

The Assembly met at 1:30 p.m.

Prayers.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRESENTING PETITIONS

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I have a petition to present from people concerned about 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.

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

Mr. Speaker, the signatures on this petition come from within the city of Regina.

I so present.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also have petitions to present today on behalf of the people of Saskatchewan on behalf of Saskatchewan's 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 retroactive with interest to April 17, 1985.

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

These petitions, Mr. Speaker, come from the Saskatoon area.

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 provide a review process with respect to family intervention to ensure the rights of responsible families are not being violated.

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

Mr. Speaker, the petitions I have in my hand are signed by individuals from the Melfort, P.A. (Prince Albert), Choiceland, Kinistino, St. Brieux areas of the province.

I so present.

Mr. Gantefer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise on behalf of citizens asking that there be a review of parental rights. The prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to provide a review process with respect to family intervention to ensure the rights of responsible families are not being violated.

Signatures on this petition, Mr. Speaker, are all from the community of Melfort.

I so present.

Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise and present petitions on behalf of citizens of Saskatchewan who are embarrassed about the horrendous state of our highways in this province. 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 greater portion of fuel tax revenues toward road maintenance and construction so that Saskatchewan residents may have a safe, reliable and effective highway system.

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

Mr. Speaker, the signatures on these petitions are from Neudorf, Lemberg, Melville, Duff, Goodeve, and Yorkton.

Mr. Hillson: — Mr. Speaker, I rise with petitions from citizens concerned about the contested and unsafe entrance to the city of North Battleford and requesting the relocation of the junction of Highway 40 and Highway 16. Your petitioners come from North Battleford, Battleford, and Denholm.

I so present.

Mr. McPherson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to present petitions today. The prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to call upon the provincial government and SaskTel being wholly accountable to the people of Saskatchewan to immediately take steps to provide cellular coverage to this area so that residents can travel in winter with some assurance of safety.

Mr. Speaker, the people that have signed these petitions are from the Kincaid, Rockglen, Willow Bunch, St. Victor, Assiniboia, Coronach areas of the province.

I so present.

Mr. Aldridge: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to present petitions on behalf of people who are concerned about the severe financial crisis facing our farmers in the province. The prayer reads as follows, Mr. Speaker:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to call upon provincial and federal governments to immediately take steps to end unfair world subsidies and provide farmers with prompt relief from declining incomes and act as watchdogs against

rising input costs which are harming the rural economy.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

Those who've signed these petitions, Mr. Speaker, come from all over the province.

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm proud today to rise again in this House to present petitions 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 upon provincial and federal governments to immediately take steps to end unfair world subsidies and provide farmers with prompt relief from declining incomes and act as watchdogs against rising input costs which are harming the rural economy.

And causing many farmers to go down the tubes, Mr. Speaker.

This petition is signed by people from the communities of Lemberg, Grayson, Neudorf, Stockholm, Fenwood, and Melville, Mr. Speaker.

And I so present.

Ms. Haverstock: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour once again to rise on behalf of citizens in Saskatchewan who are concerned about quality education for exceptional children. 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 for 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.

All the people who have signed this petition today, Mr. Speaker, are from Leoville, Saskatchewan and Prince Albert.

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

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I give notice that I shall on day no. 20 ask the government the following question:

To the Minister of Health: how many district health boards have completed and submitted their three-year strategic plan to the provincial government; what are the necessary elements set out by the provincial government that are to be included in these three-year strategic plans; and when were the districts to have their three-year strategic plans completed and submitted to the provincial government.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I want to introduce to you and members of the Assembly today, a family that's from my constituency that are here visiting the legislature today, Robert and Lydia Sliva, along with their four children, Jason and Eric and Timothy and Stephanie.

They're here, Mr. Speaker, not only to observe the work of the Legislative Assembly but as well they're home-schooling in this province. And part of their educational experience is to bring their children to the Legislative Assembly to see the work of the members who are here.

So I want to welcome them to the Assembly today. I'm meeting with them shortly in my office and would ask all the members of the Assembly to join me in welcoming the Slivas to the Assembly.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to introduce to you and to all members of the House a gentleman seated in your gallery, Mr. Lyle Stewart. Lyle Stewart was the successful candidate in the constituency of Thunder Creek last week in a very large attended meeting, and I wish him well in the future endeavours.

Mr. Speaker, while I'm on my feet I'd also like to join with the Minister of Education in recognizing Rob and Lydia Sliva. Rob and Lydia originally attended Invermay School. And this dates me, Mr. Speaker, because I think they happen to be former students of some of my classes. And I want to congratulate them and I wish them well in their endeavours of meeting with the minister.

Thank you.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the legislature, a man who is sitting in your gallery, Dr. Ed Udd — I'd ask Ed to stand — is a professor at Washington State University in Pullman, Washington. And he's here in Regina interviewing students who will go down to Washington State University on an exchange program from University of Regina and the Saskatchewan Indian Federated College.

This is part of the North American mobility in higher education project which is funded by Human Resources Development Canada, and it includes Washington State University, University of Regina, Saskatchewan Indian Federated College, University of Manitoba, Campeche Autonomous University, and Quintana Roo University, both in Mexico. Let's give him a warm welcome.

He's accompanied by my brother, Dr. Ralph Nilson, who is the Chair of this committee. He's also the consul of Norway.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McPherson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to

introduce to you and the members of the legislature, two young hockey players sitting up in the east gallery. The one is my youngest son, Carson, and a friend of his, Kyle Haubrich from Hodgeville. They're here this week to enjoy the proceedings of the House, keep the government in line. And I welcome them here.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To you and through you to the Assembly, I would like to introduce some constituents: Mrs. Shelby Goud seated in the west gallery along with her children, Eric, Andrea, and Heather.

Shelby and her husband, Garnet, operate the Carlyle Motor Products down in the town of Carlyle. And Shelby is also in the process of gaining her Canadian citizenship. So I hope she enjoys the proceedings here today. And I'd ask everyone to welcome them here.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Haverstock: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to introduce someone to you and through you to all members of the Assembly, someone who is most deserving to sit behind the bar — I notice that he's, of course, in the west gallery — that's Ian MacDougall who was a member of the Legislative Assembly for the Liberal Party representing the constituency of Estevan for some time.

Many of you may have remembered from years past his handsome knees when he wore his kilt. But the infamous Ian MacDougall is in the House today and I ask everyone to give him a warm welcome please.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Aldridge: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to join with my colleague from Wood River in welcoming his son Carson here this afternoon, as well as Kyle Haubrich, son of Barry and Val Haubrich from my riding, and I always enjoy seeing some young people in the House and I hope you have a lot of fun here this afternoon.

I'd also, while I'm on my feet, take the opportunity to welcome Lyle Stewart here this afternoon and wish him well in his endeavours, and I'd encourage him to take in as many days of proceedings as he possibly can on his road towards trying to overthrow me in Thunder Creek.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly — due to the Easter break — someone special to me in the west gallery, my son Jordan who is down to observe the activities today. I wish everyone to give him a warm welcome.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Melville People and Events

Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it is an honour and a privilege to rise today and tell you about some of the terrific events that have taken place in my constituency recently.

The annual spring Melville and District Trade and Craft Fair took place March 26 to 28; about 80 booths featuring dozens of different products, along with a first-ever craft section, made the show among the best ever and the attendance was great all weekend. I'd like to commend all the hard work done by the Chamber members — with whom I had the pleasure of working in the past — and the displayers, as well as the many people that stopped by my booth to say hello, wish me well, and tell me how they feel that this government is deserting them by choosing the wrong priorities.

And like the member from Regina Sherwood, I too would like to publicly welcome Dr. Abdalla Kenshil to the Melville area. Dr. Kenshil will be the chief surgeon at St. Peter's Hospital performing general surgery. But mostly I would like to commend Dr. Kenshil's courage for agreeing to come to a province with such a disastrous health care record. Obviously he was unaware of how health care workers are treated in this province.

Nevertheless, Mr. Speaker, I'd also like to welcome the new secretary-treasurer from Melville's combined school divisions. Mr. Calvin Martin began his job March 1, moving from Saskatoon. I look forward to meeting him and his family in the near future, and I'm sure he will enjoy living in Melville.

I'd like to congratulate the Melville midget hockey team. For the first time in 20 years, they are proud owners of a provincial midget hockey championship. On March 23, before a great hometown crowd, they defeated Tisdale for the championship. I congratulate the Junior A Millionaires.

And I'd also like to welcome this afternoon to the community — I understand the Deputy Premier will be . . .

The Speaker: — The hon. member's time has expired.

Mr. Thomson: — Mr. Speaker, thank you. I just wanted to respond very quickly. The member for Melville of course forgot one more event that . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order, order. The hon. member will recognize of course that it is beyond the rules of statements by members to engage in debate other members. Continuing statements by members.

Medical Research Funding

Ms. Haverstock: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I think members will recall over the last couple of years my requests and many questions to the ministers of Health regarding medical research funding in Saskatchewan. Too few opportunities are given in the House to be able to commend the government on its performance. And of course the reasons why I for so many times raised the issue of medical research funding or the lack of it in the province is because there was a void to be

filled.

Well this past week the Minister of Health indeed did raise I think the whole profile of medical research funding in Saskatchewan by providing to them matching funds for many, many of the resources that were going to be available to researchers in Saskatchewan, but would be lost if the province did not put in their share.

This was done. It's to the credit of the government to recognize this, and in particular to credit to the Minister of Health for doing so. I know that people in Saskatoon are very, very pleased about this and as a citizen of Saskatoon and a citizen of Saskatchewan I simply wish to say, thank you.

Medical Research Projects

Mr. Koenker: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too would like to speak to the research funding and call attention to it as a further indication of this government's commitment to quality health care here in Saskatchewan. A commitment of \$200,000 from the province for very significant research projects conducted at the University of Saskatchewan in Saskatoon.

This funding will be matched by the Medical Research Council of Canada and will be augmented also by the College of Medicine which means that the seven projects will share more than \$400,000. Projects covering a range of different health issues from cancer research, nerve cell injury, women's health, and circulatory disorders.

They address the real concerns of Saskatchewan people and they're part of an ongoing provincial commitment to health research. It isn't what it could be or maybe even should be, but it's a step in the right direction. An increase of more than 50 per cent since 1992. And I'm happy to see this additional money in place as is all members from Saskatoon especially. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

1999 Saskatchewan Indian Winter Games

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again I'm pleased to rise to mention the 1999 Saskatchewan Indian Winter Games is being held here in the city. I watched the hockey game this morning between the Yorkton Tribal Council and the Meadow Lake Tribal Council novice games. And, Mr. Speaker, all of these young children are having a lot of fun.

The game was very, very close when I left — two-two — so as I wouldn't cheer for the wrong team even though my heart was with the MLTC novice team.

But, Mr. Speaker, I was very happy to see people out there that are very important to all athletes in the province. Reggie Leach, who played with the Philadelphia Flyers, dropped the puck at the start of this game. We also bumped into Sandra Schmirler who is a gold medallist in the Olympic Games. And we also bumped into an MBC (Missinipe Broadcasting Corporation) broadcaster, the only guy in Saskatchewan that can do play-by-play in Cree — the famous Tsi-boy Iron.

All of these people are taking part in the Indian Games. And certainly it hits the mark when you hear the comments by Saskatchewan's Minister of Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Affairs when he opened the games. He had this to say:

As the new generation you have helped build and shape the future of our province. You will become the leaders and role models of tomorrow. The dedication and hard work it has taken to get here will serve you well as you pursue your education and careers. These games are an opportunity for you as young athletes to expand your horizons, test your abilities, make new friends, and renew friendships from past years.

I ask all members to once again show our appreciation to the participants, the volunteers, parents, and organizers of . . .

The Speaker: — The hon. member's time has expired.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

National Aboriginal Curling Championships

Mr. Whitmore: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Over the Easter weekend Saskatoon and the Granite Curling Club hosted the National Aboriginal Curling Championships, concluding with a nail-biting, come-from-behind win on the Monday night game.

Eighty rinks from across Canada participated as they of course attracted a great number of spectators to this annual event which pits the best Metis and First Nation curlers against each other in friendly competition.

I particularly want to congratulate Mr. Martin Aubichon, the 1999 chairman, and his fine staff of volunteers which planned the event. And I know he'd want me to mention the sponsorship of SaskPower.

To our newest member of the caucus, the member from Athabasca, I can report his teams did very well. The men's team, skipped by Lawrence Corrigan, a good sport from Ile-a-la-Crosse, lost by a whisker to a team skipped by Len Aubichon from the Red Pheasant Reserve. But at least the championship stayed in-province.

The junior men's title went to Jason Gardiner, also of Ile-a-la-Crosse. The junior women's title was won by Tracy Deschambeault from Cumberland House.

My congratulations to all.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Prince Albert Community Workshop 35th Anniversary

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Tonight the people of Prince Albert are celebrating the 35th anniversary of a very special community organization.

The Prince Albert Community Workshop is celebrating 35 years of advocacy for the disabled; 35 years of providing meaningful employment, economic freedom, dignity, and personal independence; 35 years of working to remove barriers

facing people with disabilities.

I would ask all members to join with me in commending the staff and volunteers of the community workshop for 35 years of excellence.

I would also like to congratulate the general manager, Dennis Bleir, who will be retiring after 35 years of service.

Mr. Speaker, through their efforts the staff and volunteers demonstrate the values of Saskatchewan — compassion, caring, and concern for their community. Mr. Speaker, this is what makes Saskatchewan a wonderful place to live.

And I want to once again congratulate the P.A. Community Workshop on 35 years of the best work that our community and our province has seen. Thank you very much.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Students to Toronto for National Competition

Mr. Ward: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm proud to inform the House today of two high school students from Estevan who will be representing Saskatchewan in a national auto skills competition. Murray Conrad and Jared Story, grade 12 students at the Estevan Comprehensive School, earned this right by placing second in the 8th annual provincial Canadian Automobile Club and Ford Student Auto Skills Contest that was held last month in Regina.

This contest challenged the mechanical knowledge of eleven teams representing seven high schools from across the province. During the competition each team had to diagnose and repair a malfunctioning car. This was followed by a comprehensive written exam. The Estevan team received high marks and placed second to a very strong Nipawin team.

This gives both teams the right to go to Toronto for the national competition. In addition, the Ford Motor Company of Canada will pay the expenses of both teams. The winners of this competition will go on to the North American final held in Washington later this year.

