

EVENING SITTING

SPECIAL ORDER

ADJOURNED DEBATES

MOTION FOR COMMITTEE OF FINANCE
(BUDGET DEBATE)

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

Hon. Mr. Goulet: — Okay Mr. Speaker, I am again very pleased to speak on the 2001 budget that was brought down, as well as the speaking to the amendments in relation to the Sask Party.

Just as a quick summary before I proceed into my commentary relating to the government and the relationship with Aboriginal people, you know, the relationship with First Nations and Metis people, I would like to say this as a quick summation of it. When I was speaking just before supper, I mentioned the importance of not only the connection to the people — you know, the connection in regards to education, you know, the connection in regards to health — the listening that this government had done in regards to what the people were saying in this province. The fact that we responded not only by words but by action was an important part of the speech just before supper.

I talked about the record expenditures in health. Something that would be good in the North, in the urban area and the rural area. You know, I talked about response in regards to the agricultural situation, you know the 33 per cent increase to 95 million. You know the action we take in education where we've moved the percentage share from 40 per cent to 42 and a half per cent in regards to the province, \$40 million to community schools. And indeed the respect that we show not only to the people of the province but the respect to the request by business in regards to the small business tax cut by 25 per cent, you know down to 6 per cent now. The fact that in the North on a mining side, we had improved the taxation, the tax credit for the flow-through shares, which are now 25 per cent of which the provincial share is 10 per cent.

These points showing that indeed not only do we cut taxes on a sustainable level, that we indeed cut down on the debt which is now in the \$650 million figure, that we are also doing expenditures that people have been talking about for the past while.

And the counter that I didn't make is this, that for the Sask Party, I simply stated that they sounded a lot like what I knew when I first came to the legislature, that indeed when I first came to the legislature, I was in opposition dealing with the Grant Devine Tories. And I mention the fact that although they changed their name to the Sask Party, that policies are still the same. Grant Devine talked about cutting taxes and cutting taxes. And I remember the gas tax as a specific example which they did cut, but they had to bring it back up because what they did

was unsustainable in terms of action. And in that regard I would say that they are not much better, Mr. Speaker, that indeed I hear the same old story from the same old Tories. They may change their name, but they are much the same.

Now the other thing that I didn't mention was this, Mr. Speaker, and that's a sense of values that you do have in this province, a sense of values where you respect people from all over the province, from the North, South, East, West, the farm areas, urban areas — all over. You pay this respect to people. You pay respect to people in business. You pay respect to working people as well.

And what I saw was the same Grant Devine message again this past week because there was an attack on our expenditures, an attack on the amendment to this resolution which attacks working people in this province. You know, they are attacking the people who are doing the excellent work in the North on mining where we are trying to get people who will be doing the needed exploration, and that we will get the people to work in the geoscience area to help the businesses do exploration in the North. But their amendment attacks those workers.

And then there's people who are going to be employed by the health boards, and in those health boards those people attacked the janitors. And I thought to myself that is the divide-and-rule strategy that I heard from the Grant Devine Tories. They divided between business versus workers, and now they were saying the workers against workers, and that is a type of practice that people don't like that, Mr. Speaker.

Those people from across right now are talking while I'm speaking, but I know that there is a concern underneath some of them when they are really checking their values out. And the values are respecting not only the people, the doctors, but also to respect the janitor who works at the health centre.

And that is a basic, critical point behind it and that is a very, very important point. The member says that it is important in a sarcastic way. I don't deal with it in a sarcastic way. I say that . . . one of those things I learned as a teacher when I was first starting out is that when you're doing work — and I saw the people who were doing janitorial work at the school, and I saw people who were doing secretarial and administrative work — they were an important part of the team in the school. That is what I knew as a teacher.

And that is what I know when you look at the health team and you look at people who make sure that our health centres are at the top level spic and span stage. And they do a lot of the things that need to be done. And it's part of the health system and the health system team. That is how we look at it, Mr. Speaker, on this side — a teamwork model, the co-operation, and the respect.

Now the other thing that I'm talking about is this. I mentioned that . . . they were getting quite fidgety when I mentioned that they were going away from their traditional values. And it's true. I saw that in the big debate with the Reform when they kicked out Preston Manning and they brought in a new glitzy guy in a swimsuit. And you know that they said they were going away from their values. And a lot of people saw that, and

you see that being talked about in the rural areas. And I think that those types of things are very important when we talk about Saskatchewan values, Saskatchewan pride, and Saskatchewan respect.

So on the latter point, I would say that I would deal with the question on Aboriginal people, on First Nations and Metis people in this province. And for me, when I was in opposition I saw the neglect in the North and the neglect in regards to the previous governments because they played more or less a conflictual role. And they always talked about the negative things. And in that sense, they were always saying the negative stuff about Aboriginal people.

They never talked about those people that took an education, you know, that came through Saskatchewan Indian Federated College, that came through Gabriel Dumont Institute. You know the pride that you have in regards to people getting an education and putting good work out there as they pass in regards to the famous different types of graduations that they've been through.

And you see that very few times they will talk about that. Very few times they will talk about, for example, the success story on Lac La Ronge Indian Band and over \$50 million worth of contracts on their businesses. You know the fact that indeed they pay a lot of corporate tax, that they pay a lot of income tax. You will never hear them say that. They will hide around and talk about the negative stuff on welfare, the negative stuff on this and that.

But one of the things they forget, Mr. Speaker, is that a lot of the people in this province have taken a leadership role in getting an education and Aboriginal people are also playing a key role in that.

And as well, Mr. Speaker, I would say this on that whole issue, that in regards to Aboriginal people and the economic development dimension, there is always an attack also on the Crown corporations. And they attack our Crown corporations all the time.

And one of the things that I did notice on the Crown corporations is this: that we have the best rates in regards to the Crowns anywhere in Canada. I was looking at even the SGI (Saskatchewan Government Insurance) rates just before supper and there were places in Canada where the SGI rates for the youth — you know these people talk about the youth — there were over \$5,000, \$3,000, \$2,000, where our rates were at 5 to \$800 in SGI. And yet they will say privatize those Crowns.

And I will tell you when you look at those rates, and I saw even the rates on SaskPower as my fellow seatmate was talking about the other day, ours was a little over \$108 and theirs in Alberta was \$150 — a \$150. Yes. There was an outrageous response over there.

So I would say this on the question of Aboriginal people and the Crowns, I would say that I was very pleased with the Crowns and their co-operation and their partnership with Aboriginal people. Because when I looked at the issue of SaskTel when we first come into as government there was about 30 per cent of First Nations homes that were hooked up

on SaskTel. When we examined it there was old, worn-out lines that were in. There were insufficient lines, etc. We put in an extra 25 million, SaskTel did, and now over 60 per cent of First Nations are hooked up across this province — double, over 60 per cent. It used to be in Grant Devine era 30 per cent. In about a 10-year period we have doubled the number of people that were connected on in regards with SaskTel.

The other thing too is that I notice although in the '80s Grant Devine had put in about \$300 million on SaskEnergy and the development of lines, natural gas lines throughout the province, when I examined the record there was only 6 First Nations reserves that were hooked up during that era. In the past 10 years we have improved our partnerships. We are now over 50 and even going up into the North country with Montreal Lake, and to me that is progress.

