991 the current New Democratic government was elected under the leadership of the member from Riversdale and

we see again that continuing process of transformation and transfiguration.

We've seen debt reduction, Mr. Speaker, and deficit elimination, both of which I am immensely proud of. We see pay equity being implemented through negotiations; we see a Child Benefit plan. Indeed this year, as I said earlier, 26 per cent increase for the funding for that Child Benefit plan, recognizing that it's children who need the extra help and it is children that we have to put most of our focus and most of our energy on.

Mr. Speaker, we've also seen, under the current government, various things like The Victims of Domestic Violence Act. I would point out, just as an aside, that I was recently in Oakland, California meeting with Jerry Brown's people.

Members may know that Jerry Brown used to be the governor of California, made an unsuccessful attempt to become the president of the United States and — I guess either in a fit of pique or a fit of inspiration — decided that if he couldn't be president of the United States, then he would be mayor of Oakland, California which is exactly what he has done. He's in the process of re-inventing government there.

And I noted when I was meeting and discussing with them that they have taken our notion of The Victims of Domestic Violence Act which basically turns the whole situation of spousal abuse on its head. And instead of compelling women and children to flee from their home in the middle of the night with a garbage bag containing the few possessions they can carry, instead puts the onus for change and for leaving on the perpetrator of the violence and asks the perpetrator to leave the home.

Mr. Speaker, in Oakland, California, they are looking at different initiatives that will expand and enhance that basic thrust, and they have something they call tough love, operation tough love, where they do a sweep to pick up all the men who had orders to go for aggression management and so forth and who have not followed through on their court orders. And they pick them up and make sure that they do follow through on these orders.

As well, Mr. Speaker, they have a very innovative program that I would like to see our government giving some consideration to.

Mr. Speaker, when police are sent out to deal with a domestic violence situation, the police do not arrive alone. The police go out with a counsellor, and the counsellor is able to begin the process of psychological change right away rather than waiting until people have had a time to cool off and get out of the hearts and flowers stage that often accompanies the cessation of violence and before they get into rationalizations and so forth. They start the counselling right away, so there can be some solid change.

But I digress. Other things that this government has done that I think have started the transformation in this province are various initiatives to stop childhood sexual abuse. We are not viewing the young children, the young boys and girls who are compelled for various reasons to sell their bodies on the streets,

we are no longer viewing them as perpetrators or as criminals, but rather we're viewing them as individuals in very unfortunate circumstances in need of assistance and counselling and safety.

Mr. Speaker, other things that we have done as members know who've read the budget document, we are spending the most money we've ever spent on health care. We have a revamped health care system and, I think, Mr. Speaker, we have proof that wellness actually works. And I want to, just to very quickly quote from the *Rosthern Village Press*, Wednesday, March 3, 1999, which will give an indication of just exactly how well the health care system is working in Saskatchewan and also in small town Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, I understand I may not use a members name so I will simply, in quoting from this newspaper article, say that a certain member opposite in the Saskatchewan Party is now as the headline says:

On the mend, Rosthern MLA (B.H.) is recovering from an emergency appendix operation February 17, and while he's still on the job, he's had "some restraints" placed on him by doctors who fear the possibility of infection.

Not sure where he was going to be infected. The newspaper article goes on to say:

In an interview last week, the member from Rosthern said he first noted sharp pains in his abdomen February 15, but dismissed them as symptoms of a flu bug that was then going around: "I limped around till Wednesday night (February 17), when my daughter took me to hospital and I was diagnosed as having gangrene on my appendix," he explained. "I underwent emergency surgery and the doctors took it out about 2:00 o'clock on Thursday morning (February 18). I was in hospital about a week and got home February 23.

"It was a rest, but one I could have done without," he added. "I still have to take it easy, but other than that, I'm feeling pretty good."

Mr. Speaker, we have here sitting in this House this evening living proof, minus a gangrenous appendix, that health care does work in Saskatchewan and I do wish the member from Rosthern all the best and thank heavens he only has one appendix. Now, Mr. Speaker, if Thomas Cahill's statement about gifts of grace is true, the opposite is also true. Some individuals and some groups historically have worked to reverse progress, to suppress human accomplishments, to replace charity with selfishness, compassion with greed, co-operation with rampant individualism. And I notice that the members opposite are starting to increase their volume again now and perhaps it is because they're recognizing themselves in my statements. Perhaps the professional welder from Kindersley or the newest Sask-a-Tory from Humboldt recognizes themselves in the description I was just giving.

Because, Mr. Speaker, what have the Tories given us in Saskatchewan? How have they advanced the cause of our society and its people? Mr. Speaker, I'm not going to refer to what happened in this province in the '30s when during the

height of the Depression we saw rampant racism and extremely ugly things, with people going around at night draped in white sheets and so forth.

I'm not going to mention that but what I am going to talk about is some of the more, the more recent past for the members opposite. They gave us the longest list of public-spirited criminals in the history of the province. They gave us a health care system in retreat with the destruction of the children's dental plan. And who will ever forget the sight, Mr. Speaker, of all those dental nurses crying as they came out of the hotel room knowing that the good work that they were doing and the jobs that . . . the contribution they were making to the people of Saskatchewan, the children of Saskatchewan, had been in one cavalier, callous moment, swept away as if it were nothing.

Mr. Speaker, the members opposite did more, though. They gave us Grant Schmidt, for heaven's sakes. They gave us the big giveaway. You know, they gave away the mining draglines down in Estevan. They gave away all the highway equipment. They gave away Saskoil, potash corporation; you name it, they gave it away. They didn't just give away things though; they gave us a few things. They gave us GigaText and they gave us Eric Bertson. And, Mr. Speaker, in just a year ago, they returned to us the dark of night as a clever political move. Mr. Speaker, they formed a new party in the dead of the night without benefit of going to the electorate, without benefit of consulting the people who had elected them.

Mr. Speaker, here you go, two contributions to history I've tried to outline: the contributions from people in the '80s from the Tory Party, contributions in the '90s from the New Democratic Party. You take your pick as to which one that you think more gives us a gift of grace.

Mr. Speaker, this budget is one more step that we are taking as a government, a big one in terms of the lifespan of this particular term of government, but a very small step in terms of the panorama of history. But it is a step forward. It's balanced. It's balanced between expansion of necessary programs and tax adjustments, between looking forward to the future and past to the sins of the previous administration for which, as we know, we will be paying for some time to come.

And one thing that I particularly like about this budget and this Finance minister is that the budget says and the minister says quite openly, we can't do everything at once. You address what is most in need of attention. This year that means addressing health care. And at the same time, you prepare for what is next in line which will be next year, tax review and revision.

I suppose that means that this budget really isn't an election budget because it makes no claim to be all things to all people for all time. But quite frankly as Gerry Sperling said this morning on CBC (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation) Radio, every budget is an election budget. This budget builds on the work that we have been doing for the last eight years, and it takes us forward towards the new millennium.

I like this budget. It is prudent, responsible, progressive, humane, creative, and balanced. I will be voting for it, Mr. Speaker. I will not be voting for the amendment that the members opposite have put, but I will be voting for the budget.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Lorje: — I would like to, at this time, adjourn debate . . .
move to adjourn, sorry.

Debate adjourned.

The Assembly adjourned at 8 p.m.

TABLE OF CONTENTS