Mr. Speaker, please join me in congratulating Murray Conrad and Jared Story, along with their auto technology teacher John Dyck, in their success. We wish them the best of luck in the national competitions and know they will be superb representatives of Saskatchewan.

ORAL QUESTIONS

Negotiations with Nurses

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Premier. Mr. Premier, over the past eight years you have given this province one health care crisis after another, and it's always someone else's fault. You blame the former government, you blame the federal government, you blamed the health districts, and today you're blaming the nurses.

Mr. Premier, it isn't the nurses' fault; you created the mess. You created the nursing shortage; you created the wage

disparity. Why don't you take responsibility?

Mr. Premier, instead of blaming the nurses, why don't you take responsibility for the chaos you have created in Saskatchewan's health care system?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I have an editorial from *The Press Review* which is the Eston newspaper, dated Tuesday, March 30, 1999 and in that editorial Verna Thompson indicates:

In the past few days I've been at two Saskatchewan Party meetings and one NDP meeting. I've come away from both Saskatchewan Party meetings depressed and ready to slit my wrists with my fingernails. I came away from the NDP meeting on a three-day high.

Mr. Speaker, the point of the editorial is that all that this opposition seems to be able to do, Mr. Speaker, is spread doom and gloom, Mr. Speaker. And that's not what this government's all about. We're quite optimistic about the future and quite hopeful about the future.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I gather the writer can't stand the truth because the Premier did create this mess, Madam Minister. The nurses didn't create the massive wage disparity between provinces; you did. The nurses didn't create the Dorsey report and the massive pay inequity between Saskatchewan nurses; you did. The nurses didn't create the nursing shortage; you did.

And what is the result? Overworked nurses, bed closures, and chaos in the health care system. And now the potential for a nurses' strike. It's not the nurses' fault, Madam Minister; it's your fault. Yet all you do is blame the nurses.

Madam Minister, when are you going to take responsibility for the nursing shortage and the total chaos that you have caused in our health care system?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Mr. Speaker, you know, the Saskatchewan Party or the Tory Party continue to spread doom and gloom. You know, if you left it up to them I think we'd all be in a major state of depression.

Mr. Speaker, as you will know, the Premier yesterday called on both the Saskatchewan Union of Nurses and the Saskatchewan Association of Health Organizations to meet with him this morning. Those meetings are continuing and we're quite hopeful about the outcome of those meetings.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, after eight years of NDP (New Democratic Party) government most people in Saskatchewan are depressed. Madam Minister, there is nothing more than sandbox negotiation tactics from the

playground bullies known as the NDP. First the Health minister threatens to take away all the toys by bringing back . . . by putting in back-to-work legislation and threatening with thousand dollar fines. And now we get the Premier picking up sand and throwing it in the nurses' faces.

Madam Minister, you have been acting like playground bullies for the last eight years, always blaming someone else and throwing sand in their faces. Madam Minister, you know what always happens to playground bullies. Eventually someone decides they've had enough and hangs a licking on them. Madam Minister, when are your bully tactics going to end? When are you going to quit throwing sand and take responsibility for the chaos that you have created?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Mr. Speaker, as I indicated in the previous answer to the previous question, the Premier of the province of Saskatchewan along with the Saskatchewan Association of Health Organizations and the Saskatchewan Union of Nurses are meeting. There are many issues that obviously need to be addressed if we are to put hope back into the workplace for nurses. And what I can tell the member is that those discussions are continuing and we're quite hopeful that through these series of discussions that the issues that we're all faced with can be resolved.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, to the Minister. The headline on the front page of today's *Leader-Post* says, "Patient safety a concern." Of course, that's a story about the possible nurses' strike. The problem is patient safety has been a concern with nurses for a long time now and it will continue to be a concern even if you legislate the nurses back to work. Health care in this problem . . . in this province is bleeding to death and you're offering a band-aid. The problems are going to continue; patient safety is going to continue to be a concern because we don't have enough nurses.

Madam Minister, I know . . . I know you plan to legislate the nurses back to work to fix your short-term problems but how are you going to deal with the long-term problems — nurses that are overworked and stressed out because of the nursing shortage created by your NDP government.

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the member will know that on March 26, 1999, the Minister of Finance rose in his . . . from his chair in the legislature and announced a \$195 million increase to the provincial Health budget. The provincial health spending in this province, Mr. Speaker, is now at \$1.9 billion. That's 1,900 millions, Mr. Speaker. That's a significant increase in funding and we believe that this increase in health funding will go some distance to addressing many of the issues that we are presently confronted with.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to go back to this editorial. What's so interesting about the Saskatchewan Party is that they are running around the province — which they are prone to do — they are running around the province spreading doom and gloom and fear.

Mr. Speaker, as this woman, Miss Thompson indicated, it's time for the Saskatchewan Party to start spreading some hope, Mr. Speaker, and we think that's what will happen with the discussions that are occurring as we speak.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There is a good reason for fear and concern around this province when this government is dealing with health care.

Mr. Speaker, I've been in the Plains hospital and the Wascana Rehab a lot over the last year and I've seen what's happening first-hand when it comes to working conditions of nurses. And their concerns are very real. They're working too many hours, they're working double shifts. The strain on the system is real, Mr. Speaker, and patient care is suffering. It's not because nurses aren't working hard enough; it's because they're working too hard due to the nursing shortage caused by the NDP government.

Madam Minister, it's a problem you and your government created and you're not going to solve it simply by ordering the nurses back to work. In fact, the situation is probably going to get worse. The Premier hired the past president of SUN (Saskatchewan Union of Nurses) and is now the Associate Minister of Health and the problem has got even worse since then — some friend.

What are you doing to address the tremendous nursing shortage in this province, Madam Minister, that's causing the problems?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, if the member, the Health critic for the Saskatchewan Party, had had an opportunity to read any newspaper in this country, and in fact, if they had gone onto the Internet, they would discover that nursing shortages are not something that are peculiar to the province of Saskatchewan. In fact, Mr. Speaker, there are nursing shortages all across the globe, and I'm thinking in particular Great Britain is one example, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, as I indicated to the member — and I know that he is extremely interested in escalating this situation because that's what the Saskatchewan Party or Tory Party is prone to do — the Premier of the province of Saskatchewan and the employer and SUN are having a discussion as we speak. And we are hopeful, Mr. Speaker — we are not in a doom and gloom mood — we are hopeful that we can begin to address the many issues that nurses and other health care workers in this province presently face.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. D'Autremont: — Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Premier said, nurses are asking for wage increases that would be unfair to other health care workers, to other public sector workers, and to taxpayers. Once again, we see the NDP government's double standards.

In 1996 the CEO (chief executive officer) of the Saskatoon Health District was making somewhere between 105 and

\$140,000 a year. Today he's making \$185,000 a year, and that's an increase of somewhere between 33 and 77 per cent in just three years — 33 to 77 per cent.

That's a wee bit more than 2 per cent your guideline has. But of course the NDP always have more money for administration but never enough money for the front line workers like nurses.

Madam Minister, why the double standard? You compare the CEO salary to London or to Halifax, but how about comparing some nurses' salaries? Why is there more money for administration and not for the front line workers, for the nurses?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Mr. Speaker, this member of the legislature was elected in 1991 I believe. He replaced Mr. Berntson, representing the constituency of Cannington.

Mr. Speaker, this member came to this legislature as a Conservative and he was re-elected to this legislature as a Conservative in 1995.

My point is, Mr. Speaker, that this member comes from a history of a government that racked up \$15 billion in debt. That presently, Mr. Speaker, amounts to about \$2 million a day in interest.

Mr. Speaker, I could tell this member that we could hire a tremendous number of health care providers in this province if we had that \$700 million-plus that is now leaving this province in the form of interest on the public debt racked up by that member's party.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Phoenix Advertising

Mr. McPherson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question today is to the minister responsible for SOCO, Saskatchewan Opportunities Corporation.

Mr. Speaker, the minister . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order, order. Order. Order. The Chair is having some difficulty being able . . . Order . . . The Chair is having some difficulty being able to hear the question being put by the hon. member for Wood River. I'll ask for the co-operation of the House on both sides.

Mr. McPherson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the minister has surrounded herself with political hacks that are either incompetent or have chosen to deliberately mislead elected members of the Crown Corporations Committee.

Liberals have received through an FOI (freedom of information) from SOCO a listing of the advertising agencies contracted by SOCO and the amount they are paid. Well for two years Phoenix Advertising with Reg Gross, who we all know too well as the NDP bagman, has coincidentally been the NDP agency of record. In 1997 they were awarded \$153,000. That's nice to have old friends like the NDP writing your cheques.

What's interesting, Mr. Speaker, is that in a report given to the Crown Corp. Committee SOCO stated that only 82,000 was paid to Phoenix Advertising in 1997. The amount given to MLAs (Member of the Legislative Assembly) is \$70,000 less than what was forced out of SOCO through an FOI.

My question is to the minister responsible for Saskatchewan Opportunities Corporation. Why did her staff hide the \$70,000 difference in expenses from committee members? Why is her staff deliberately misleading elected members of this House?

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — I can assure the member and I can assure the legislature that nobody's staff is misleading anybody or hiding anything. These are wild allegations. And what I will say is that one of the things that we are proud of on this side of the House is what we've done to clean up the tendering of advertising.

Before we became government this sort of thing probably did occur in this government because there weren't strict rules and there weren't guidelines. We've gone to an open tendering process in which everything is transparent and accountable and that would be true of SOCO as it would for any other agency in this government.

Mr. McPherson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm surprised to learn that the minister is proud of their record in advertising. Again to the same minister. In the FOI received by the Liberals, Phoenix received 105,000 in 1996 and 152,000 the following year. That's a 50 per cent increase in funding for NDP advertising. While the Premier demands workers accept a 2 per cent increase in wage demands, he gladly signs cheques for 50 per cent increase in advertising expenses for NDP hack firms.

My question to the minister. How does she justify a 50 per cent increase in advertising expenses paid to that NDP hack firm when her NDP government forces others — like nurses and others working in this province — to stick to a 2 per cent increase?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — First of all, when it comes to the Liberals, like the Tories, I would never take their numbers at face value. You look at some of the comments about their platform and I think we can learn from that. You never take their numbers at face value.

The second point I would make is, look at what this member is doing to respected firms in this province, calling them NDP hack firms. As I say, we have a process that we put in place as a government whereby advertising is tendered.

And the final point I want to make, the final point I want to make to this legislature, is the government has to do some advertising. If we have programs available, if we have agencies like SOCO, which invest or lend money to businesses, we have to be sure that the businesses know what the services are that are available to the people.

So again on this side of the House, we have nothing to apologize for in terms of advertising. We've cleaned it up. And as far as them, I'll look at their numbers very carefully before I

believe them.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McPherson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You bet you'll look at these numbers. You've got a lot of explaining to do.

Mr. Speaker, this case of incompetence or deliberate misleading of MLAs is not isolated to the Saskatchewan Opportunities Corporation. It appears that SaskEnergy is guilty of the same thing. Again coincidentally the agency of record for SaskEnergy is Phoenix Advertising — the lucky group. In another FOI obtained by the Liberals, Phoenix was paid 750,000 bucks by SaskEnergy for the services in 1997.

However once again a completely different number was reported to the Crown Corporations Committee. Rather than a \$70,000 sleight of hand, this time the difference is almost 120,000 bucks. Mr. Speaker, I think a pattern seems to be emerging here: let's only tell one part of the story and hope nobody asks any questions.

My question to the Deputy Premier: why did he and his staff hide the \$120,000 difference from elected members? Why is his staff deliberately misleading elected members of the Assembly? What's he hiding?

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — Mr. Speaker, I want to say to the member from Wood River that clearly this would be the Phoenix that that member would have used when he was a member of this side of the House — just so people understand who he's talking about.

I would also say that in terms of the numbers, likely the differential is different year-ends or some very explainable method of accounting for the advertising. What's important here is that the tendering that takes place, the tendering that takes place, is open to scrutiny at any time.

Probably what has happened here is your new staff, Mr. Urbanoski, has done the numbers and due to lack of experience simply hasn't got the dates, that the numbers tie to, correct. But to you, sir, I would say, as the House Leader has said, we'll be checking these numbers pretty carefully because your numbers in the past haven't been quite accurate.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McPherson: — Mr. Speaker, I'm surprised that this government is still saying, we're going to check your numbers. They have been caught so many times, they should just sit back, listen and accept the blame that's coming their way.

Mr. Speaker, my question again goes to the Deputy Premier. In the FOI from SaskEnergy, the 1996 total paid to Phoenix Advertising was 572,000. The following year the bill paid by taxpayers rose to almost 750,000 — that's a 30 per cent increase in one year.

Ironically it seems the closer we get to the election, the more money is spent on NDP propaganda. The 50 per cent increase in fees paid by SOCO to Phoenix, the 30 per cent increase paid by SaskEnergy — that's the waste that we've been talking about

and that's what's going to be cut under our government.

It's obvious to everyone that the NDP is really just using tax dollars to pad their election IOU accounts with these hack firms. How does the Premier, and how does the Deputy Premier, justify 50 per cent and 30 per cent increases to their NDP hack firms while everyone else in this province is being told to shut up and take what you get from this government?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — Mr. Speaker, I want to say to the members opposite and to the Assembly, obviously this member is a little confused about advertising and competition because as we know, all of our Crowns are moving towards competition. If you follow the track of SaskTel as it went to full competition, the advertising went up by many, many percentage points. SaskEnergy is now moving down the track, as urged by the members opposite, to full competition. What would they have us do? Not advertise, lose the business to the private sector friends of the Liberals and Tories?

But one thing I do want to say to the member opposite. Just remember, this is the individual who ran under the leadership of another individual as a Liberal, formed the official opposition, then went through the process of kicking out that leader, and now sits with a rump of a party pretending to be a Liberal. I say to you, sir, you have very little credibility and it's gone down another 10 notches today.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Funding for Education

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my questions this afternoon are for the Minister of Education.

The health system is not the only government service that is falling apart thanks to the NDP. Saskatchewan teachers are saying the NDP is well on its way to destroying the education system as well. Mr. Speaker, STF (Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation) president, Doug Willard, is saying inadequate education funding from the NDP government is driving more costs onto the property tax base. Mr. Minister, Saskatchewan already has the second highest tax in Canada. Now your NDP government is forcing education boards to increase property taxes to pay for K to 12 education.