So when I looked at it in regards to the issue, I might say that as people are listening in on treaty land entitlement, and I looked at the whole history of treaty land entitlement and land issues in this province, I recognize the importance of Dominion lands policies in the 1930s when Saskatchewan became a province. And when I looked at those facts and figures, Mr. Speaker, the tremendous policies in the agricultural area provided 31 million acres of land for free homesteads and about 6 million . . . about 5 million acres of land in regards to paid homesteads. So there was 31 million acres of land on free homesteads in 1930 during the natural resources transfer agreement.

And during that time the railroads had gotten about over 15 million acres of land in this province. And when I looked at that history, I also recognize that the schools, when they talked about the politics of tax policy and the school loss in there, there was 4 million acres in regards to what the schools got.

But how much did the First Nations get in that regard? Just over 1 million acres of land. Now we're restoring the fairness. We're doing the issue on treaty land entitlement. Out of the 550 million over a 12-year period, the province of Saskatchewan's share will be 200 million. Again that is true partnership and that is respect and that is what I mean when we do not only listening to people and connecting to people but taking action with people.

In regards to that, I would say that with our new . . . we have a new strategy in regards to Metis people and off-reserve First Nations people particularly living in cities and smaller towns and so on, because many times the federal obligation occurs on reserve. There's definitely problems there in regards to the funding mechanisms but improvements have been made. But I would say this, that we are moving forward with a new plan, about \$10 million in this budget and that I'm very pleased to see that happening in the different areas in regards to health, education, roads, and so on.

So when I looked at it, Mr. Speaker, I was very, very pleased with this historic budget. It was a budget that indeed provided a connection to the people. It provided a sense of pride and respect among peoples. We saw action being taken by this government in regards to that connection and that which I am very proud.

(19:15)

On the idea of good communications, I will say a few words in regards to Cree so that our elders who are out there listening right now, in regards to the people who are in bed, in regards to the nursing areas, the elders, then I know that a lot of people who are listening in who are sick in bed are in our health centres can be listening in and understanding what is going on. So now I will switch off and do a summation in Cree, Mr. Speaker.

(The hon. member spoke for a time in Cree.)

So I guess, Mr. Speaker, in regards to the budget, again I am very proud of this budget. I am proud with the listening. I am proud with the connection we have made in regards to the people of this province — their wishes and their dreams and their calls for action.

That indeed we have seen the nightmares of the Tory past and the nightmare of the Sask Party. Although they changed their name, but they haven't changed their game — as one of my members says — that indeed it's the same old story.

All they would say is cut taxes and spend more money — no sustainability. But for us, we have had eight straight balanced budgets.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Goulet: — We have record support in Education and Health. We have roads, close to a billion dollars over the next three years . . . 33 per cent increase in Agriculture, 95 million. This is commitment and action by the coalition government. This is commitment and action for the future. As we're hitting this new century, it makes me very proud that indeed I stand here in support of the 2001 budget and in opposition to the Sask Party's doom and gloom and their attack on the working people in this province.

So with that, I close my remarks and will continue to work with a fantastic team in the coalition government, who is proud of the people of the province and who is proud of this province.

So with that, thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Bakken: — Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak on behalf of the constituents of Weyburn-Big Muddy. The people of Weyburn-Big Muddy are a proud, hard-working people who have contributed much to their communities and to this province.

Our area has been blessed with rich farmland, good grazing land, and abundant oil fields. Mr. Speaker, farming is the mainstay of our area, and the people directly and indirectly involved with farming have for some time now been facing some very tough times. Today, Mr. Speaker, many are struggling to stay on the farm; struggling because of circumstances, many of which are beyond their control.

On the first day of this spring session, Saskatchewan Party proposed sending all 58 MLAs (Member of the Legislative Assembly) to Ottawa. We did this, Mr. Speaker, because we

believe it is time that we make known to Canada, all of the people in Canada and to the Government of Canada, the seriousness of the crisis in agriculture. Because this crisis is not just about farmers and their families, this crisis has and will continue to impact all of Saskatchewan.

The agriculture sector is of vital importance to Saskatchewan's entire economy. I have talked to many businesses in and around Weyburn and the hurt is being felt everywhere. In Weyburn we know when it is seeding or harvest time because the town is dead. So it is very clear that we all need and depend on a vibrant agriculture economy — both farmers and businesses alike.

Mr. Speaker, an example of how business depends on agriculture is Bengough, which is located in the southwest part of my constituency. Over the last year, Bengough has lost four businesses. And with these businesses go direct jobs, children in schools, jobs in the service sector, and a loss of the tax base.

Many towns in my constituency, Mr. Speaker, are but a shell of what they used to be. And many of the people have been left struggling — struggling to make a living, struggling to keep a sense of community. They're struggling to keep their community centres open, their towns, their halls, their rinks. Every time we lose another farm family we are threatened with losing businesses that service these farm families and we are threatened with losing more schools and more health facilities and with these losses we also lose teachers, nurses, and the list goes on.

Mr. Serby says he supports small farms . . . oh, Minister of Agriculture, says he supports small farms. He should ask the farmers on these farms if they think the policies of this government support them.

Mr. Speaker, this government has had a plan over the last few years, but sad to say their plan has been to deliberately devastate rural Saskatchewan. And now the NDP are telling us that they realize there is a problem in the agriculture sector. And their solution — write a letter to Ottawa. This has failed before and it will surely fail again.

Or in the budget, talk of the crop cover protection program, which is an insult to all farmers. Or telling the farmers to haul their grain in the winter. Or the AIDA program which was designed to fail. And this government's continual support of the Canadian Wheat Board which has done nothing but devastate the farmers in my area and throughout Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Bakken: — Mr. Speaker, the NDP long ago lost the trust of farm families because they turned their backs on rural Saskatchewan when they tore up GRIP (gross revenue insurance program) in 1992. Since then we've heard nothing but empty promises, and in this year's budget there is not even a mention of a long-term safety net program.

Mr. Speaker, there is devastation, discouragement, and despair in many farming communities because farmers realize that this government has no plan, they have no vision, and they have failed to offer them any hope or opportunity.

Mr. Speaker, we have very few young farmers left in rural Saskatchewan, many are getting older, many wanting to sell out or pass their farms to their sons. Many of these farmers are near retirement and are using up their life savings to keep the farm afloat, and there are many heartbreaking stories of a lifetime of work and savings now gone.

Our farmers have diversified, worked off the farm, their wives have worked off the farm, and they still can't make it. This budget does nothing to address the need for immediate help for farmers and spring seeding is just weeks away. It is very clear that agriculture is not a priority of this government.

Mr. Speaker, we on this side of the House believe in farmers and we will continue to recognize them and their vital importance to the economy of Saskatchewan and we will continue to fight for farmers and their well-being.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Bakken: — Mr. Speaker, farming is the backbone of Saskatchewan and we were once proud to be called the breadbasket of the world. It is time this government made agriculture a priority and gave agriculture back the respect it deserves.

Mr. Speaker, the people of Weyburn-Big Muddy are industrious people who believe in hard work, who believe in helping their neighbours and friends. They will go the extra mile to make their communities successful. But we have a government who for 10 years has set about to systematically tear apart rural Saskatchewan.

We have watched this government destroy what our grandparents and parents spent a century building — building the railroad, elevators, schools, hospitals, highways, farms, and businesses. And then they built churches, rinks, fairgrounds, town halls, community centres. A proud people; proud of their accomplishments and their communities. The people in rural Saskatchewan are now losing or have lost many of the things they spent a lifetime building.

And yet, Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance declared over and over again in his speech when he was delivering the budget that this is progress. Let's take a look at the progress NDP-style.