Mr. Minister, is that your advice to school divisions? If the NDP's funding isn't going to pay the education bill, then have the school boards just jack up the taxes.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Speaker, I want to say to the member opposite that in this province, we've had that two sources of revenue for the funding of Education, from the treasury and from the local tax base, of which school trustees in this province support as the minister . . . as the member opposite supported when he was the president of SSTA (Saskatchewan School Trustees Association). So the process is the kind of process that school divisions across the province want.

Remember, Mr. Speaker, that in this province today we spend more money on education — the most amount of money in education — than we've ever spent in the history of this province. Similar to health. The largest amount of money that we've spent in this province — \$400.9 billion to K-12 education.

The member opposite talks about what we spend. What will he spend? What will he spend, Mr. Speaker, because this member here talks about freezing education in this province. One point five spending in education is what the Saskatchewan Party would spend — \$1.5 million.

Not us. Ten and a half, ten and a half per cent increase to education over the last two years with a commitment, Mr. Speaker, to spend more. Not like the Saskatchewan Party to freeze it and leave it at 1.5 per cent below the cost of living in this province.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Krawetz: — Mr. Speaker, I think I under . . . I'm starting to understand the NDP strategy. Cut education funding to the bone, and then blame school boards for the tax increase. Mismanage the health system for seven years and then blame the nurses for the deteriorating health services. Is that the NDP's strategy, Mr. Minister? Find some innocent bystander and blame him for the government's . . .

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

Mr. Krawetz: — Mr. Minister, schools divisions are saying property taxes will have to increase if education grants are not brought into line with rising costs. Teachers are saying the NDP is forcing school boards to increase taxes in order to keep schools open. Saskatchewan families need more from their provincial government than an endless supply of excuses and a growing mountain of new taxes.

Mr. Minister, what is the NDP government's plan for dealing with the serious funding shortage many school boards will face this year? Is your plan to close more schools and chase more teachers out of the province?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Serby: — I want to say first of all to the member opposite that in this province today, as I said earlier, we're spending \$400 million in education. And I want to . . . to the K to 12.

But I want to say to the member opposite, there are two strategies that I've already announced that we're going to work on. One is the role of the school — to add additional resources to the system over the next couple of years. And the dialogue with SUMA (Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association) and SARM (Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities) and the SSTA to look at how we're going to fund education in the future.

But to the member opposite when he talks about closing schools in this province, this member sat as a member of the school division in his constituency. He closed schools in his

constituency at a rate that's comparable to any other part of the province. He was part of that school closure.

He said . . . In his Canora career in 1996 he said that it's important that we look at a meaningful, a meaningful strategy in closing schools in this province. He says a meaningful . . . closing schools in this province.

And I want to say to the member opposite that if we had the \$750 million today that the Tory, that the Tory administration, of which he's a part of today, ran up as debt in this province — 750 million — we could take the 60/40 and we could take the 60 per cent off completely and fund education in this province. Seven hundred and fifty million dollars in taxes is your expenditure — yours.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ORDERS OF THE DAY

WRITTEN QUESTIONS

Mr. Kowalsky: — Mr. Speaker, from a government that's open, accountable, and responsible, I submit the answer to the question 35.

The Speaker: — The answer to item 1, question 35 is provided.

Mr. Kowalsky: — The answer to question 36, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: — The answer to item no. 2, question 36 is provided.

Mr. Kowalsky: — I have here the answer to question no. 37, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: — The answer to item no. 3, question 37 is provided.

SPECIAL ORDER

ADJOURNED DEBATES

MOTION FOR COMMITTEE OF FINANCE (BUDGET DEBATE)

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

Mr. Hillson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government was first elected in 1991. It came to power . . . it came to power in the midst of a serious fiscal and moral crisis which will go down in Saskatchewan history as the Devine comedy. I give this government full marks for, like Ottawa, bringing back fiscal integrity.

That said, after eight years in office, we have to ask what next? Where is the plan for the economic renewal of Saskatchewan? Where is the plan to reverse the flow of our young people out of the province as economic refugees?

What is the plan to deal with the changing environment of Crown corporations, the rapid amalgamation of telephone and communication services across the continent?

Where is the commitment to bring our rapidly expanding Aboriginal population within the economic mainstream?

What is the approach to deal with the fact that we live next door to the lowest taxed jurisdiction in the country while we remain among the highest?

What is the plan to deal with our crumbling infrastructure, especially in highways and education?

Where is the commitment to bringing MRIs (magnetic resonance imaging) and CAT (computerized axial tomography) scans and renal dialysis to our regional hospitals so that all residents of the province may have health care close to their homes? Where is the commitment that there won't be a wave of rural hospital closures as soon as the election is over.

Where is the commitment to ensure that in health care and in other fields we do not simply become a province of two cities? Where is the plan to bring our highways back to standard?

And, if I may digress for a moment here, three years ago this government promised to spend \$250 million a year for 10 years on highway redevelopment. They haven't hit that target once and they do not hit it again this year in this year's budget.

The one good thing in the budget, we had hoped, is that we do see significant new funding in health from the federal government and now from the province. So we had thought we could look forward to some improvements in health care.

And I was very bitterly disappointed then that following on this budget our own health district in the Battlefords was forced to have an horrendous increase in the cost of ambulance service in the Battlefords. The basic cost of a hospital trip has gone now from \$145 to \$225. The mileage cost for out-of-district trips over and above this basic 225 will go from \$1.45 per kilometre to 2.25 per kilometre.

Now, Mr. Speaker, we know that the ambulance provides a good service. We know they have to upgrade their vehicles. However two things disturb me greatly: first, for our seniors especially, we have this huge increase from \$145 to \$225; and the other thing that came to my attention is that ambulance service around the province varies widely from health district to health district.

Now I know this government is committed to equal access to health care. The fact that ambulance rates vary so greatly is two-tier medicine. It is two-tier health. And I have to ask the minister and the associate minister, why the enormous differences in ambulance rates from health district to health district?

If we believe in universal and equal access to health care surely something should be done from the provincial level to provide ambulance service at reasonable cost and also to make sure that the burden of ambulance costs falls more or less equally across the province instead of especially in some communities over

others. We know that most of our ambulance users are our senior citizens on fixed incomes so this is a serious issue for them.

If I also may digress for a personal note for a minute. I have always been one, Mr. Speaker, who objects greatly to those people who insist on telling us . . . I've always been one of those who does not like those who tell us the details of their operations. Well if I may break my own rule for a minute, I do have to say that I had surgery last week in the Battlefords Union Hospital, and I must put it on record that I am more than satisfied with the level of care and treatment I received.

I especially want to express my gratitude in view of my prior fears that the NDP might send down word that I was not to be given anaesthetic. But I have to report, Mr. Speaker, that everything went well and like many other patients I have spoken to, I was impressed with the dedication and the caring of our nurses. And we know that in spite of the tremendous pressures they have been under, that they continue to do a dedicated job for the people of Saskatchewan and that I want to put forward my own personal thanks for a job well done.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to speak about our Crown corporations for a moment. Again this year the provincial budget includes only the activities of the General Revenue Fund. That 40 per cent of government activities . . . (inaudible) . . . occurring within the Crown corporations is not covered by the provincial budget. This omission is even more serious today as our Crowns are faced with new and fundamental challenges.

(1430)

Take the example of SaskTel. Today it is the only, solely, provincially-owned telephone company. It is also the only telephone company on the continent not regulated. And finally, it is the only telephone utility which has yet to form a link with any other telephone company.

Well we know that every other telephone company in the country has now formed a link with one or more other telephone companies. What is the plan to save telecommunication service in this province as we move into CRTC (Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission) regulation? We know that there will be new and increasing pressures put on our Crown corporations which now look very small and vulnerable in the face of this new environment.

We are all thankful, Mr. Speaker, that we have gotten through another winter with no serious interruption in power service. However this . . .

The Speaker: — Order. Why is the hon. member on his feet?

Mr. Toth: — Mr. Speaker, with leave to introduce guests.

Leave granted.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And thank you to the member from the Battlefords.

I just noticed in your gallery, the Speaker's gallery, a young lady and her two daughters from our area. Her husband happens to be the dentist in our community. I've had to deal with him a few times but . . . Mrs. Sylvia Ku and her daughters, Stephanie and Natasha. We'd like to welcome you this afternoon and trust you'll find the proceedings very interesting and informative. Join me in welcoming our guests today.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

SPECIAL ORDER

ADJOURNED DEBATES

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

Mr. Hillson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I was saying, we are thankful that we have gotten through another winter with no serious power interruptions. However, this does not diminish the reports that our power has not been well managed and that SaskPower has a grid which is aging, not being properly maintained, and being increasingly stretched to the limit to meet the needs of this province. SaskPower, which was so full of ideas for investing and building around the world, has lost sight of its real mandate to provide power to this province.

On taxation, Mr. Speaker. Saskatchewan starts taxing low-income earners at one of the lowest levels in Canada, far lower than either Manitoba or Alberta. Alberta residents will soon enjoy a basic exemption of \$11,600, which is over 23,000 for a couple. Manitoba offers a basic exemption of nearly \$1,500 more than the exemption in Saskatchewan.

In Saskatchewan we start taxing low-income residents at only \$7,402 income. If the government truly wanted to put more money into the pockets of low-income earners, it would raise basic exemptions. This would be by far the most efficient method of giving low-income families additional funds.

I do want to congratulate the Minister of Finance on the reduction of the sales tax. This is especially welcome to residents and businesses in the western part of our province. I note that the minister projects this will cost the province 100 million in lost revenue. The last time there was a reduction in the sales tax, it ended up costing the treasury only one-half of what it was forecast.

I firmly believe that this was because fewer of our residents drove to Medicine Hat or Lloydminster to do their shopping.

I call upon the provincial government to do a study as to the cost of cross-border shopping, especially in the western part of the province. The government should know how much revenue the government is losing and how much revenue businesses are losing because of cross-border shopping. I am convinced that reductions in the sales tax will ultimately save rather than cost money to our province.

However, Mr. Speaker, the biggest single area in which Saskatchewan residents are overtaxed is property tax. We pay by far the highest property taxes in the whole of Canada. This

of course is the direct result of underfunding by the province in the areas of education and municipalities.

This situation has not been addressed in the current budget. And of course since the budget was announced we have heard more reports from both municipal governments and school boards that increases in property tax are inevitable as a result of this budget.

Our high level of property tax is not only sapping the strength out of struggling farms, it is acting as a disincentive for retiring residents to remain in Saskatchewan. In that regard I have to say that since the Alberta budget came down in February I have been truly frightened by the number of residents who have approached me saying that they are now considering moving to Alberta.

I have to also say that most serious of all, the high burden of education tax is leading to a backlash against education by property owners. And I don't want to see that. If we want our education system to remain a high provincial priority, then the province has to reassume its responsibility for funding. It has to cease pushing the burden of school financing on farm and home owners.

We do see some increase in training, post-secondary training, but that represents transfer of responsibility from the federal to the provincial government rather than an increase in programming.

Mr. Speaker, I've spoken of the tax revolution which appears to be sweeping this country. Alberta of course is now committed to a flat tax, no longer linked to the federal income tax Act. The provincial Minister of Finance has shown some interest in that and said that Saskatchewan is also looking at an independent income tax system, no longer linked to the federal income tax.

Mr. Speaker, I want to say that there is nothing necessarily wrong with that. However, when the Minister of Finance talked about our own income tax Act, I couldn't help but worry that his real concern is that Ottawa is now committed to reductions in the federal income tax. And of course the way the present system is set up, every time the federal government reduces income tax, the marginal rate of Saskatchewan is also automatically reduced.

Is this what the Minister of Finance is really worried about? Is this what the government is determined to stop so that unlike what happened this year with the federal budget — the federal government reduced income tax, consequently the provincial income tax also came down — is the government committed to putting a stop to that so that future decreases in the federal income tax rate will not result in benefits to Saskatchewan taxpayers?

We live next door to the lowest tax jurisdiction in Canada. This is a problem for us if we are to maintain our infrastructure, maintain our tax base, and to have incentives for growth. We cannot afford to have the second last tax freedom day in the country without suffering an exodus of investors, entrepreneurs, and other people who are looking for a lower tax level.

I am distressed as I look down the revenue side of this year's

budget. I note that if we look at provincial revenues, we find that they are static or declining in nearly all areas except for two, Mr. Speaker. And the two which are increasing are these — federal transfers, and liquor and gaming. Again this year, the only true bright spots in our provincial revenues will be transfers from Ottawa, and gambling.

Mr. Speaker, a province increasingly dependent on federal transfers and gambling revenue is not something to take pride in. This is something we should all consider to be extremely serious and something we should all be committed to reversing if we truly want a strong and vibrant future for Saskatchewan.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I heard one of the ministers say earlier that all we hear from the opposition is gloom and doom. And I don't want to do that, but I do have to say that many of the statistics being generated by this province do indeed give us cause for pause. And the most serious of all the statistics which have been generated by this province in the last year which concerns me is that we had the lowest level of job creation in the entire of Canada and the only province with a net job loss.

A couple of years ago I recall that in an area of Regina the bus benches, while people were waiting for the bus, were decorated with signs announcing how many jobs had been created in Saskatchewan.

Well we should all, regardless of party, look for job creation. We want our young people staying and living and working and having families and building futures and building homes and yes, paying their taxes here. And it should be a matter of great sadness to all of us when we see our province not fulfilling that promise and when we see our young people pursuing their futures elsewhere.

I have to ask, will we see in Regina this year bus benches with signs on them saying Saskatchewan, lowest job creation in Canada? Will we see signs saying Saskatchewan, only province to have a net loss in jobs?

You know, some of the rhetoric we heard around the budget, if one let it go very quickly and didn't analyze it too carefully, would leave one with the understanding that this province was booming. You would think we were the envy of Alberta instead of struggling to keep up with Newfoundland. Well last year unfortunately we did not keep up with Newfoundland. Newfoundland considerably outstripped this province in job creation.

If I can digress for a moment. When I was convalescing last week I considered myself privileged to be able to watch the television coverage of the 50th anniversary of the entry of Newfoundland into Confederation and of course the inauguration of the new territory of Nunavut.

These are great developments and we in this Chamber, being Canadians, I'm sure welcome heartily both the new territory and also the anniversary of Newfoundland. I certainly wish them no ill and I am glad, as I'm sure other members are, that Newfoundland appears to be headed to a new prosperity after many years as our poorest province.