Mr. Speaker, we have lost schools and yet do the people pay less education tax? No, they pay more, and yet their children spend long hours on the bus to go to some other community. And when this happens a little bit more of their community dies. How is this progress?

Mr. Speaker, we have lost hospitals. Premier Calvert was one of the architects of the health care disaster that closed 52 hospitals and forced the closure of the Plains hospital that serviced all of southern Saskatchewan. In my constituency we now have only one facility that provides acute care, that is Weyburn where we fluctuate between 30 and 50 beds.

In other towns we have health centres. How are we to keep doctors in small towns if they cannot even provide service to their patients? Mr. Speaker, in Radville we have two great doctors. People come from all over to see them and what a great

asset for Radville and area. It allows seniors to have a sense of security and enables them to stay in their community knowing they have a doctor when they need one. Doctors in these small towns also take the weight off of Regina hospitals.

(19:30)

The doctors in Radville would like to have up to five more beds — acute-care beds — so that they can keep their patients in Radville. But no, this is not allowed under the NDP's wellness model. In these centres we can only have observation beds, palliative-care beds, or respite-beds. Many of these seniors are moved from bed to bed because their respite beds can only be kept for a month and then they have to move on. This has caused great hardship for many seniors and their families and is completely devoid of any common sense . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. Order.

Ms. Bakken: — Mr. Speaker, Dr. Oberholzer of Radville has told me he could open five acute care beds with no additional staffing, but no one will give him approval. So the people of Radville and area must go elsewhere. Is this the idea of NDP rural revitalization? Is their idea of progress?

In the Minton-Gladmar area it makes sense to go to Plentywood to access health care, and many do, but they have to pay the bills themselves. Mr. Speaker, the people are only asking to be reimbursed for the same dollar amount it would cost in Saskatchewan for the same service. At a time when we have a shortage of doctors and a shortage of hospital beds, this too would help take the weight off of our overtaxed health system.

Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Health refuses to even look at this as an alternative. Mr. Speaker, the people of southern Saskatchewan will never forget how this government has devastated health care, and they will never forget who was one of the masterminds behind it.

Mr. Speaker, people have been promised for years that they would have 911 service; yet it still is not provided province-wide. The latest news release from this government on February 26 of this year, when talking about 911 states . . . upon full implementation. No deadline given as to when this will happen.

Mr. Speaker, in the Big Muddy, if you dial 911, guess who answers? The sheriff's office in Scobey, Montana. Then they call the US (United States) customs. Then they call the Canadian customs. Then they call central dispatch in Saskatchewan. Then they call the local ambulance. How is this time sensitive? Mr. Speaker, 911 is about emergencies. How is this progress?

Mr. Speaker, people in Saskatchewan have been promised for years that cell service would be province-wide. In many parts of my constituency there is still not reliable cell service. And in Big Beaver and area when you use your cell phone, guess who answers? Sage Brush Cellular in Glasgow, Montana. This is cell service NDP-style.

Mr. Speaker, it is bad enough that many residents in my constituency do not have cell service. But, Mr. Speaker, in at

least two of these small towns — Viceroy and Kayville — SaskTel has now removed their public pay phones. SaskTel says that it costs too much to keep pay phones in these towns. And, Mr. Speaker, in Kayville the local people have disconnected the phone in their community centre and in the rink because they cannot afford the high rental imposed on them by this government. SaskTel has removed the pay phone. They have taken out their other phones, so they have no access to a public phone in their town. It means in an emergency you must knock on the door of a private home. A community without a public phone, Mr. Speaker, what have we come to? In this world of revitalization, is this progress?

And now the NDP are promising enhanced Internet services to rural communities across the province. Individuals wanting to access Internet in rural Saskatchewan have to pay up to \$700 for a second line, and businesses \$5,000 or more just because they are located outside of a town or the city limits. For many, this is cost-prohibitive.

Mr. Speaker, the NDP promised 911 to everyone in the province, they promised cell service to everyone in the province; they have failed to deliver. Now they are promising Internet service to everyone. Will this be yet another broken promise? Mr. Speaker, this shows why the people of Saskatchewan have lost all trust in this government.

Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan has lost its highway system. The highways have been left to crumble, to become a maze of potholes, loose pavement, gravel shoulders, in many areas unsafe even to drive on. Highways are the lifeline in Saskatchewan for school buses, ambulances, transporting grain, and the economic well-being of all. We have had 10 years of neglect by this government. Last year the NDP's highway program was to convert highways to gravel. The people of Weyburn-Big Muddy said no, this is not acceptable, and they as well as others in Saskatchewan came up with a plan and fixed their own highways.

Mr. Speaker, the NDP's latest plan: build a parallel grid road to the highways and leave the existing highways full of potholes. How does this make sense? Is this rural revitalization, and how is this progress?

The people of Saskatchewan have lost many things. Communities have been split apart; people now go in all directions to access services. And now, Mr. Speaker, residents of Saskatchewan are afraid they will lose their locally owned and run ambulance services.

I'd like to read parts of a letter that Dr. Oberholzer of Radville wrote to the Minister of Health expressing his concern over the recommendations in the EMS (emergency medical services) report. I believe he speaks for many people in Saskatchewan. He, as well as many others, know the system that we have now is working well. They do not want changes imposed on them. They remember all too well when health reform was forced on them. This time they are on their guard.

And I'd like to quote from the doctor's letter from Radville. The letter reads:

It is with fear and amazement that I write this letter to you

after reading the proposed changes to the current ambulance system. We now rely on an efficient and reliable ambulance and crews. Transfers, emergencies, and help were available within minutes without exception. Now your department proposes to take the service away from the community. This community which has paid for this ambulance with fundraisers like rodeos, rallies, and a variety of community events for years, a service which made them proud and provided a feeling of safety in a medical system that is perceived to be on the verge of collapse.

And the letter continues:

For the statistical purposes you have used a current road map of southern Saskatchewan and based your response time on actual distances to travel. When was the last time you travelled the road between Radville and Regina? If you may be so fortunate you will realize that the actual distance travelled through and around the potholes does not fit the ideal you used in the statistical outline.

Try the journey of picking up a patient on a farm with a driver or crew that does not know exactly where the turnoff or grid road should be, or does not know who to phone to find out at which farmhouse the accident occurred. Add a little bit of snow to this mixture and monitor response time again. These variables do not appear in your document.

We need to remind you that Radville Marian Health Centre is only a 24-hour emergency centre in our region, and with your department's previous cost-cutting incentives we are limited to only three beds. That is three beds per 2,000 patients — one acute bed, one observation bed, and one palliative bed. We need not remind you that some developing countries have better statistics than this. So when we need to transfer a patient we need to do it on an emergent basis. There is simply nowhere to go with some patients.

We certainly get the idea that your proposition is purely to save money as it will do only harm to the people relying on this ambulance service. This community has endured more than their share of health provision cutbacks. We try to deal with shortages in bureaucracy on a daily basis while trying to provide the accepted standard of health care. Why impose another burden on the community? Why try to fix something that is not broken?

And this is signed by Dr. Werner Oberholzer of Radville.

Mr. Speaker, I believe the letter speaks for itself and clearly shows the frustration being felt throughout this province. In the budget the government states revitalizing rural Saskatchewan will be a key focus for the government in the months and years ahead. This government has spent the last 10 years tearing Saskatchewan apart.

Mr. Speaker, if any one of my colleagues on the other side of the House think they can strip rural Saskatchewan of their well-being, that the province can remain strong, they are sadly mistaken. In Saskatchewan we need each other. We need rural and urban. We need to work together for the betterment of all.

And now, Mr. Speaker, they want us to believe that they care and they have a plan. Well the people of this province have lost trust in the empty promises of this government. Look at the promises made in last year's budget which were never kept.

They promised to create jobs but Saskatchewan actually lost 13,000 jobs. They promised to reduce high input costs facing farmers and implement a long-term safety net program. But, Mr. Speaker, it never happened. They promised more health care providers. They promised to cut waiting lists, to have 15-minute access to emergency care, and improved access to health services no matter where you lived.

Mr. Speaker, we all know these promises have not been kept. Just ask the people whose lives have been on hold because of this government's mismanagement of the health care system. This government has no plan to fix the problems in the workplace, no plan to hire health care workers or doctors. Their solution — throw more money at the system. This has not worked in the past and it will not work now.

Mr. Speaker, the NDP even refuse to admit the health system is broken. They get up in this House, day after day, and tell the people of Saskatchewan about how good our health care system is.

Well, Mr. Speaker, this government is not fooling anyone. The health care system is broken. We have emergency wards where day after day people are lined up. In a Saskatoon hospital, the hallways in emergency have become a new ward. The beds in the halls have numbers above them. This new ward is called stretcher alley.

Mr. Speaker, there are not enough beds on wards, or adequate staffing levels, and so patients are held in emergency. Doctors are operating in the middle of the night so that . . . because this is the only time available to them. Patients waiting days for surgery that should have been considered emergencies, and as they wait they become more critical. We have the longest waiting lists in Canada for surgery and tests. Mr. Speaker, doctors are frustrated; nurses are stressed; patients lives are in jeopardy.

Mr. Speaker, how is this progress? I could, as well as all MLAs on this side of the House, go on for hours about health care issues in our constituencies. But the pain and the hurt, the plight of Saskatchewan people, has fallen on deaf ears.

Mr. Speaker, this budget shows clearly that this government has lost touch with the people. They are sitting on \$500 million from windfall oil and gas revenues, yet are there any new tax cuts — no. No cuts to the PST (provincial sales tax). No cuts to gas tax. No cuts to property tax. No new cuts to income tax. Absolutely no new tax relief for Saskatchewan families. And the income tax reductions from last year and this year have been wiped out. Last year by an expanded PST base and this year by rate increases in SaskEnergy, SaskPower, and SaskTel.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to read a letter written to me by a constituent of Weyburn-Big Muddy, a small-business owner, which expresses how most people in Saskatchewan feel about this government and their gouging of the people. And the letter reads:

How does the NDP government justify a rate increase in SaskTel, SaskEnergy, and now SaskPower? In my business in farming industry, we would love to increase our income every time an increase comes along. When we get an increase, we have to cut within our operation or find other ways to make money to pay the added expense. In our area we have a rough enough time making it without more expense from our government. It is truly a big rip-off and makes us really mad at what is going on. I think the government Crown corporation should be cutting within their own operation instead of passing it on to the users or taxpayers.

End of letter.

Mr. Speaker, this government believes in bigger government, while the families in Saskatchewan struggle to make ends meet. This government unbelievably has added 550 new government employees

An Hon. Member: — 570.

Ms. Bakken: — 570; it's going up daily. The cost of this is \$500 million, Mr. Speaker, yet there is not a dime for municipalities in revenue-sharing grants. This will result in more downloading and another increase in property tax.

The government grows and the taxpayer just keeps on paying. Mr. Speaker, no thought to families, business, or farmers, or a recognition of the struggle with continued increased costs imposed on them by this government.

Mr. Speaker, the last thing the people in Saskatchewan want or need is bigger government, but that is exactly what they are getting from this administration. People in Saskatchewan love their province and they want to stay here, to raise their families here, to own farms and businesses. They were looking to this government and this budget to give them a reason to stay, to give them opportunity, and to give them hope. They were looking for a plan and a vision.

Mr. Speaker, this budget has failed the people of Weyburn-Big Muddy. This budget has failed the people of Saskatchewan and so, Mr. Speaker, I will be supporting the amendment and I will not support the budget.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Yates: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to take this opportunity to thank you in your election to Speaker, Mr. Speaker. I haven't had an opportunity to be on my feet since you've been elected Speaker, and I'd like at this time to congratulate you and thank you for the wonderful job that you're doing.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Yates: — I'd also like to take the opportunity to thank the Deputy Speaker, the member from Regina Sherwood; he isn't here at the moment but he also is doing a wonderful job as Deputy Speaker. And I'd also like to take a minute or two to . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order, order! I would just remind the

member that he should not be referring to the presence or absence of members in the Assembly.

(19:45)

Mr. Yates: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I forgot the member doesn't sit beside me any longer.

Mr. Speaker, I'd also like to congratulate the new Premier on his election and the opportunity that it brings to and for the people of this province. As well, my seatmate, the member from Regina Elphinstone, who was newly elected just a few weeks ago is making wonderful contributions to this Assembly.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Yates: — Now, Mr. Speaker, I want to start by outlining what the government was trying to do in this budget. Mr. Speaker, under the leadership of a new Premier, the government will move an exciting new direction that was stated in the budget speech. Now, Mr. Speaker, that's exactly what we're doing. The budget was designed to look to the future, to present hope and opportunity for the people of Saskatchewan in the upcoming years.

Mr. Speaker, the people on this side of the Assembly believe Saskatchewan is a great place to live, and every single day you hear us talk about the great things the people of this province do.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the members opposite may not think this is such a great place to live. We hear every day the doom and gloom as they put down our province — unfortunate for them, unfortunate for the province. But, Mr. Speaker, they may yet catch on that this is a vibrant economy, a vibrant province in which we want to move ahead.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, if you looked in the papers over the weekend, there was a number of very, very interesting things in the papers, Mr. Speaker. It talks about . . . Out of the *Macklin Mirror* — not exactly one of the ridings that we represent — but it says, “new medical equipment benefit patients,” Mr. Speaker.

It goes on in Regina *Leader-Post*, Mr. Speaker, to talk . . . Bruce Johnstone — not exactly a friend of this government — goes on to talk about that:

. . . there's a big difference between this spending spree and the orgy of overspending in 1980s that made drunken sailors look like paragons of fiscal rectitude.

Instead of Jacuzzis and decks, the (new Premier's) government is lavishing more money on such frivolities as community schools, early childhood (intervention) programs to reduce fetal alcohol syndrome, highways . . . farmers . . . and school operating grants . . .

Mr. Speaker, not the spending of the 1980s.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to go on to talk about provincial initiative. “Good first step,” the FSIN (Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations) says. The people of this province are looking and

judging the budget favourably, Mr. Speaker.

And last but not least, Mr. Speaker, Bruce Johnstone, again, *The Leader-Post*: “Budget applauded by business.” Mr. Speaker, I don't know, I keep hearing how bad everything is from the members opposite, yet when those people who judge our budget from the outside — right in the newspapers, Mr. Speaker — they talk very favourably.

Mr. Speaker, I want to talk a little bit about what's in this budget. I'm going to start with the fair, simple tax system that was put in by this government a year ago, Mr. Speaker, and continues each and every year up until 2004, Mr. Speaker. There are income tax cuts. Just as an example, Mr. Speaker, in 2001 Saskatchewan people will pay 317 million less in provincial income tax than they did prior to tax reform, Mr. Speaker — \$317 million and they're saying nothing. Mr. Speaker, something's wrong here. I don't know. They just don't add up. They don't get it. They don't understand.