However, that said, I hope this doesn't mean that we will

supplant Newfoundland as the province with the lowest economic growth and the bleakest time for our young people.

Mr. Speaker, many of the things I have said have been perhaps critical of the government. But I have to for one moment put the Liberal Party on record as soundly rejecting the solution offered by the Saskatchewan Party. Their proposal to abolish the Canada Health Act and thus end national standards is an Alberta-driven agenda.

Mr. Speaker, I understand when Reform, as an Alberta-based party, is opposed to national standards and is opposed to the Canada Health Act. I also understand that the end of national standards would in fact benefit provinces like Alberta. So I understand where they're coming from and I understand why they endorse it.

But I want to say emphatically that national standards are Saskatchewan's best, perhaps our only guarantee that the level of services we have in education and health and transportation will be commensurate with those enjoyed by Canadians in other provinces.

We cannot afford to sacrifice the principle of national standards. And I think that has been a struggle for the Premier too over the constitution talks. We all know that there are great moves for decentralization in this country, mostly coming from the province of Quebec but also coming from the province of Alberta.

(1445)

I think all members of this House applaud and support the Premier for his work on behalf of national unity. But I again want to say we cannot sacrifice national standards for national unity. National standards are key to the success of this province and to the maintenance of a fair level of services in health and education for Saskatchewan residents.

Well, Mr. Speaker, in the Throne Speech debate one government member put forward two very interesting propositions. First he said that we shouldn't be comparing Saskatchewan to other provinces. Next he said that Saskatchewan will have to be patient while this government tries to get it together.

Well, Mr. Speaker, how else do we evaluate how we are doing in areas of taxation, economic development, job creation, taxation, health care, and highways, and growth, if we don't look at our neighbours and see how we stack up against them?

The fact that the government or NDP members would say we shouldn't be comparing is I think proof that they know that under their stewardship we have not kept pace with our neighbours. And we are in danger of becoming the poor relations in Confederation.

We have to be prepared to compare and we have to say we can be compared to our neighbours in other provinces and we can look good in the process. Well, as I say, we were told we shouldn't compare and we were told we needed more patience.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I have to report to this House that as I go

around the province I note that the patience of our people is melting away faster than the winter snow. Our people have been patient — too patient. But, Mr. Speaker, that patience is fast wearing out.

What is needed, Mr. Speaker, is to bring together the leaders of agriculture, industry, labour, and the Aboriginal community, to sit down together and to jointly devise a strategy for the economic renewal of our province. We need a plan to work together. We need a joint conference representing the leadership of all sectors of the Saskatchewan population. This is urgent and it should be a top priority of whoever is elected as the next Government of Saskatchewan.

If we do not get economic renewal, then even with the very best of intentions we will not be able to maintain a proper infrastructure. We will not be able to hold our young people. We will not be able to have a fair level of taxation on the level with our neighbours. It is only through economic development that we will be able to maintain those social services which we all cherish. It is only through economic development that our future will be our children's future, and that this province can continue to grow and develop and be strong and support those social programs in which we all take pride. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to stand today and reply to the budget speech on behalf of the constituents of Humboldt, a great people who I admire very much. They're a very forward-looking, a very creative and innovative people, and certainly the rest of the province acknowledges the way that area of the province has moved ahead in spite of NDP repressive policies. And so I once again would like to greet those people out there today and to acknowledge some of their thoughts through my reply to the budget speech.

Mr. Speaker, what the people of the Humboldt constituency constantly tell me is they know that they have the resources, the human resources and certainly the natural resources, at hand and they have the desire to go ahead in this province and to build the province and to maintain their livelihoods and certainly to increase the opportunity for their children to stay in the province and hopefully to have some of their children come back.

However, they have also told me that just in no uncertain terms that their children are leaving because they cannot make a wage that will leave some money in their pockets at the end of the day. And not only are their children leaving, Mr. Speaker, I've received several letters of late that indicates that there are a number of people in their 30's and 40's who are certainly deliberating and thinking very seriously about leaving our province and moving to Alberta or moving to another province.

They are doing this and they tell me stories like this. They say . . . A couple in Humboldt wrote me mentioning that they have three children. The mother of these children chose to stay at home with the children. However, she was forced to go back to work just to pay the taxes that her husband has got to pay from coming from his cheque. And so she goes to work, Mr. Speaker,

simply to pay the taxes that her husband must pay.

Now when we talk about a better quality of life in the province . . . and we have often mentioned the violence that we're experiencing within the province of Saskatchewan, certainly a number of young people experiencing difficulty because they don't have work and they don't have proper guidance sometimes, and they are getting into trouble. I think, Mr. Speaker, this woman's letter to me gives a clear indication of what could be done to help the situation. If the taxes were lowered in this province, particularly our high personal income tax, I think that we would see many more people staying here.

People have also indicated to me, Mr. Speaker, that the costly regulations associated with setting up business in this province is a major deterrent to them. People become very discouraged when they have to go through a barrage of paperwork and a lengthy waiting period to set up business in the province. So those are some very simple things.

The other things that people are talking to me about, Mr. Speaker, is they're saying, you know, this government has collected more taxes than ever. They're spending \$5.5 billion a year now to run the province. What is the matter? Where is the money going? And so I tell them, I don't really have a great understanding of it because the government doesn't divulge to us all of their expenditures and all of their income, and there's no possible way for us to know at this point. However, it is evident that there has been mismanagement — terrible mismanagement — and incompetence on the NDP government's part in every sector that we look at: in health care, in education, in municipal government. We look at our highways, Mr. Speaker, and we still have the same crumbling highways that we had when this government came into power, and they have gotten much, much worse.

In the budget this year, Mr. Speaker, speaking of highways, I noticed that in the Humboldt constituency, we have a total of approximately about 24 kilometres of highway that will be patched. This is a shame, and it's a disgrace that people have to take their children to school, that people in the health care service sector have to drive ambulances over roads like this, that farmers that are trying to transport their grain and their livestock to market are having to deal with a dangerous highway system.

Mr. Speaker, that has got to come to an end, and people are wanting to have designated taxes . . . they're telling me they want to have fuel taxes, 100 per cent of that designated to highway. At least that way they'll have a clear picture of what's happening and whether or not there maybe needs to be another way of dealing with it. But if they get that clearly from the government, that government will do that, there is an area of predictability there for them.

Mr. Speaker, the government . . . the NDP government ceases . . . or doesn't seem to, rather, understand that we just cannot get along here the way we are going right now. They don't seem to understand that Saskatchewan is not an island onto itself when it comes to competition. They don't seem to understand that we need to be competitive with other provinces in order to flourish in this province.

They don't seem to understand that just because the government seems to appear to be doing well financially that most people in this province are not. And they don't get the fact that the government cannot simply confiscate most of the income of the average worker in this province and hope to build a prosperous province. Because to build a prosperous province these people across the way need to understand that we must be competitive, we must have a level playing field. And we must have that playing field, level playing field, with our neighbours to the south and to the west and to the east of us.

And the government across, Mr. Deputy Speaker, don't understand that playing politics with a budget at this critical juncture in our history is an abandonment of the leadership that they were elected to provide.

The NDP just doesn't understand that it is to Saskatchewan's advantage to become a have province. The NDP seem to be thrilled when we are so very poor. They seem to be very happy when they get increased equalization payments from Ottawa. But in reality, Mr. Deputy Speaker, increased equalization from Ottawa sends a clear signal that the NDP have failed.

Mr. Speaker, this budget as I see it is nothing but a political document. It's obvious that the Minister of Finance went to great pains to use the budget document as a political tool designed to fight the Saskatchewan Party's popular, credible, and realistic plans. But try as they might to adopt much of our platform they just couldn't bring themselves to do it, Mr. Speaker. They couldn't bring themselves to announce plans for a realistic and decisive tax system that would stimulate growth and produce a vibrant economy here in our province. But they insist instead on perpetuating prohibitive, high, income tax systems where our citizens are forced to pay taxes that they cannot any more take.

As much as party ideologies may not be as strong as they once were, Mr. Speaker, with the NDP, one party ideology in the NDP is still very much alive — and that's the belief that people's money is better off in the pockets of the government. Yes, it is true that political pressure mainly from the Saskatchewan Party but from people throughout the province also, have caused them to act and offer a very minor reduction, very minor reduction with the most visible tax in this province, the PST (provincial sales tax). And we agree on that move but, Mr. Speaker, it's only a very small part.

We have no signs in this budget, none whatsoever, or in the Throne Speech that began the session this year, that the NDP government is serious about bringing responsible and considerable tax relief to the people of the province. It seems that the NDP is content to keep the people of Saskatchewan pinned to the mat with the monster of high taxation. And until the government does realize the damage that their high taxation policy is doing to this province economically and psychologically, damage will continue to be inflicted.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we've come to a point where if something is not done and done quickly, there will be no hope to see Saskatchewan advance up the ladder of economic prosperity. We're already choking on the dust of other provinces who've realized that governments cannot continue to tax people to within an inch of their lives.

Those provinces began cutting their taxes years ago and we're seeing the results of that. We can see this in *The Globe and Mail* story clearing showing Saskatchewan dead last in terms of economic momentum.

And we can see this in terms of the job numbers which have been recited many, many times in this legislature. Mr. Deputy Speaker, everyone can see this except the members opposite of course, who should be absolutely embarrassed by their record on this front.

We see tens of thousands of jobs created in provinces on either side of us. And in NDP Saskatchewan we lose jobs, the only province to do so. And it's frightening to see that, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It's very frightening also to see that even the government, the inept NDP government cousin Glen Clark in British Columbia has a better record in job creation than we do. Now if that isn't a damning indictment of a government, I don't know what is, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I find it very interesting and telling when I look at the equalization payments received from the federal government in Saskatchewan. Just to explain to the members opposite, equalization payments aren't the same thing as transfers from the feds for health care or other programs. This is a program who sees the poorer, so-called, have-not provinces, get a cheque from the Government of Canada to make up for the fact that they have failed to create their own wealth, their own prosperity. I think the equalization formula is a pretty good measuring stick as to see how very poorly this province has done in building an economy.

(1500)

Well let's see, Mr. Speaker, in 1997-98 Saskatchewan was on the verge of becoming a have province for one of the very few times in its history. That year we received just \$8 million in equalization payments. We were one step away from that leap from the unsuccessful to the very successful; one step from being classified as welfare recipients to becoming contributors to the nation. Now that would have been really something any government could have taken pride in.

But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, instead of jubilation and pride, do you know what we got from the NDP, Mr. Speaker? We got a bunch of hand-wringing and woe-is-me stories, that because of a strong economy our equalization payments were on the decline. The NDP Romanow government didn't see that as good news — no way. Instead the then Minister of Finance, now the Minister of Economic Development, in one of life's cruel little ironies said becoming a prosperous have province was really bad news because it would really be better to continue having to depend on large sums of federal revenue — federal welfare payments.

It was better, according to her, to continue to live off the success of other prosperous provinces. And the fact that that minister is now in charge of building the economy of this province explains why we were the only province in 1998 to actually see jobs vanish right before our eyes. Once again this was a party, an NDP Party, that could not see past the needs of a government in order to start looking to the needs of a people.

If Saskatchewan had . . . had crossed that line and become a have province, it would have meant a strong economy, a thriving province. But for too many on the opposite side of the House, their views of the province does not extend too much farther than the doors of this building. They see Saskatchewan and government as one in the same. And it's just not the case, Mr. Deputy Speaker. When the government is doing well financially, it doesn't necessarily follow . . .

The Deputy Speaker: — Why is the hon. member on his feet?

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — With leave to introduce guests?

Leave granted

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and also to the member for allowing the leave.

I'd like to introduce to members . . . I thought this lady looked strangely familiar to me. I'd like to introduce to all of you a page from the last session actually, up in the gallery. Cara Renkas is seated in the Speaker's gallery, and I'd like all members to join with me in welcoming her back to the Legislative Assembly today.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

SPECIAL ORDER

ADJOURNED DEBATES

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

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, what the people of the province need to know is, when it appears that the government is doing well financially, it doesn't necessarily follow that the people are doing well. And I should direct that remark more at government members because the people of this province do understand that.

And if there was ever a case study for this, it's Saskatchewan in 1999, Mr. Speaker. And as we continue down this path of ruin, it's only going to get worse. As we continue, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to chase our youth out of Saskatchewan, there is no one to pick up the tax burden. More and more taxes continue to be placed on the shoulders of fewer and fewer net contributors. And that just simply cannot be sustained.

But yet the NDP still doesn't get it. Politics in the place of good governance. That's what the NDP is all about. Mr. Speaker, there are some very real issues that must be addressed in this province, and no matter how much political wallpaper the members opposite use, the problems remain.

I find it extremely interesting that nearly four years after I raised the issue of the growing problems of child sexual abuse through the child prostitution trade — and I raised that in this legislature — the government has now seen fit, mere weeks before an election call, to bring in a Bill that makes it appear

they actually care about the issue.

For three years, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I've raised this issue only to be greeted by members on the opposite side of the House rolling their eyes, shaking their heads, and thinking that this subject was something that did not need to be discussed. For three years they've claimed it wasn't a problem.

So why the change now, Mr. Deputy Speaker? Well perhaps the Premier made an uncouth visit to his own riding. Or maybe he took a look at the NDP's polling numbers when it came to justice issues and saw that sweeping these problems under the rug was no longer good enough in the eyes of the people.

Did the NDP bring in this Bill that has proven effective in other provinces, Mr. Speaker? No. Did they adopt the measures used in Alberta that have already proven extremely successful? No. Did they provide more safe houses or spaces in drug and alcohol treatment centres for youth? No, they didn't. Any actions that are substantial are beyond this government's scope.

When literally dozens of cars were stolen in Regina over one weekend a year or two ago, our Justice minister stood in his place right over there and he told us with a straight face that he didn't think it was a real problem. It was only when their polling came back that the NDP thought that they'd better get on board in the fight against crime and in our streets.

Do they really believe . . . even now, Mr. Speaker, do they even really believe it? Will they admit how serious these problems are under their government? I doubt it.

So when I hear the Minister of Finance say safe communities is one of the targets of this budget, you will have to excuse me if I'm just a little bit sceptical about the authenticity of the NDP's claims on either child prostitution or youth crime.

Mr. Speaker, like any other department of the government, the NDP simply throws money at the situation and they think it's done — the job is done. And they haven't figured out yet that sometimes the problems go beyond funding.

Yes, we have to provide adequate funding in all areas of government, but we also have to provide leadership in those areas if we want to effect real positive change. Simply opening up the cheque book, taking taxpayers' money and throwing it at the problem is not enough, and taxpayers expect more. It's the easiest thing for a government to do but it is not enough, not by a country mile, Mr. Deputy Speaker. In fact, spending estimates went up in 21 of 28 departments this year. But does that mean that services are going to get better? I doubt it.

Mr. Speaker, of course this is the same argument, and we can use this argument in health care — the NDP cheer and they applaud whenever the health care budget goes up but never do they ask how the money is being spent. Never do they tell the people how the money is being spent. Never do they seem to look into how the money is being spent. Never.

This seems to me to be a pretty irresponsible thing to do when the Health department now consumes 40 per cent of the total budget. It's a lot of money, Mr. Deputy Speaker — over \$1,900 for every man, woman, and child in this province.

And while the Saskatchewan Party is committed to matching this dollar for dollar with subsequent increases in future years, we also want to know how the money is being spent and we want to make sure it goes to front-line services. And we want to make sure it's going to patient services. And we want to know for sure that it's not going to administrative purposes to the extent that it has been put in by the NDP government because this administrative nightmare has caused complete decimation of our health services.

The NDP don't seem to want those answers, Mr. Speaker. I know in my area those questions are being asked. When people find out that the funding for a new hospital in Humboldt has not been slated for in the budget, they are very doubtful about this government and they ask, where is the health budget going? For goodness' sake, why couldn't we have had the money for our new hospital? We have been deliberating over this. We had our plans finalized. We had Sask Health people out there knowing exactly about all of these plans being completed, waiting for the call from the Minister of Health to submit the plans.

Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the call never came. And so on the behalf of those people in Humboldt, I made a phone call to the Minister of Health's office and also to the capital management person, Leslie Parker. And I asked why, at the end of February, the good people in Humboldt hadn't gotten a call that usually comes in November from this government, a call for capital construction spending.

The answer I got from the minister's office and also from the capital management person was that there wasn't going to be a call going out. And I said well, the budget is about ready to come down very quickly here within a month. How can our hospital be considered for construction approval if in fact the people there can't even get their plans in to the government?

The minister's assistant simply said, we don't know yet if we can do this or something to that nature, and there may not be a call put out to health districts for capital construction projects for two or three months.

What I heard from the minister and what the minister commented to the media on this matter was that health districts should have known that they could have submitted their proposals any time. That the policies had changed; everything had changed.

Well the CEO (chief executive officer) in our health district had not heard about the changes. And so, Mr. Deputy Speaker, this leads a person to be a bit suspicious about the intent of the government and the intent of maintaining hospitals within that district of their intent to honour affiliates in that district, who happen to be the Sisters of St Elizabeth in Humboldt, to honour them in the ownership of that hospital.

It seems like that district has gotten stonewalled left, right, and centre by this government, and there is a lot of people feeling that they have been misled. It is my hope, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that we will see money for a new hospital in Humboldt. And it is also my hope and the wishes of the people there that the sisters will not be deterred from maintaining ownership of that facility.

Mr. Speaker, another area where expenditures continue to rise is in Social Services. This is another area we hear the government talking a really good game about making people more independent, about moving people from welfare to work. But do we ever see any concrete evidence of this? Today we have more people on welfare in Saskatchewan than we do farmers.

The NDP sees this as a mark of their compassion. More welfare. Others, however, see this as a major cruelty. To allow someone to stay on welfare when they are perfectly capable of taking care of themselves is not compassionate. It's cruel. Yes, there are those in our society who do need help — single parents, the disabled. However, single employables should not be on welfare if they are able-bodied, single employables. They should have the opportunities at hand, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to work.

Welfare cannot be a way of life, Mr. Speaker. It is demeaning to people. It should be there in the case of the unforeseen emergency which happens from time to time. But people should be encouraged to make their own way in the world because the best social program, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is always a job.

We also hear this government, the NDP government, bragging about more money for education and municipalities, Mr. Speaker. But let's again look at the reality. The increase in K to 12 education will barely cover the cost of increased teacher salaries negotiated without input from the SSTA. This could mean another increase in school taxes for property owners in many parts of this province. And property owners are already paying the highest property taxes in Canada.

In terms of increased funding to municipal governments, Mr. Deputy Speaker, municipal governments are still about \$13 million short of what they said they need just simply to maintain the services that now exist. Once again this could mean another increase in property taxes, especially since the RMs (rural municipalities) must raise cash to match the government's funding if they want to see a penny.

In terms of Agriculture, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have seen this government's lack of commitment through and through and through, Mr. Speaker. Agriculture has barely rated a mention in either the Throne Speech or the budget. Our province's lack of action during the fall and winter has left our farmers saddled with a farm aid package that is practically useless.

And while our Agriculture minister was declaring the crisis over and leaving for vacation, the federal government was cobbling together a program that might be just fine for farmers somewhere in Ontario or Quebec, but it's a true farce here in Saskatchewan.

This is a program where farmers have to spend hundreds of dollars, Mr. Deputy Speaker, just to pay for accounts . . . for accountants rather, because the forms are so convoluted. And in the end most of them are told that they don't qualify for any assistance anyway. So those who have been hit the hardest during the last three years most likely will not qualify.

(1515)

The provincial government's offer to hog producers will do

more to benefit the large hog barns because many of them have a major grain company backing them and they can afford to take the loans. But smaller hog producers say they won't take the loans. They won't take them even if they're there because they won't help them anyway. They say they simply don't have enough cash on hand, and those loans will not keep them in business.

So, Mr. Speaker, we hear so much of the grand plans of the NDP when it comes to economic development and job creation, but where's the proof? The NDP continues to jabber on about the mythical 30,000 jobs that they say they've created. The only thing impressive about this figure is that those members can keep a straight face while mentioning it, because they know full well that it is a fantasy.

The NDP idea of economic development is to set up yet more boards, more bureaucracy. The Economic Development department's budget is about \$43 million. But when asked whether they ever use services provided by the department, such as REDAs (regional economic development authority), a tiny percentage of business people actually have done that. Only about 1.9 per cent have used our REDAs to establish a business.

Instead of real economic development, namely creating an environment where entrepreneurs want to locate here, the NDP simply creates more work projects for government employees.

I think if you ask the average business owner what would benefit them the most, they would tell you substantial and sustainable tax cuts, Mr. Speaker. All the government programs in the world can be put into place and nothing will happen if our taxes aren't brought under control.

The public relations exercise conducted by the NDP in the fall bared that out. Of the people who answered the NDP's taxpayer-funded questionnaire, most people said the government should cut income tax. But like everything else, the NDP ignored what the people were saying.

The member from Saskatoon Southeast said the only reason people want a cut in their income tax is because they're filling out their tax forms at this time of the year. Now how condescending can you get. Here's another example of government saying that people don't really know what's good for them so the government will make that decision for them.

Do you claim . . . do you really blame people for being angry when they fill out their tax forms? Especially when it's now so easy to compare our tax load to every other province. What do you expect people to think when their computer tells them they would be paying \$3,000 less in tax if they were living in another province?

Mr. Deputy Speaker, from what I can tell, the only people in this legislature who despise tax cuts more than the NDP are what's left of the Liberal caucus. At least the NDP pretends that they want to cut taxes, but we have the existing Liberals who have decided that tax cuts are just not a priority in Saskatchewan right now.

My God, what a statement. I didn't think any party could fall

farther out of touch than the NDP, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but the Liberals have managed to show us that they are also nowhere in touch with what the citizens of Saskatchewan are clearly saying.

Mr. Speaker, the people of Saskatchewan can rest assured that there is one party though in this province willing to fight to free them from the bonds of repressive taxation. And we have no choice. The long-term damage being inflicted on this province by the NDP must be stopped.

Let me give you one example where good intentions simply are failing because of high taxation and no jobs in Saskatchewan.

At the Carlton Trail Community College in my riding, Mr. Deputy Speaker, they receive both federal and provincial money to provide academic and job training for students. And that's a great thing. It seems like a very good thing.

But in the end, Mr. Deputy Speaker, little is being accomplished because the school is having tremendous problems placing students in apprenticeships. Because the agriculture sector has suffered economically, 77 of those trainees could not be placed. Some have been placed throughout the province but many in other areas are not. And many of them have to wait lengthy periods, sometimes up to three to six months to be placed.

So even though the Agriculture minister declared the farm crisis over in January; the farm crisis carries on. It carries on into the machinery manufacturing industry; it carries on throughout the entire province; and it hurts everyone in this province. And this has contributed to the lack of apprenticeships for students there. If there is no economic growth, Mr. Deputy Speaker, businesses will continue to diminish in our province and where will our young people find work? How many of them will make their lives in Saskatchewan in their near future?

Mr. Speaker, it's clearly, clearly true that the NDP simply don't have a clue what's going on . . . what it's going to take, rather, to get this province moving in the right direction. They don't understand that, if they would simply get out of the way and let business and entrepreneurs create wealth in this province, it could be done.

And the best way they could get out of the way is to lessen the tax burden. They could also get rid of unnecessary and excessive regulations, red tape, and look to see how their labour laws are killing businesses. If they don't do that, we're going to continue to have fewer and fewer taxpayers picking up a greater and greater share of the load.

And, Mr. Speaker, in the coming election I expect the members opposite will tell the people of Saskatchewan that the province simply cannot afford greater tax cuts but the truth of the matter is that we can't afford not to cut taxes. This is truly a critical juncture, Mr. Deputy Speaker. If the NDP are allowed to carry on with their ruinous policies in this province, Saskatchewan will continue to fall back and there may be no hope of recovery. We have to act now to get Saskatchewan back on the right track and the only way to do this is a realistic plan for tax reduction — something the government has failed to provide to the people of the province.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to just quote from a weekly commentary of the Canadian Taxpayers Federation, their commentary on the provincial budget, 1999. And it goes like this:

It was enough to make your head spin. Within minutes of tabling the 1999 provincial budget, the government's spin doctors were out in full force touting its merits. Spending was up almost \$400 million, including 195 million on health care. The debt was reduced by a mere 101 million to 11.4 billion. And the PST was cut by one point from 7 per cent to 6 per cent.

The government would have us believe that this year's budget is the best thing since sliced bread except of course they're using our dough. Certainly any tax relief is welcome news but there happens or appears to be an enormous gap between the government's spin and the truth. Let's try to separate fact from fiction.

The government's spin in the budget was: Saskatchewan has the lowest sales tax rate in the country.

The reality, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is that is technically true except that Alberta has no sales tax at all. And taxpayers should keep the bigger picture in mind.

The budget did little to deal with our overall tax burden. If you earn an income, we have the second highest income taxes in the country. If you drive a vehicle, we have one of the highest fuel taxes in the country. And, if you own property in the city or on a farm, we have the highest property taxes anywhere in Canada.

The next government spin, since 1995 income taxes paid by the average Saskatchewan family have been reduced by over 10 per cent, and that is in addition to the 33 per cent reduction in sales tax. The reality is this. Again the government is playing fast and loose with the truth.

The NDP government raised taxes by hundreds of millions of dollars from 1991 to 1995 in the first place, including hiking the sales tax from 7 per cent to 9 per cent. So for them to suddenly claim taxes have been reduced is a bit of a stretch.

Also bracket creep, by which inflation pushes taxpayers into higher income tax brackets, has quietly resulted in hundreds of millions in higher tax revenue over the past eight years.

The next government spin, the PST cut will put \$100 million a year back in the pockets of taxpayers. Well the reality is yes, but on the other hand bracket creep increased provincial income tax revenues by almost a hundred million this year alone.

The next government spin in the budget was, the PST cut will stimulate consumer spending and help the economy. The reality is yes, it will be a small shot in the arm, but will the tax relief announced in the budget deal with the problem of brain drain and out-migration? No, it won't. Will it make our tax system more competitive with our provincial neighbours? No, it won't. Will taxpayers actually have more money in their pockets at the end of the day? No.

Higher payroll charges, rising utility rates, higher, we could call

them taxes, and bracket creep will see to that. In this budget the government continues to whisper what we have been saying loud and clear for many years — the people of this province need and deserve meaningful tax relief.

Lower taxes will stimulate growth, create more jobs and opportunities for our young people, and ultimately more taxpayers. A large, diverse, and growing tax base is the key to the long-term sustainability of our social programs.

With an election looming, the government may have wrapped its political brain around tax cuts, but their heart just isn't in it.

And with that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I just want to close today by saying that for the reasons that I put forward in my speech today, and due to the very fact that there was no vision put forward by the NDP for this year or the years ahead, that there was no vision for meaningful tax relief to our people, no vision for creating an economically prosperous province — I will not be voting for the budget, but I will be voting for the amendment posed by the member from Melfort-Tisdale.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It's a privilege once again as the representative of the great constituency of Melville to enter into a debate with respect to the recent budget presented by the NDP government. A constituency which boasts a variety of entrepreneurs, both from the urban and rural centres, Mr. Deputy Speaker, people who truly believe in their communities and the viability and the continuing effort to sustain our small communities and hope for our future and hope that the NDP government, for the short time that they will continue to be in power, do not miss any more of the opportunities that they have missed in the past to create some economic activity in rural Saskatchewan.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, before I go on, I've sat and listened to debates here, both following the Speech from the Throne, and as well debates with respect to the recent budget. It still saddens me, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that what seems to be a highlight from both sides is the ongoing shroud that overshadows this venerable institution when fingers continuously are pointed, and people reminisce about the wrongdoings of former and perhaps even some present members of this venerable Assembly.

That's sad. And that's something that people of this province are getting fed up with hearing. I have to agree with the member from Kelvington-Wadena: people do not want to hear about poverty; they do not want to hear about hungry kids. We don't want to hear about any of that, but we also do not want to hear any more about the wrongdoing of elected members to this venerable institution.

Where have things fallen off the rails and gone wrong? How are we ever going to clear this up and eliminate this embarrassment from this great province of ours. When will this come to an end.

People of this great province built what we have today because of their ethics — because of their work ethics. And you know something, Mr. Deputy Speaker, words like honesty, integrity,

trust, loyalty, commitment, and dedication are still words that are held in very high esteem as values to people of Saskatchewan.

(1530)

But they are saddened and have become totally cynical because their elected members do not have those words any longer it seems in their vocabulary, in their repertoire. That's what's saddening to this . . . promises made in advance of being elected to work hard to save a hospital, and then subsequently after being elected to support the closure of the Plains hospital is one of the things that creates cynicism.