Mr. Speaker, our tax system is both competitive and fair. In 1993 the average Saskatchewan family had the second highest personal income taxes in Canada. In 2001 they're the fourth lowest, Mr. Speaker. And our top marginal tax rate is now the second lowest in Canada, Mr. Speaker. I don't know what these members opposite are reading. Obviously they don't read the budget. They don't understand the budget. I don't know, we have to help them, Mr. Speaker, and we're trying.

Mr. Speaker, on January 1 of this year we eliminated the flat tax, the high income surtax, and the debt reduction surtax, Mr. Speaker. The members opposite just need to go to their own tax returns last year and look what they paid on those taxes, Mr. Speaker. It's not that difficult, even they can do it. Their accountants may fill the forms out for them if they have difficulty understanding them but they can go and see how much they paid on those three taxes, Mr. Speaker, and know what they stand to save next year, Mr. Speaker. I don't know, it's not that difficult.

Well, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker, this budget continues to increase provincial tax credits. They recognize greater tax credits for post-secondary costs. Persons with disabilities and caregivers, Mr. Speaker, continue to get enhanced benefits this budget year. As well as that, Mr. Speaker, our Saskatchewan tax credits for CPP (Canada Pension Plan) and EI (employment insurance) contributions, tuition fees, charitable gifts, student loans will match those provided by the federal government every year, Mr. Speaker. And they'll be indexed in our tax system, Mr. Speaker, they'll be indexed.

Beginning in 2001, Mr. Speaker, provincial income tax credit amounts for senior persons with disabilities and caregivers and medical expenses will be fully indexed to inflation, Mr. Speaker. During this fiscal year as well, Mr. Speaker, we're adding to the tax credits. Effective January 1, 2002, we will increase the child tax credit from \$1,500 to \$2,000, Mr. Speaker, and they say there's nothing in it for families. I don't know. Mr. Speaker, pretty simple document — I don't know why they don't understand it.

We'll increase the senior tax credit from \$500 to \$750, Mr. Speaker — another increase, more money in people's pockets.

They don't seem to get it.

Mr. Speaker, it's also very, very important to note that Saskatchewan is the only province that has a universal child tax credit program.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Yates: — The only province in all of Canada, Mr. Speaker. Yet we live in the land of gloom and doom in their mind, Mr. Speaker. There seems to be problems.

Mr. Speaker, I don't know what has happened to the members opposite, but in this year we continued tax cuts. We announced effective July 1, 2001, that small-business corporate income tax rate will be cut from 8 to 6 per cent. Mr. Speaker, that's a 25 per cent reduction. Yet they say nothing.

Effective January 1, 2002, the amount of income eligible to be taxed at the small-business rate will rise from \$200,000 to \$300,000. We represent the same types of people. Your constituents get that benefit, just like mine do.

And on top of that, Mr. Speaker, to deal with some of the problems we have in this province in dealing with professionals and retention of professionals, from now on all Saskatchewan-regulated professionals will be allowed to incorporate their practices, Mr. Speaker. Another move to help us retain those high-paid professionals that we need in this province to continue to prosper.

We listen and we respond, Mr. Speaker. I don't know about the members opposite.

And I think the members opposite are learning something here. They're sitting and they're listening, at least some of them. That's good. That is very good, Mr. Speaker.

Last year our province's economy was more diversified than ever in our history, Mr. Speaker, and it grew by 3.4 per cent, 3.4 per cent, Mr. Speaker.

Saskatchewan will continue to grow its economy, despite world pressures to the contrary, Mr. Speaker. And we'll have a range of about 2 per cent over the next two years, due largely to the innovation of the people in our province, Mr. Speaker, and their hard work and effort.

Mr. Speaker, I want to talk a little bit about being fiscally responsible. This government has delivered its eighth consecutive balanced budget. Eight balanced budgets in a row. That's far, far different than the 1980s. The 1980s were a pattern that put us in massive debt, Mr. Speaker. This government has had to deal with that debt, and they're doing it, Mr. Speaker.

And, Mr. Speaker, in a year like this, when we have unusually high resource revenues, we didn't go on a spending spree. No, Mr. Speaker. Fiscal responsibility made us consider the future, consider our children's future, Mr. Speaker, and we put aside \$775 million to deal with the instability and resource revenues, Mr. Speaker.

You can either have a little bit of a savings account or you can spend it all. The members opposite will spend it all. Not us, Mr. Speaker . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . That's true. The pattern of the past was they wouldn't only spend 775 million, Mr. Speaker. They would have went in debt.

Mr. Speaker, we on this side of the House don't believe in that. Mr. Speaker, this government put substantial amounts of money into health care this year. Mr. Speaker, we put \$229.5 million more in health care this year than last. That's an increase of 11.6 per cent, Mr. Speaker — 11.6 per cent. Mr. Speaker, that's an investment in our future, in our children, and in our families.

Mr. Speaker, that included a 22 per cent increase for the Saskatchewan Cancer Agency. The purchase of a second air ambulance to help people in rural Saskatchewan get to much needed care in our urban centres of Regina and Saskatoon. And they refer to that as simply throwing away money, Mr. Speaker. Trying to do things to help people of rural Saskatchewan reach our primary health care centres in Regina and Saskatoon, Mr. Speaker.

They do not want to spend that money, Mr. Speaker. I don't know who they represent. Mr. Speaker, this government believes in spending money for the people and on the people of Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker.

Now we made an additional commitment of \$95 million for the federal/provincial farm income program that works for producers. We put \$95 million into a program because, Mr. Speaker, it may not have been the perfect program, we may not have liked all aspects of the program but, Mr. Speaker, we are not going to leave our farmers in the lurch. This government is going to do what we can within our fiscal capacity to help farmers. We're not going to leave people in the lurch.

Mr. Speaker, they ask when did we change our mind. I tell you, we were trying to negotiate a better deal for our farmers and guess who sold us out not once but for the second time in two consecutive years — the members opposite, Mr. Speaker. I don't know.

Mr. Speaker, we put a 35.5 per cent increase into agriculture this year. An unprecedented increase, Mr. Speaker. But the members opposite they find little, little did they look forward to in our budget.

Mr. Speaker, this is a budget for the people and about the people. It is a budget that looks to the future needs of people. We, as a government, are working to reduce poverty and to help those most vulnerable in our society, Mr. Speaker. Things that they don't care about over there, Mr. Speaker, they simply don't care. We're trying to ensure that all the people in Saskatchewan have a high quality of life, Mr. Speaker, not just those who are rich and well off.

Mr. Speaker, our vision is what is guiding us in our battle to reduce poverty. Our innovative strategy to reduce poverty has reduced the number of people on social assistance in each of the last six years, Mr. Speaker — fewer people on social assistance each of the last six years. Now the members opposite, they seem not to care about those things, Mr. Speaker, and we were the only province to reduce the incidence of child hunger. Mr.

Speaker, we're very proud of helping those most vulnerable in our society — our children.

And, Mr. Speaker, they seem not to care. They seem hard-hearted about some of those things. They seem to care more about cutting taxes than helping people. They seem to think that cutting taxes, of course, puts money in some people's pockets, but there's a good portion of our society, Mr. Speaker, that don't, don't pay taxes and those are the most vulnerable in our society. And that is why you have to increase programs to deal with poverty, Mr. Speaker. Dealing with poverty is very, very important.

This budget is not about limiting future obligations. It's about creating future opportunities, Mr. Speaker. Things that they do not share . . . a shared vision with us, Mr. Speaker. We want all our citizens to enjoy a high quality of life. We want all our young people to build and live in a province of growth and prosperity. It's about providing quality services to all the people of our province, Mr. Speaker. Now, Mr. Speaker, I don't know if they're sleeping over there or what, but I hope they're learning something.

Mr. Speaker, I want to talk a little bit about how our province is connecting to the future, Mr. Speaker. We have three key strategic investments in the future, Mr. Speaker, in education, in transportation, and in technology, Mr. Speaker. Now the members opposite, of course they think you can build roads without having more employees, Mr. Speaker. I don't know how they think it can be done but if you want to spend money on transportation, Mr. Speaker, somebody has to build the roads. There has to be more people to do the work. If you're going to do more work, you have to have more people.

(20:00)

Now the members opposite, you know, they don't seem to catch on to that. If you want to have better education, spend more money on education. You want to increase benefits for disabled children in schools, Mr. Speaker, that requires resources; it requires people to deliver those benefits, Mr. Speaker. It's an investment in our children, Mr. Speaker.

And, Mr. Speaker, technology, they may not understand the benefits of technology yet, Mr. Speaker, but they will learn. Technology might go right over their head right now, Mr. Speaker, but we hope they will learn.

We are going to put CommunityNet in, Mr. Speaker. By the spring of next year, 30 per cent of Saskatchewan schools will be hooked up to CommunityNet, Mr. Speaker. Virtually all schools will have the Internet access by 2005, Mr. Speaker. CommunityNet will provide students, no matter where they are located, with instant access to the world of learning, Mr. Speaker. To schools, to schools, we care about children in school. CommunityNet helps them access information, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, we want to give CommunityNet to the children in all the schools in rural Saskatchewan. That's our goal, Mr. Speaker. We are spending \$2 million per year for the next three years to improve our connections to rural Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker. Three million in each of the next three years for

schools to develop on-line learning resources, Mr. Speaker. All about our children, it's all about our children learning and being better prepared to face the world of the future, Mr. Speaker.

And Mr. Speaker, we have put an historic amount, \$950 million into Highways and Transportation over the next three years. That includes \$312 million this year, Mr. Speaker, 25 per cent higher than last year. And Mr. Speaker, last year member after member from the opposition stood up and talked about our poor highways. Well this year, Mr. Speaker, they're going to have to stand up and complain about the amount of construction on the highways and how it takes them a little longer to get home, Mr. Speaker. Well we can't make them happy, but we're trying, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, primary pavements will be upgraded to a 20-year life cycle, Mr. Speaker, a 20-year life cycle, Mr. Speaker. Pavements to a 25-year life cycle for regional pavements, Mr. Speaker, 25-year life cycle. Well the members opposite wanted us to do something in Highways, Mr. Speaker, and we're doing it. But what did they do? They still complain it's not enough. It's not the way they wanted it. Mr. Speaker, it's very difficult to please them at all.

Mr. Speaker, and this government is committed to twinning the No. 1 Highway, west of Gull Lake, by the year 2004, Mr. Speaker. Four years ahead of schedule, Mr. Speaker, we're going to have No. 1 West twinned, Mr. Speaker.

And over the next three years, Mr. Speaker, 800 kilometres of the province's thin membrane surface will be upgraded to handle heavier traffic, Mr. Speaker. That's a significant amount of highway rebuilt and upgraded, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I want to talk a little bit about education. Education, one of the most important foundations of any government, economy, or our future, Mr. Speaker. We are going to spend more than \$1.1 billion on education, Mr. Speaker.

Now I want to make a little comparison that the members opposite should be able to relate to because many of them helped create the problem that we had to face as a government in 1991. But in 1993-94 we spent \$865 million on education, Mr. Speaker. The same year, interest on the debt was our second highest expenditure — \$873 million, Mr. Speaker. Our debt was higher than our ability to pay for education, Mr. Speaker, in 1993-94.

Today, this year, Mr. Speaker, we will be able to spend twice as much on education as we do on the public debt, Mr. Speaker. A phenomenal change in eight years. It shows what eight years of good government can do, Mr. Speaker, compared to nine years of very poor government . . . (inaudible) . . . Mr. Speaker, K to 12 education will receive a 9.9 per cent budget increase. The largest budget increase in many, many years. Foundation operating grants will increase by 16 per cent in two years, Mr. Speaker. A phenomenal increase, Mr. Speaker. The members opposite still complain it's not enough, Mr. Speaker.

On one hand the members opposite want to freeze spending, Mr. Speaker. Can you believe that? Freeze spending on key services like health care, education, highways and cut taxes. Yet

they stand everyday in the House and say those services aren't good enough, Mr. Speaker. I don't know. It just doesn't add up, Mr. Speaker.

How can you spend more and cut the available dollars to spend, Mr. Speaker? It just doesn't add up, Mr. Speaker. The only way that could happen is by running massive deficit and debt like we saw in the 1980s.

So, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker, I don't know but if it looks like a duck, walks like a duck, and quacks like a duck, to me it's a duck. So the way they want to deal with the province, Mr. Speaker, is the sorry Tories use the same old story. I don't know but it's the same as the 1980s the way they want to do math, Mr. Speaker. If it looks like a Tory, walks like a Tory, talks like a Tory, it's a Tory, Mr. Speaker. I don't know. Mr. Speaker, it all adds up.

Well, Mr. Speaker, our commitment is to more community schools to help children and their futures, Mr. Speaker. It's not to freezing education spending for five years. We're going to have 42 new community schools in this province, Mr. Speaker, 42 more community schools, Mr. Speaker. That's progress. That's caring about our children, Mr. Speaker. It's definitely not freezing education spending, Mr. Speaker.

Well, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker, the members opposite, still they're learning. The Leader of the Opposition is at least listening. He's learning. Their solution was zap; you're frozen — to education, health care.

Not ours, Mr. Speaker. We're going to put 20 per cent more for special education for disabled students this year, Mr. Speaker; 20 per cent more to help those most vulnerable in our society to do better, Mr. Speaker — things the members opposite should be happy about. In fact, in fact, business leaders are happy about it. But Mr. Speaker, they're not happy.

Mr. Speaker, I don't know. We're going to put money into provincial training programs, Mr. Speaker. There will be 25,000 more people involved in training programs this year than last year.

I don't know, Mr. Speaker, to me this is a budget that talks about progress in the future, Mr. Speaker. I don't know what they talk about.

But, Mr. Speaker, this was a budget that was built on a vision of the future, not about living in the past or complaining about what might be if we had all the money we wanted in the world, Mr. Speaker. It is a budget based in reality, founded in our province and for the people of our province, Mr. Speaker.

We are moving forward with a vision for the people of the province, Mr. Speaker, strengthened by our value that all people should benefit from our enhanced position, Mr. Speaker. We will progress by investing in education and job training, by creating a better tax system, cutting taxes for businesses, small businesses, Mr. Speaker, by preserving a public health care system, but the members opposite would just privatize, Mr. Speaker. By connecting to the information highway. By rebuilding our roads, Mr. Speaker. And by fighting poverty for the most vulnerable in our society, Mr. Speaker.

Now, Mr. Speaker, that leads me to the second part of my speech, Mr. Speaker. Now I want to talk a little bit about . . .

An Hon. Member: — The second of ten parts.

Mr. Yates: — Well, maybe 12. Maybe 12 parts to the speech.