Those people give a different meaning . . . those people give a different meaning, Mr. Deputy Speaker, a different meaning or a new meaning to the term "trust me I'm a politician."

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we in the Liberal Party believe in the people of Saskatchewan. We believe that communities in rural Saskatchewan need some help from a government who has become less caring. One that boasted about caring for people of Saskatchewan but it, since 1991, have completely abandoned the rural Saskatchewan. It has been decimated over this last eight years with the closure of hospitals, with the loss of nurses, with the loss of our doctors, with the loss of our infrastructure to rural communities, with our embarrassing conditions of our highway system.

You know when we talk about any kinds of plans for the future of this province — we haven't seen any plans. The only plans that we've seen from this government is cut and slash and close. There weren't even any sound plans.

The ill-conceived idea to close the Plains hospital was not even well thought out. That was bad enough. But now they had to close it one year in advance of the date that it was to be closed — for political purposes nothing else — and we will continue to see the ill effects of that for sometime yet to come.

There is no light at the end of the tunnel as far as seeing the completion of the General Hospital in downtown Regina at this point in time, and that's because of no planning, no thoughts about the future, no consideration for people that needed to use these facilities, primarily the people from rural Saskatchewan.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'm confident that the Liberals can and will create a work environment which treats front-line health care workers with a dignity and respect that they truly deserve for a cost of about 60 per cent of the budget that's been proposed by the NDP.

With the creation of 10 to 12 regional hospitals and making a modest investment in additional services at each of these regional hospitals, there will be an opportunity to keeping rural beds open, there will be an opportunity for people seeking diagnostic and surgical services in those smaller communities in their local community so that they're close to home. They're close to their work environment and close to their families, not having to travel great distances for health care services as they now do.

It would as well relieve the pressure that's so desperately on the

hospitals, our big hospitals here in Saskatoon and Regina, Mr. Deputy Speaker. There needs to be something to alleviate the severe pressure, the serious pressure that exists currently — the waiting lists, people that call who are suffering, who are concerned about becoming drug addicts because they're kept under medication in order to ease their pain and suffering while they wait and wait and wait for their surgery.

By expanding the diagnostic treatments, Mr. Deputy Speaker, throughout those 10 to 12 regional hospitals, this is a commitment that the Minister of Health today is not prepared to make. The Minister of Health accuses the opposition of promoting private clinics. That is not what's being promoted. We have them now. People are forced, people are forced to go to private clinics now because they can't wait. They can't wait.

They languish in emergency room corridors. They're told that their surgery is put off and it gets put off longer and longer so they can't wait. So they have no alternative. Those with means, what do they do? They go to Alberta; they go to the Mayo Clinic. A two-tier health care system already created by an NDP government — that currently exists.

By keeping all our rural hospitals open, by making a commitment not to close any more beds, that's a commitment that the associate Health minister is not prepared to make, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but we need to have that kind of a commitment for people in rural Saskatchewan. The Liberals' health care priorities as well will create more jobs and more opportunities.

We have also proposed to increase the budget in lots of areas and reduce the budget in areas which we do not believe are the real priorities for the people of Saskatchewan. And we've heard, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have reports in our local newspapers from last fall that tell us about the waste, the continuous increases in government advertising. Are these the kind of priorities that we need?

Saskatchewan government departments hiked their advertising cost to \$5.15 million in the last fiscal year, up from \$2.9 million a year earlier — a 78 per cent increase in the area of advertising. Mr. Deputy Speaker, that money could have been better spent to a more proper health care system.

I just want to quote from a well-known politician who spoke in this House on April 22, 1991, and I quote:

Finally, what about the health-care system. Much can be said about this, and much will be in the days ahead as I bring my remarks to a close — a health-care system that we see today where doctors and nurses and other care-givers are worried about intolerable working conditions, and difficulties of stress which manifest themselves today with the nurses coming to this Legislative Building to protest what's happening.

And it goes on:

What in the world's gone wrong with medicare and health care — 197 beds, 197 people, 113 beds in Saskatoon, about 200 in Moose Jaw, Yorkton, and Regina, I think in round terms, closed down. What in the world has gone

wrong?

They say that the costs are getting out of control . . .

And it goes on, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I quote from the then leader of the opposition in this legislature, now the sitting Premier.

So what has changed since 1991? Why are we still asking, what in the world has gone wrong with our health care? Why has it been so ignored and allowed to deteriorate to the extent that it has?

Mr. Deputy Speaker, there are other areas which we talked about and we have a grave concern for, and we talk about it daily in this House, and that's the future for our young people. When we now hear that our young people going to universities are going to be faced with a horrendous increase in tuition costs, what kind of incentive is there for them — for them, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to continue on with an education here in this province? And once they obtain that education, what opportunities do they have to recover the costs of their efforts?

Well I'll tell you. What the Liberals are proposing is that for 1999 we've reviewed all these budgets, and what we would do is offer to these . . . In 1999 a Liberal government would introduce a scholarship program which would provide \$1,000 per year — 1,000 a year — to every first-year and second-year student enrolled in the full-time university studies at the University of Saskatchewan, University of Regina, or any of the SIAST (Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology) campuses.

That's called investing in our future, Mr. Deputy Speaker — in our young people. Twenty-two million dollars per year is what the investment would be to provide those \$1,000 scholarships for first- and second-year students. Well worthwhile investment, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Far better investment than some millions of dollars invested in a broken-down, Guyanese electrical company. Monies that could better be invested here in this great province of ours.

We're also concerned about our rural communities that have grain elevators closing down and no opportunity for those small communities to have any say as to whether or not there may be some opportunity for them to maintain these elevators.

From the date of notice . . . What the Liberal platform would propose is from the date of notice of an elevator closure, Mr. Speaker, local community groups would have 180 days to determine whether or not they want to take over that elevator at fair market value. Communities facing closure of grain elevators will have two questions to answer. Does saving our elevator make economic sense? And if so, is it a priority of our community? It will be a community decision to decide whether or not they proceed with that kind of an investment.

A Liberal government would provide the funding to assist one group per community to complete such a feasibility assessment. The cost for these feasibility assessments would be shared on a 75 per cent/25 per cent basis to a maximum provincial contribution of \$60,000 per community.

This is believing in our smaller rural communities. This is an investment that government should be making in rural communities throughout this great province of ours, not neglecting and ignoring them, not allowing the infrastructure to deteriorate to the extent that it has. And, Mr. Speaker, highways affect all of those things and all of us, as do the streets and roads in this province. I'm sure that if more of the members of government travelled throughout the highways and byways of this province they would recognize that they need to increase the budget for Highways by a great deal more than \$15 million. They promised \$250 million. They have not yet achieved that goal; they have not yet kept that promise.

A Saskatchewan government would . . . Liberal government would make highways and streets a top priority. Gasoline taxes which were once targeted to ensure that our highways and byways, our roadways were in proper repair — this year \$370 million will be raised for the provincial coffers from gasoline taxes. Our position is to commit all those highway taxes to what they were meant, is for highways and streets in our province — 75 per cent or 277.5 million to the Department of Highways and Transportation budget; the balance to cities, towns, villages, and municipalities to build and maintain their roads and their infrastructure.

Mr. Speaker, there are those as well, there are areas in the budget where there is and can be found waste. There are areas, as I pointed out, in advertising, there are areas in positions that need to be looked at. There is a need for some review of our taxation policies in this province in order that there may be economic activity created, in order that there may be an attraction for people to come to this province. That is desperately necessary.

But the other thing that's necessary is not to turn away people who want to come in and invest at no cost to taxpayers. And I'm going to refer back to the missed opportunity of this NDP government in the 1992 proposal by a Calgary-based organization to bring in a cogeneration operation which would have created hundreds of jobs at no cost to taxpayers, would have eliminated the need for landfill sites, and would have created all kinds of economic activity and employment in east-central Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker.

And you know what happens when people work in this province, you know what happens when people work in this province — it may be news to them — but when we get all kinds of people working, they pay taxes; they buy goods and services; they pay the provincial sales taxes; they pay personal income taxes; they pay school taxes and property taxes. I don't know why that this government cannot seem to get it through their heads to invite, to welcome, to open up the doors, and ask people to invest in this province. Why invest in broken down electrical companies? Why doesn't the government invest that money back here into our province to create that kind of activity that we desperately need?

In future years, Mr. Speaker, I know that the position that the Liberal government has taken, that the Liberal Party has taken with respect to future tax cuts and significant debt paydown are credible, Mr. Speaker. And for those that would choose to sit down and closely analyze . . .

(1545)

The Speaker: — Why is the hon. member for Athabasca on his feet?

Mr. Belanger: — Mr. Speaker, to ask for leave to introduce guests.

Leave granted.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My apologies and my thanks to the member from Melville for the interruption. But spring is here and Easter's here and so is the Easter break and so the Easter-break kids are here. And I have a couple that I want to introduce to the Assembly today.

I have in your gallery, Mr. Speaker — I'll ask her to stand as I name her — I have my daughter, Kellie, and her cousin from Buffalo Narrows, Courtney — and have Courtney stand. They're here to watch the proceedings and they've actually been doing a lot of work in the office for me and so far they have not been paid, Mr. Speaker.

So I want to ask this Assembly to kindly welcome these two young guests from northern Saskatchewan.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

SPECIAL ORDER

ADJOURNED DEBATES

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

Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are other areas in government where cuts and savings can be found. A Liberal government could also make budget cuts through government to save millions of dollars by eliminating unnecessary middle management jobs, Mr. Speaker, and some of those who choose to champion the cause of political appointees — there are those.

Mr. Speaker, there has been evidence — and how soon they forget — of what has happened, and I've seen it happen in this province in 1982. In 1982, the wanton dismissal of not only middle management positions, but of positions throughout, throughout government in order to make room for the friends of people of the party that was taking power. That happened in 1982, wanton dismissals, even as low as clerk positions. And guess what happened in 1991 after this government took over in 1991? The same thing. No excuses. Just a clear dismissal of hard-working, long-term, committed, dedicated civil servants who were wantonly dismissed with no regard to their future and the future of their families, Mr. Speaker.

I've seen that — and not for any cost-saving measure — but only to replace those people, those hard-working civil servants with patronage appointments, with friends of the party that came into power. That's not the Saskatchewan way, Mr. Speaker, that the people of this province, each time a

government changes, have to look forward to fear for their jobs and their security and the future of their families.

We have long-time dedicated civil servants and we have had . . . but unfortunately they've fallen under the axe of those governments that come to power and cut and slash without giving any thought to what was happening to these long-time dedicated civil servants. We believe that we could eliminate 400 jobs from the civil service — through attrition, through retirement, through severance packages — and 200 jobs from Crown corporations. It happened before only to replace those jobs.

This is out of the total of — and someone is saying it's 600 out of a thousand — this is out of a total of 10,000 jobs, 10,000. I repeat that for the individual that quoted it as being 600 out of a thousand. It's out of 10,000 jobs, less than 3 per cent at almost all middle management positions.

This is not something that anybody particularly enjoys doing but you see major corporations, major operations in the last decade that have done that, have re-organized and have downsized. But not this government, they don't believe in that. They just believe in eliminating people and replacing them with their supporters.

Mr. Speaker, another area that we have some problems with is in the area of travel, and I know my colleague from Wood River has outlined the costs related to travel. When you talk about our Liquor and Gaming Authority for one year, over half a million dollars, Mr. Speaker, over half a million dollars in travel — for what? There needs to be some justification for that.

Mr. Speaker, this is a budget that has ample opportunities for cost-saving measures to the taxpayers of this province. It has a great deal of opportunity for allowing taxpayers to be less and less burdened by taxes.

Mr. Speaker, we often hear people on both sides talk about . . .

The Speaker: — Order. Order, order. Now all hon. members will recognize that it's not necessary to be shouting at one another across the floor. And I'll ask for the co-operation of all hon. members to allow the Leader of the Third Party to have his remarks be able to be heard.

Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are some other areas where there can be savings made, as I mentioned, some of those in the areas of Economic and Co-operative Development. That \$49.2 million budget for that particular department can certainly be reduced. It goes to regional and economic development authorities. We do have REDAs; we do have people; we do have chambers of commerce; we do have very capable people that are able to determine the needs for creating economic activity in this great province of ours.

We don't need to have advertising and communications budgets go from \$750,000 in one year to two and a half million dollars over a period of six years. We don't need that kind of expenditure. That money can be better put towards the needs of people and putting the people as our first priorities.

Mr. Speaker, this is a budget that can certainly find a great deal

of savings and we believe that the Liberal platform has found those savings. We would be able to apply it and it would be for the benefit of the people of Saskatchewan. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Koenker: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This budget is a rather different budget in that so much of it goes in one direction, namely to health care — a hundred and ninety-two million dollars, which is really an unprecedented increase in provincial funding for health care. There's scarcely been another budget in the history of Saskatchewan I dare say, that gives this kind of increase to one particular area of government, namely health care. And so there's no doubt then that this budget is all about better health care. I want to raise some questions about that in a few moments.

This budget also is rather remarkable in that in addition to having an 11 per cent increase in funding for health care, there's a reduction in the provincial sales tax. A 1 cent reduction which many people . . . the opposition obviously are looking for more. This is a step in the right direction to lower taxes.

And there's a third component to this provincial budget, namely paying down the legacy of provincial debt. This is the sixth straight balanced budget. And the government, and I would as part of the government, would say that this is a balanced approach to the provincial household.

However in looking at this particular budget these last number of days since the budget was introduced, I've also been looking at the television news that carries pictures of the tragedy unfolding in Bosnia and in Kosovo. And in sharing my remarks today I would like to measure in some respects the public expectations here in Saskatchewan and the presentation of this provincial budget against what we see unfolding halfway around the world in Bosnia and Kosovo.

There we see nightly the drama of forced displacement of families — families from all generations as well. The elderly wheeled out of Kosovo in wheelbarrows. I'm sure you've seen some of those graphic pictures, Mr. Speaker, and other members have seen them. Pictures of orphans, of widows, field hospitals where children and adults are having shrapnel removed, some of the miracles that they're even alive to have the shrapnel still removed.

Pictures of vast oceans of people waiting to cross the border into Macedonia with little, if any, food or water. Pictures of homes destroyed in Kosovo and in Bosnia, of bridges burned, bridges destroyed by bombing, buildings destroyed, utilities destroyed.