But, Mr. Speaker, I want to talk about intercity comparisons of taxes and household charges in various cities across the province, Mr. Speaker. Now okay, Mr. Speaker, we put a nice chart in the budget for them so that they could understand it. It wouldn't be too difficult. It's simple. It gets all the explanations. We're trying to help the members opposite, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, a single person at \$25,000 total income — looking at their taxation, their living expenses and their household charges, Mr. Speaker — in the city of Vancouver the total is \$12,663 per year, Mr. Speaker. In Calgary it's 11,246; in Winnipeg it's 9,370; in Toronto it's 14,984; in Montreal it's 10,387; in Saint John it's \$10,013, Mr. Speaker; in Halifax the total cost is \$12,124, Mr. Speaker; and in St. John's, New Brunswick . . . or Newfoundland, pardon me, Mr. Speaker, it's 11,152. And what do you think it is in Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker? The lowest in all of Canada, Mr. Speaker. And the members opposite still complain about how difficult it is to live here. Mr. Speaker, it's only \$9,348 — the lowest in Canada, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I don't know, Mr. Speaker. We're trying to get them to understand this isn't such a bad province to live in, Mr. Speaker. Now we have a couple other comparisons I think we need to run through, Mr. Speaker, so they understand the whole picture.

Next we're going to talk about a family at \$50,000 total income, Mr. Speaker. In Vancouver their total taxes and living household charges are \$23,214 in Vancouver, Mr. Speaker; in Calgary, \$17,264, Mr. Speaker; in Winnipeg, \$15,323, Mr. Speaker; in Toronto, \$23,085; in Montreal, \$16,897; in St. John, \$16,040, Mr. Deputy Speaker; in Halifax, \$18,797; in Charlottetown, \$15,088; and in St. John's, \$15,463, Mr. Speaker. And what about Saskatchewan people? Well stay tuned because in Saskatchewan it is the lowest in Canada once again at \$14,526.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Yates: — Now, Mr. Speaker, if they haven't caught on to the trend yet we're going to talk about a family at \$75,000 total income. Mr. Speaker, there is a pattern forming here. They will catch on I think when we get to the sixth and seventh example. In Vancouver, Mr. Speaker — in Vancouver, Mr. Speaker, it cost \$26,005; in Calgary, \$19,642, Mr. Speaker; in Winnipeg, \$19,205, Mr. Speaker; in Toronto, \$25,714, Mr. Speaker; in . . .

An Hon. Member: — Tory government there.

Mr. Yates: — Tory government, that's part of the problem. The member opposite is very intelligent over here. In Montreal, \$23,289, Mr. Speaker; in St. John, 19,654; and Halifax, \$22,438; in Charlottetown, 18,423; and St. John's, 19,388. And in Saskatchewan what do you think it is, Mr. Speaker? Again

the lowest in Canada, Mr. Speaker, at \$17,837.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(20:15)

Mr. Yates: — Mr. Speaker, that's three examples, Saskatchewan having the absolute lowest costs, Mr. Speaker, but the members opposite talk about the doom and gloom and how bad everybody is off here. Mr. Speaker, I don't know.

Well, Mr. Speaker, it's clear that this is a budget for the people of Saskatchewan and it's clear that this government is trying very, very hard in very difficult times to meet the needs of the people of Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker. Now we didn't have easy times. This government inherited a terrific debt in the 1990s. We're able to deal with that debt and build a solid foundation, Mr. Speaker, for the future.

And through building that solid foundation for the future, Mr. Speaker, it's through that foundation and through the desire of this government that they are able to now — now start to turn the corner and provide some of those essential services with new resources that have been difficult over the last decade. First you have to get your house in order and then you can spend for the future of our province, Mr. Speaker.

Now, Mr. Speaker, because of the great work of this government, I stand very proudly to say I will not support the amendment of the members opposite and will support the budget.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am honoured to stand in my place tonight to respond to the budget speech on behalf of the good people from Kelvington-Wadena.

Before I proceed, I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate the member from Regina Sherwood and the member from PA (Prince Albert) Carlton on their respective positions as Deputy Speaker and Speaker.

At times, those of us who work here in the legislature take the Speaker's presence not only for granted but perhaps also as an annoyance at times, getting in the way of some perfectly logical arguments and discussions we have with the members opposite. At times, Mr. Speaker, I'd want to believe, were it not for untimely interventions, we may be able to convince the government members of the error of their ways.

We in opposition continue to hope that the democratic system as we know it will weave its magic in this Assembly and before long perhaps the hon. members opposite will just throw in the towel. Then we in the Saskatchewan Party will get on with the challenging and exciting task of allowing the people of this province to take hold of the vision and the opportunity that this province holds.

Mr. Speaker, I would also to congratulate the new Premier on his two elections — that of Premier and the member for

Saskatoon Riversdale. The last position was won in a fair battle on March 19, 2001. The first title, that of Premier, will be more correctly debated when the Premier calls the next election. In the meantime, we ask the Premier to give it his best shot because the people of Saskatchewan deserve that.

I also would like to welcome the new member from Regina Elphinstone. He must have been still in Utopia from his victory in the by-election when he made his maiden speech here in the Assembly. Being a senior member here gives me the right to perhaps warn the member that some of his statements have left him marked as fair game the next time he rises in the Assembly. Mr. Speaker, perhaps the member should be warned that if you want to give it, you also have to be able to take it. And I await the next round with impatient expectation.

Mr. Speaker, you may not have noticed it, but I didn't respond to the Throne Speech this year for two very important reasons. Firstly, the verbal dexterity of my very capable colleagues ably voiced my opinion of your bland and directionless conglomeration of platitudes and promises.

Secondly and more importantly to me, I spoke to constituents who asked me why I'd even want to bother. They wondered why the people of Saskatchewan were paying their elected people to stand in their place for a week to debate a nothing speech. After studying the volumes of verbiage the members opposite spouted about the speech, I'm amazed to realize that no one on the government side of the House realized what was missing in the Throne Speech. It was so obvious and you just didn't see it.

Mr. Speaker, what the people of Saskatchewan wanted to hear was a vision. They wanted to hear a plan for the future. The government was so busy looking for the trees, they just didn't see the forest. They can't or didn't see the big picture. They didn't see what . . . or tell people what was going to happen in the next five years, the next 10 years. That's what people in this province need. They need a hope and a goal and a dream, and it just wasn't there, Mr. Speaker.

Sadly, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that lack of goal, that dreamless, visionless theme, was noticeable again in the budget speech. The closest thing to a compliment about the budget was, it was a good first step but what's next? Where is the plan? Where is the direction and where is the vision of this government?

There was one underlying obvious philosophy that frightened me last Friday, and that was the addition of 570 new government positions. It clearly shows what the NDP lack in vision they're going to try and make up for in size of government. Bigger government, more bureaucracy to invade the citizens' lives here in this province. That's supposedly your answer.

Mr. Speaker, the province of Saskatchewan has approximately one million people. That's about the same number we've had for the last 50 years. I'm wondering how many people it took to run the province 50 years ago when we had the million people. In fact, Mr. Speaker, I believe we have 6,700 fewer people than we had just one year ago. So I'm wondering if anyone can give me one logical reason why we need 570 more people to govern 6,700 fewer people, keeping in mind of course there are 6,700

fewer people to pay the additional \$30 million of the wages for those extra 570 people.

I should have realized this was going to happen when the government announced their changes to the summer employment program. That employment program only allowed people who work for . . . bureaucrats to actually hire young people. That's their way of actually thinking they can grow the economy is to train people from government. Small business just does not fit in with the NDP philosophy of governing. You know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I should probably save my breath to cool my coffee rather than try to explain that recycling government wages does not grow the economy.