And I look at all of these pictures and I look at our provincial budget, and I look at the reaction of the opposition and I listen to that and to the public expectations. And I ask myself, how do we measure our needs here in Saskatchewan, and more particularly, how do we separate our wants from our needs in crafting a provincial budget?

I ask myself, what more do we need here in Saskatchewan? Do we need more money put into highways? Do we need better highways across the province meriting, as the opposition would give in their election platform, an increase of \$50 million a year

for better highways? Is that what we really need?

Do we really need more tax relief beyond what we've already seen — 2 per cent reduction in the provincial sales tax a couple of years ago, 2 per cent reduction in the provincial income tax last year, a 1 per cent reduction in the provincial sales tax this year. Do we really need more tax relief?

The opposition amendment to the budget motion says exactly that — oh, we must have more tax relief. I doubt that, Mr. Speaker, in the light of a more searching examination of public priorities.

Some would say we need to put more down on the provincial debt. That's a cautious, conservative voice and one that needs to be heard still, one that's heard less and less as we move away from the legacy of debt and deficit.

Some would say that we need to put more money into health care, more money than was put into health care in this budget — \$192 million more isn't enough. We need to put more money into health care, more into a increased or enhanced prescription drug plan for the province, perhaps more for home care, perhaps more for more nurses in hospitals.

I wonder, Mr. Speaker, about public priorities in the light of what we see happening in many places in the world; the public priorities that we need to bring to bear here in Saskatchewan.

A very prudent politician once said, and I quote:

If we can produce in such abundance in order to destroy our enemies, we can produce in equal abundance in order to provide food, clothing, and shelter for our children. If we can keep people employed for the purpose of destroying human life, surely we can keep them employed for the purpose of enriching and enhancing human life.

This politician was the Rev. T.C. Douglas, well-known to Saskatchewan people. And he raises that what I would call moral or ethical question about what we do as a society in terms of promoting life and valuing human life and enriching and enhancing human life. There's no doubt about it that the public expectations here in Saskatchewan are that we need more and better.

Let's start with health care. There's no doubt about it that people want more health care, they want better health care, they want it sooner; they don't want to wait for it. They don't particularly want to pay for it either. They want it and they want it now.

(1600)

And there is much in this budget that addresses that public agenda. An increase of \$195 million, an 11.3 per cent increase over last year. Much of this goes to the health districts across the province — 139 million of that.

Another 13 million is invested in physicians and health professionals. Another 5 million goes to additional funding for cancer programs. Included in the funding for the health districts, in 139 million for the health districts, is money for a settlement

with the nurses that's going on in the province right now. And indeed \$50 million to deal with the millennium problem of Y2K (Year 2000) compatibility in equipment.

There is much in this health budget that is good. But I must confess, I have to ask how much of this budget really addresses fundamental alternatives in health care, addresses what I... the wellness model that the government has adopted. Fifty million dollars for equipment to ensure compliance with Y2K may very well be necessary. I would even go so far as to say if I had a heart attack on New Year's Eve I would probably want to make... I'd probably want that heart monitor to have been checked out and to be fully compliant with Y2K.

But here is a question of wants and needs again and public priorities. And basically we have just in that segment of the budget alone, a quarter of the increase in spending on health care just going to compliance on Y2K.

And I ask myself, what if we had taken an equal amount of money, \$50 million, and directed that into new programs or even existing programs, but fully addressed at health enhancement, wellness, sickness/accident prevention. What kind of difference would have that kind of investment make across Saskatchewan?

We now have indeed three communities I believe in northern Saskatchewan that still don't have sewer and water facilities. And this is less than a year away from the millennium. That's a sad commentary on life in our province and in some respects the priorities that successive governments have had in Saskatchewan.

I look, Mr. Speaker, also at the programming in Social Services. Very few people have talked about this in the budget debate so far. The overall budget for Social Services has been increased from 540 million to 578 million.

And I do want to say that this is one positive initiative in this budget, I believe. It puts money into life enhancement. It expands benefits basically to needy children in Saskatchewan — all of this increase in Social Services.

Now some people in the opposition have said, well the welfare caseloads are going up in Saskatchewan. This is simply not the case. Social assistance caseloads here in Saskatchewan continue to decline and indeed have declined over the last four years, 14.7 per cent. And the fact that there is an additional \$38 million in funding for Social Services where the overwhelming majority of these funds go to help children is a testimony to the fact that in this area the province is on the right track.

It isn't what many people in Saskatchewan might call for, especially those who would want tax reductions in their own pockets, and yet this is the kind of priority that really goes to addressing human need and building the social priorities of the province, not just for our generation but for the next generation as well.

People will know, most people will know in Saskatchewan at least, that Saskatchewan has introduced one of the foremost new social programs in all of Canada within the last couple of years, namely the Saskatchewan Child Benefit.

Along with the Saskatchewan Child Benefit — incidentally an increase of 33 per cent in funding for this program that targets benefits to families with children — there have also been increases in the employment supplement that helps families to get off of welfare.

There's been a 15 per cent increase in funding for the employment supplement, and increases in funding for family health benefits, extended family health benefits, also to help break down the welfare wall and to become independent and to secure jobs in the job market.

So I think this is an important dimension of the budget that has largely gone ignored, and that is the priority that has been placed on the low-income families in this budget. And maybe part of the reason that it's been ignored is because, dare I say, it contrasts too sharply with the calls for tax reduction? You can't have it both ways. You can't initiate programs to help needy families if you continue to call for unrealistic tax decreases as the opposition does.

And in some respects I think the government should be a little bit more, dare I say, forthright or congratulatory in talking about some of the things that we've done in Social Services and what we are really doing to help low-income families.

There's one other area that I'd like to comment on just briefly, Mr. Speaker, and that has to do with the kind of perspective we bring to long-term issues — long-term issues in economic development. I want to just give one example this afternoon.

In this budget there is no increase in funding for reforestation by the province and I really have to wonder about that. Yes, we've done a wonderful job, some would say, in putting money, investing money into the health care system. Here's another area though that really begs for investment of funding. It takes a long-term view to put money into reforestation. You don't see the results for 80, 100 years, if you're lucky.

And yet in Saskatchewan we have over 300,000 hectares of logged-over land that has not been sufficiently regenerated. This is a huge amount of land that represents a vast amount of lost wealth to the province, not now, but for future generations.

And I dare say that future generations will pay dearly for the fact that we aren't making the kind of investment in reforestation that we need to make here and now, and nor have successive Saskatchewan governments. This just isn't one of the public priorities of... well basically of, I suppose we have to say, Saskatchewan people, or else that it would be reflected in government priority. It's one that I think we need to look at a bit more and take a lot more seriously.

I want to say that in this budget I think we as New Democrats have proven our ability to manage the provincial economy in a balanced fashion. We have achieved a balance between better health care, lower taxes, and less debt. There's no doubt about that. That's been one of the hallmarks of our last six budgets that they all share in common; a very balanced, common sense approach to the governance of the province.

I think we need to say that when the present government took office, it took hold of a legacy of debt and mismanagement and

it moved beyond reckless expenditure to more prudent fiscal management. After a decade of excess, what else could you do? Your hands were tied behind your back. Even if you didn't want to exercise prudent management, circumstances would have forced any government to do so.

This government has been consistently committed to fiscal integrity, to balanced budgets, to not just eliminating deficits but paying down the debt. And we've paid that down by 25 per cent from 15 and a million dollars, we're down to \$11.5 billion now.

So we've moved beyond the legacy of mismanagement and debt, excess, fiscal irresponsibility to balanced and common sense government. But I'd like to suggest that it might be time for us now to move a bit beyond just balanced budgets and common sense to some of the basic social needs that we still have here in our province.

Yes, we've restored stability to Saskatchewan but we still have huge challenges, any number of areas where instability still exists in the lives of Saskatchewan people. We've cleaned up the financial deficit but we still need — make no mistake about it — we still need to attack the human deficit in this province.

We have lowered taxes in this province over the last number of years. Slowly but steadily we have lowered taxes but we still have a long way to go for a fair tax system. And I'm encouraged in this budget that there is provision for an examination of the present tax system. And I want to say here on behalf of the people I represent in Saskatoon Sutherland that this examination of the provincial tax system cannot be just an exercise in lowering taxes, it has to be an exercise in making the tax system fairer and more progressive based on ability to pay.

We have reformed the health care system. But as I've said earlier this afternoon we still have a long way to go to implement a wellness model of medicare. And I look for this government to turn to that agenda in the future. We've brought a balanced approach to government but poverty and racism and injustice still weigh far too heavily on far too many Saskatchewan people. There is a huge unfinished agenda for us to engage in, Mr. Speaker.

Franklin Delano Roosevelt in his 1944 State of the Union Address to the American people said this:

We can not be content, no matter how high the general standard of living may be, if some fraction of our people, whether it be one-third or one-fifth or one-tenth is ill-fed, ill-clothed, ill-housed, and insecure.

And President Roosevelt went on to talk about a second Bill of Rights in the United States under which there would be a new basis for security and prosperity — a new Bill of Rights that embellished economic truths and economic security.

And some of the things that he talked about in terms of that second Bill of Rights for the American people was for example the right to earn enough to provide adequate food and clothing and recreation. And that's something we need to address here in Saskatchewan, that we need jobs for our people. We need jobs that are good jobs to provide adequately for food, clothing, and

even for recreation of Saskatchewan people.

And we need to work on our Child Benefit Program, and our employment supplement, and our supplemental health benefits to encourage more and more people in that transition to the workplace.

(1615)

Roosevelt went on to talk about the right of every family to decent housing. And there's still far too many people in Saskatchewan who do not have sufficient housing, decent housing, safe housing. This is a huge agenda that we don't talk about much as a society any more. Most of us are pretty content to be safe and secure in our homes and worry about paying our own mortgages.

But I say here, in Saskatchewan at least we have a tradition of being our brother and our sister's keeper. And we should not and we can not be content to be safe and warm in our own homes if our brothers and sisters don't have homes that are decent and safe and warm.

And certainly the right to adequate medical care and good health. We've done relatively well here in Saskatchewan on that score. We have a long way to go. That task will never be ended. Disease, sickness, and accidents are no respecter of person or position or pocketbook, and that's why, to our credit here in Saskatchewan, we have always held to the principles of medicare. And we have recognized that right, simply by being alive, that every human being has to adequate medical care and good health.

Roosevelt talks about the right to adequate protection from economic fears of old age, sickness, accident, and unemployment. We have a long way to go here.

Many have private pension plans, many in their workplace have benefits that go along with the job — dental benefits, prescription drug benefits, life insurance benefits, accident disability benefits. But there are far too many men and women in Saskatchewan who don't have those benefits. And we need to address that as part of building our society here in Saskatchewan and taking care of people and putting them first.

As Roosevelt said, and I quote again:

We cannot be content, no matter how high the general standard of living may be, if some fraction of our people, whether it be one-third or one-fifth or one-tenth, is ill-fed, ill-clothed, ill-housed, and insecure.

We have a huge unfinished agenda then facing us as Saskatchewan legislators and Saskatchewan people. We need to do things like increase the food and clothing allowance for people on social service.

We need to begin helping the working poor even as we are helping those who are on welfare. People who may not have children but . . . and qualify for the child benefit, but who still need benefits that are accorded those who are on welfare right now. And this needs to be added to the agenda of social change and reform here in Saskatchewan.

We need to do more for families with autistic children. And I say families with autistic children, because heaven knows that the children need help, but when you're dealing with autism, the parents and the siblings need help as well. And we need to do a lot more in terms of providing palpable support for these families in Saskatchewan. There's a huge task to be addressed here.

And don't we need to do more for those in society who are physically handicapped in so many different ways. We've made some good starts but we have a long journey in all of society, Canadian society, to deal with issues of access for people who are handicapped.

Single parents, single parents need better maintenance enforcement and better access to their maintenance enforcement officers. That is another agenda that needs to be met by this government.

Workers need better occupational health and safety standards and enforcement in our province. It's good, but it isn't good enough. There is so much that we need to do. And the list goes on and on.

And so I come to the proposed amendment by the opposition that whines about taxes, and then totally, totally ignores the legacy that has led to such high taxes here in Saskatchewan.

And I say, rather than indulge in an agenda of the selfish epic of the strong who would want lower taxes for themselves and for their children and for their friends and for their neighbours, I say before we start to lower taxes on a jihad to lower taxes, we need to take care of many of the unfinished agendas that exist in Saskatchewan, the standard of living and the level of security that Saskatchewan people have and need to have in many instances.

And so I don't buy this amendment at all in any way, shape, or form. I'm convinced that we here in Saskatchewan, at our best, are our brother and our sister's keeper. That we don't indulge in an epic of the . . . selfish epic of the strong. That we do use government as a positive instrument of change, to build a just and a compassionate society, and that we are doing just that with this budget.

We need to do a lot more as I've said, but we need to keep our eye on the priorities that meet human need. And we need to go beyond that and we need to look at our position in the world, measure our needs and our wants, and separate the two.

And finally, I think we need to be thankful for the many good things that we have here in Saskatchewan and the many blessings that we do enjoy here in Saskatchewan that are so much in absence so many places in the world. So . . . and no end of public expectations, this budget attempts to deal with some of those expectations. There's a lot more that we have to do, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you very much.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Hon. members, it is my duty to advise the

House that the Minister of Finance wishes to exercise his right to conclude debate after which all hon. members will be precluded from entering into debate. Is the Assembly ready for the question? I recognize the Minister of Finance for a maximum of 20 minutes.

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. And let me say that it's a honour for me to rise today to close the debate on the 1999-2000 provincial budget.

Before I go into my remarks, I want to thank my constituents in Saskatoon Mount Royal for allowing me the privilege of representing them in this Legislative Assembly. Their support and the support of all Saskatchewan residents has made it possible for our province to put an end to the destructive fiscal and economic policies of the 1980s, and continue moving forward to a future of hope and opportunity.

And I want to say a few words about that, Mr. Speaker, just to contrast what it was like when this government came to power to what it is like today because we hear a lot of doom and gloom from the opposition. Well I want to tell the members opposite that I met with a couple of very astute and well-known and capable business people in Saskatoon a few weeks ago, and I'll be frank with the opposition. What they wanted to say to me was there are a few things that our government, they felt, really hadn't done as well as we could and they wanted to share that with me.

And I started explaining the difference between our government and the previous government, and these two business people — who explained that they'd never been members of any political party — said to me, wait a minute, don't misunderstand us. We don't want to go back to the way it was when they were in power. They said, we remember what it was like in the late 1980s, and I remember it, Mr. Speaker, because I was practising law in downtown Saskatoon; and I'll tell you, they want to talk about gloom and doom — that was the late 1980s, trying to make a living in Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker. We didn't have people pay . . . worrying about income taxes and complaining about their income tax rate when those people were in power. You know why? Nobody was making any money — that's why.

And you know, Mr. Speaker, these people talk about . . . they talk about modest tax relief in the budget. And the amendment to the main motion in support of the budget coming from the opposition says the tax relief is too modest. Well I just want to take a minute to remind the members opposite and the people of the province what kind of tax relief we got from them when they were in power because the first act of this government when we were elected in 1991, Mr. Speaker, was to reduce the expanded PST that had been brought in by the members opposite, Mr. Speaker. You know what they did? They put a tax on restaurant meals. But they weren't satisfied with that so they put a tax on used cars. But they weren't satisfied . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order, order. Order! Order. Order. Order. Order. I'll ask for order on both sides of the House. Hon. members have had several days to put their remarks on the record, and we now . . . I'll ask the members of the House to allow the Minister of Finance to be heard.

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The members

opposite say call the election. It's like a bunch of turkeys calling for an early Christmas — that's what that's like, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Well as I was saying, they're complaining about so-called modest tax relief. We've cut the PST by 33 per cent in the last few years, Mr. Speaker. What did they do? They put it on used cars. They put it on children's clothing. They put it on restaurant meals. They put it on lottery tickets. And you know what? As of January 1, 1992, they wanted to harmonize the PST with the GST (goods and services tax). They wanted to put the PST on all goods and services, Mr. Speaker. That's what they wanted . . . (inaudible) . . . and now they talk about modest tax relief.

Then they go on in this amendment to the motion in support of the budget to say they want to stop the youth from leaving the province. Now we all remember when they went to power in 1982 and their slogan was to bring the million children home. Well you know what, Mr. Speaker? Between 1985 and 1991, under them, we had record out-migration out of this province — 15,000 people a year leaving Saskatchewan. That's what we had. And that situation has turned around quite a bit.

But before I leave this topic of tax relief and our record versus their record, Mr. Speaker, let me say this. That if we weren't paying \$2 million a day . . . \$2 million a day, Mr. Speaker, interest on the debt that those people left behind, we could not only eliminate the PST, we'd have \$100 million left over, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: — Order, order, order. Now all hon. members on both sides of the House will recognize that the Chair is having much difficulty being able to hear the remarks of the Minister of Finance.

Order. And the Chair asks for co-operation from members on both sides of the House to allow the remarks of the minister to be heard.

(1630)

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Well thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can hardly hear myself think because the members are yelling so loudly over there. But it's . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. Now I'm sure the Minister of Finance will also want to resist the urge to comment on matters related to the Chair's ruling and proceed with his speech. And I'm sure the hon. members will — order — will want to allow the minister to be heard.

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Listening to the members opposite reminds me of something that the Minister of Agriculture once said in the House which is: when you throw a stick in the dark and you hear a dog yelp, you know you've hit the dog, Mr. Speaker. Well, so much for them and their record.

And I want to say to the member from Kelvington-Wadena, I was talking to a reporter from Wadena and the reporter said to me she had been talking to the member from

Kelvington-Wadena who said her response to the budget was apparently well it doesn't go far enough. Well I've got news for the member for Kelvington-Wadena, Mr. Speaker. When you say that somebody isn't going far enough, you're also saying they're going in the right direction, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — And that is where we're going. And the reason, Mr. Speaker, is because we're not listening to the chirping from the opposition, we're listening to the people of the province. And what they're telling us and what they've told us is that the focus of the budget should be better health care, lower taxes, and a commitment to debt repayment and sound financial management — and that's what we're doing, Mr. Speaker.

And if we look at health . . . I want to tell the members opposite and the people of the province, Mr. Speaker, that in 1996 the Health budget was \$1.56 billion; today it's \$1.9 billion, Mr. Speaker. We're meeting the needs of Saskatchewan people. We're making the largest investment ever in our health system.

Now the members opposite, especially the Liberals, like to say that this is because of the federal reinvestment in health. Well I want to say that we should give credit where credit is due, Mr. Speaker, and we should acknowledge that this year we'll get \$67 million more money from Ottawa for health care — \$67 million. And that is part of the \$195 million of new money we're putting into health care, Mr. Speaker. Because for every dollar the Liberals in Ottawa are coming up with, we're coming up with \$2 from the people of the province — that's our commitment to health care, Mr. Speaker.

Now I want to say that what I really like about the health care budget — the largest expenditure in health care in our province's history, Mr. Speaker — is that every penny of that new money is going to be directed to front-line services for people, Mr. Speaker. And we're going to target areas like shorter waiting lists for surgery, which we need to do; better cancer care; more health services for women; and improved working conditions for nurses and other health professionals.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — And I'm pleased to say, Mr. Speaker, that the response to the budget from the University of Saskatchewan health care administration professor, Allen Backman, he said he was overjoyed with the increased investment for health services. And he said, most importantly, Mr. Speaker, it was targeted to services that people need. And that's what we're doing, Mr. Speaker — we're moving forward.

Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan people want services they can count on when they're ill but they also want services they can count on to keep them well. And we are maintaining, Mr. Speaker, a comprehensive array of health services in this province like renal dialysis in more communities, wider immunization programs for kids, expanded home care, advanced clinical nursing services in more communities, and better access to advanced medical technologies like MRIs and CT (computerized tomography) scanners.

We're also investing in new hospitals, nursing homes, and health care facilities in communities around the province; expansion of critical services like home care, emergency transport and mental health services, Mr. Speaker, to name just a few of the things that are being done.

We're making major progress building a health system for the future, Mr. Speaker, and that's going to be a . . . that's going to be a publicly funded single-tier medicare system, Mr. Speaker, something that was pioneered in Saskatchewan . . .

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — And the members over there can yell from their seats all they want but the people of Saskatchewan will never forget that medicare was introduced in this province over the objections of the Liberal Party whose leader tried to kick down the door of this Chamber to stop it from coming in, allied with their allies in the Saskatchewan Party who together formed the Keep Our Doctors Committee to try to keep medicare out.

And I'm not going to get into the litany of comments from the member from Arm River and the Leader of the Liberal Party, Dr. Melenchuk, and the Leader of the Reform Tory Saskatchewan Party, Mr. Hermanson, who have said repeatedly that what they really want is private hospitals in this province. That's what they want, Mr. Speaker, because at the root of it their vision is that you should get what you can pay for. Their vision is that you should be able to get faster health care if you've got more money. That's their vision, Mr. Speaker; that is not our vision. Our vision is to keep building the public health care system that we have.

And I want to say, Mr. Speaker, that *The Globe and Mail* featured a story about home care recently. They pointed out that Canadians want a seamless health care system, where you can go from the hospital to home and you can have home care support you. And it went on to say that home care should be an integral part of a seamless health system and they said in Saskatchewan the reshaping of medicare in this respect is well underway. And most people that examine it, Mr. Speaker, know that, regardless of what the opposition may have to say about it.

Well I want to say a word about education, Mr. Speaker. And, as I said in the budget address, I'll stand on our record over here compared to what they did over there because I'll repeat what I said in the budget address, Mr. Speaker, which is this: when this government came to office in 1991, the provincial government was spending more money servicing the debt left behind by the Tories when they were in power, more money on interest charges on the debt, Mr. Speaker, than we were spending on education, for the education of young people in this province.

And today we've had a turnaround because we're going to spend \$250 million more on education this year than we're going to spend servicing the public debt that they left behind, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — And that's what we should be doing.

As for the Liberal Party and their new platform, I want to say

this . . . and Dr. Melenchuk was caught up on this last night in Saskatoon by the teachers because the Minister of Education pointed out that the Liberal platform, even though they chirp about education, the Liberal platform doesn't contain one new cent for K to 12 education. That's how much priority the Liberals give to education. So much for them.

And then we have, then we have the Tories. What do they propose in their platform? Appropriately released on Halloween last year, what they propose is that we freeze education funding and that we freeze health funding.

And then we have the Liberals and Conservatives, who say in their own platforms that education shouldn't get any more money, complaining about the education budget, Mr. Speaker.

Well I'm here to tell the opposition that this budget contains a big increase for education. In fact we will be spending \$140 million more on education this year than we spent just three years ago. K to 12 education, Mr. Speaker, the funding has gone up more than 10 per cent just in the last two years; university education up 7 per cent; SIAST and regional colleges up 9 per cent this year. And they're complaining about it, Mr. Speaker.

But there's more — there's more. This budget not only invests in our youth through education, it invests \$67 million in our children through the Saskatchewan Action Plan for Children to ensure that kids have access to the basic economic and social opportunities they need to succeed. So we're spending there too, Mr. Speaker.

And I have to say when I was at Pleasant Hill School in my community — and this happens all over the province — I saw the kids in the pre-kindergarten program getting prepared for life and given the same opportunities that other kids have. And I've been to the school feeding programs and helping to make breakfast for the kids, Mr. Speaker, because kids have to be well-fed and well nourished to want to be in school and want to learn.

And there are some with a Tory-type mind that have said to me, well why should the state provide food? The parents should do that. Well yes, they should, Mr. Speaker. But if we've got problems in our community and some of those kids are going to go hungry, we're going to do something about it, and that's what we're doing.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — And then, of course, we have the opposition saying we're not doing enough for highways and they'd do so much more. Well I want to tell the opposition and the people of the province, Mr. Speaker, that this year the budget invests \$235 million to repair and maintain highways. That's \$66 million more than three years ago to keep building and improving the provincial system of highways and planning our transportation system. And not only that — \$10 million in a new municipal-provincial infrastructure program.

So we're doing a lot. And the members opposite will say it's not enough, that they would do more. Well that's their job, Mr. Speaker. Their job is to criticize. Our job is to get on with the job of building the transportation system. And that's what we're

going to keep doing.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Well we have the opposition parties being very critical, Mr. Speaker. But I guess what I'd like to say is this. There was a philosopher who said, progress, far from consisting in change, depends on retentiveness. Those who cannot remember the past are content to repeat it. And you know, Mr. Speaker, I don't think people are going to forget the past. They are not going to forget what it was like when the Tories were in power and they are not going to forget the legacy that is left behind.

I was reading a letter in *The Star-Phoenix* a while ago from a Tory who was saying, why don't the New Democrats forget about the Tories and what they did when they were in office? And you know, Mr. Speaker, it would be nice to forget about the Tories but it's hard to forget when every day I'm writing out a cheque for \$2 million. For what? For nothing, Mr. Speaker. Just to pay the interest on the debt that they left behind. Two million dollars a day, Mr. Speaker.

So it's hard to forget. It's hard to forget. And you know, I guess from the bantering over there, I guess somebody threw a stick into the dark and hit the dog again because the dog's really yelping over there now, Mr. Speaker.

Well, so much for the opposition. I think what we need to do, Mr. Speaker, is look at the positive side and how we're moving ahead in the right direction.

The opposition likes to talk about taxes. In 1995 and 1996 we reduced income taxes and took 6,000 people off the income tax roll. Low-income people, Mr. Speaker.

In 1997 we reduced the education and health tax from 9 per cent to 7 per cent.

In 1998 we reduced Saskatchewan's personal income tax rate from 50 per cent to 48 per cent of the basic federal tax.

And in this budget, Mr. Speaker, which I gather the members are going to oppose, we're reducing the provincial sales tax by another point. It's down from 9 per cent to 6 per cent in just a few years and it's applied to the lowest range of goods and services anywhere in Canada, which could be contrasted with the Tory record which was to put the PST on everything — all goods, all services. That's their plan — that's not our plan, Mr. Speaker.

Well the result of these tax cuts since 1995 means this. It means for an average family, a two income family taking in about \$50,000 a year, their provincial income taxes have gone down by about 10 per cent and their sales tax has gone down by about 33 per cent, Mr. Speaker. So we're making progress but we're making progress as we can afford it.

We're not going to slash taxes and go back into deficit and debt like the members opposite propose. We're not going to do that. We're not going to slash taxes so that we can freeze health care and education spending. We're not going to do that either. We're going to reduce taxes as we can afford it. We're going to

maintain public education and public health care, which people want us to maintain. And we're going to continue to pay down the debt they left behind.

(1645)

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — So, Mr. Speaker, let me say that the record of the government is clear. And the result of the record is sound financial management as reflected in this year's budget — the message of which is better health care, lower taxes, and less debt.

And, Mr. Speaker, I'm proud of this budget. I'm proud to stand by it. And I won't compare our record, and stand with our record against the record of the members opposite any day.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — And that is why, Mr. Speaker, I will be opposing the Liberal and Tory amendment, and I will be supporting the motion in favour of the budget.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The division bells rang from 4:48 p.m. until 4:51 p.m.

Amendment negated on the following recorded division.

Yeas — 13

Krawetz	Toth	Bjornerud
D'Autremont	Boyd	Draude
Gantefoer	Julé	Heppner
Osika	Hillson	McPherson
McLane		

Nays — 27

Flavel	MacKinnon	Shillington
Upshall	Johnson	Whitmore
Serby	Lautermilch	Cline
Kowalsky	Van Mulligen	Teichrob
Trew	Lorje	Sonntag
Scott	Nilson	Murray
Hamilton	Junor	Stanger
Jess	Wall	Kasperski
Ward	Murrell	Thomson

The division bells rang from 4:52 p.m. until 4:58 p.m.

Motion agreed to on the following recorded division.

Yeas — 30

Romanow	Flavel	MacKinnon
Shillington	Upshall	Atkinson
Johnson	Whitmore	Serby
Lautermilch	Cline	Kowalsky
Van Mulligen	Teichrob	Bradley
Trew	Lorje	Sonntag
Scott	Nilson	Murray

Hamilton	Junor	Stanger
Jess	Wall	Kasperski
Ward	Murrell	Thomson

Nays — 14

Krawetz	Toth	Bjornerud
D'Autremont	Boyd	Draude
Gantefoer	Julé	Heppner
Osika	Hillson	McPherson
Aldridge	McLane	

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

COMMITTEE OF FINANCE**General Revenue Fund
Agriculture and Food
Vote 1**

The committee reported progress.

The Assembly adjourned at 5:01 p.m.

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