Mr. Speaker, before I spend the greater part of the evening telling you what I don't like about this budget, I'm going to spend a few minutes telling you about one aspect of the budget that I do applaud. The program government is continuing and perhaps improving deals with one of society's sad and grave problems — fetal alcohol syndrome and fetal alcohol effect.

As a mother and a grandmother I am saddened and appalled at the statistics on the number of children born with FAS (fetal alcohol syndrome) and FAE (fetal alcohol effects). This syndrome which does irreparable organic brain damage to an unborn child through no fault of their own is 100 per cent preventable. Mothers that consume alcohol during pregnancy are at a very high risk of bringing a child into the world with a problem that will detrimentally affect the mental growth of that child all their life; a problem that will cause their families, the community, and society heartache for that child's entire life.

Mr. Speaker, I implore all members, or Deputy Speaker, I implore all members to read a recent article written on FAS and FAE entitled, "Born on a Bottle, Drunk for Life". It is the heart-wrenching story of a mother who came to the sad realization that by drinking when she was expecting she had deprived a child of the opportunity to live a normal life. She had sentenced that child to a lifetime of disconnection with the world, a world where there is no relationship between action and consequences.

Mr. Speaker, members will know that there is really no way to diagnose FAE. We have read lately of the attempts of one of our judges to deal with the victims of FAS and it was decided that the problem had to be dealt with in this Assembly, not by the courts. It's up to each one of you in this Assembly to work towards a solution.

There is no way to tell how many children in Saskatchewan are affected by FAS or FAE, but stats say that it is probably one in a thousand. We do know that we have more than our share of babies at risk in this province. And we also know that the financial cost to society through our health, social services, justice, and education system is very, very high. Estimations run as high a \$3 million per child.

Your government has recognized the problem in the last three budgets. Nationally and internationally work is being done not only on prevention of FAS and FAE, but dealing with the children who are already battling the syndrome. The task may seem daunting but the key word in the whole issue is preventable. This is not a political issue; this is another issue

dealing with our children. Hopefully, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the money laid out in this budget will take some concrete actions, some ground-breaking steps both on the prevention side of the issue as well as the program and training side of the issue to help children with FAS and FAE.

Mr. Speaker, one of the major areas of increased spending in the budget was in education. The budget laid out plans to spend an additional \$33.7 million a year on education. That's a laudable goal indeed, especially in light of the fact that it will require \$32 million just to keep the status quo from last year.

I heard the member opposite saying a few minutes ago that there was an increase in education. I believe he said it was 9 per cent, but the book, the budget book, says it was 7.9 per cent. But the member failed to tell everyone in the Assembly that there was actually \$375 million taken out of education since 1991 by your government. And you know where that came from — the taxpayers of this province. Right on the backs of the property taxpayers of this province, we're pay . . . they paid for education, tried to backfill, and now all of a sudden you can put a few pennies in and pat yourself on the back saying life is wonderful. Well the problem laid with your government in the first place.

The SSTA (Saskatchewan School Trustees Association) has estimated that the teachers' salary increases, support staff increases, additional utility costs, transportation costs, and supply costs will leave about one and a half million dollars to begin implementing the recommendations of the role of the school; or as the Minister of Education commented, it was the first step in reversing the 40/60 split. I'm sure that the members opposite noticed that I said "or" because you can't have it both ways.

Last year the Minister of Education tried to say . . . spend the same money two and three different times. I'm saying that you either are spending the money on programming or you are reversing the 40/60 split with the same dollars. You can't do both.

Mr. Speaker, the new property reassessment will have a huge impact on education. Many school divisions won't know how the budget will affect them until they work through the assessment and the pupil enrolment. Last year there were 44 school divisions out of the 100 that received less than the 40/60 split. With the higher assessment this year, will the number of zero-grant school divisions increase? I'm not sure if your government knows the answer yet but until you start telling people that you've really helped them, find out what higher assessment is going to be doing to them.

This question will not be answered for two or three weeks until the boards have the opportunity to do the math but I'm sure by then we will be hearing from them.

The small schools grant was reduced in the budget so at first blush there was a concern about the number of schools that are in jeopardy of closing. I know that my office has had a number of calls and I'm sure yours has too. The schools in our constituencies are saying we may not be able to remain open.

But in the area of capital funding, there was not one extra dollar

allocated beyond last year's budget commitment. This is definitely sending a conflicting message to the announcement in the Throne Speech, and I'm going to quote from the Throne Speech, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Supposedly the government is renovating, expanding, and building new schools in K to 12 and post-secondary education. And supposedly they're providing additional schools in rural and urban and northern communities. But at the same time, Mr. Speaker, there isn't one extra penny put in for capital funding. I don't know how that's going to be accomplished.

At the same time, Mr. Deputy Speaker, this budget has not addressed the fact that the Minister of Education's own department has indicated we're going to be losing 30,000 students over the next eight years. There isn't one way that you can just departmentalize this government and say this is Education's problem, this is Health's problem, this is Social Services problem. It's everybody's problem. Until you start working together, we're not going to be able to solve it.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the minister again may need reminding of the importance of schools in community. In fact the Minister in charge of Rural Revitalization may want to set up a lengthy meeting with the Minister of Education to ensure that this point is driven home. We cannot close schools and at the same time revitalize the community. The school is the heart of a community, whether it's in urban Saskatchewan or rural Saskatchewan. People's lives revolve around their children, wherever their children are, and if you force the kids to move from the community, the community will die.

One of the biggest fears of school divisions across the province came from the rumour that the government was considering removing the industrial/commercial assessment from local divisions and taking the funds directly into government coffers. This, of course, would be the preliminary step towards government control of the assessment like our neighbours to the west have done. Not everything Alberta does is right, Mr. Deputy Speaker. This is for the information of the members opposite.

Removing the ability to raise money through local taxation removes local autonomy from the boards. Financial decision making at local levels, whether it's school boards or municipalities, is the most cost-effective and true value-for-money way to gather and disperse tax dollars. There is no way the government bureaucracy can collect and spend money more efficiently than a local board. They have the hands-on knowledge of the community, and they can adjust their spending to coincide with the needs of the people and the dollars available. All school boards, as well as the opposition, will be paying . . . watching for any signs of this government infringing on their right to tax — industrial, commercial, or any other category.

Mr. Speaker, the recommendations of the Role of the School Task Force set out a powerful plan for change. Most of these changes we support wholeheartedly, and I expect we'll debating the few that cause concern here in the House. In the mean time, the Minister of Education should be in his office right now setting out his arguments for getting the additional \$43 million he's going to need next year if he's going to put his money

where his mouth is, by accepting the recommendations of the Role of the School.

(2030)

Unless of course, Mr. Deputy Speaker, he's no longer Minister of Education, or minister of anything, which brings up the issue of coalition government and its status or non-status depending on your viewpoint.

Mr. Speaker, the hon. member from North Battleford, supposedly the only Liberal in the House, continues his attack on the Saskatchewan Party. Of course this may well be his part of the political aspirations to be the new Leader of the Liberal Party. But there are many of us, myself included, who are free enterprise individuals with a social conscience who take great offence to the member's acquisition . . . accusations that we are mean-spirited people.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, I would like the member for North Battleford to give me a few examples of what he considers to be mean spirited by this party. Wanting people to have a job? Wanting every able-bodied person in the province to have a well-paying job to give him a feeling of self-worth and confidence. Is that mean spirited? Is it mean spirited to believe that God created men as equals and everyone should have the luxury to explore their own goals? I challenge the member from North Battleford to give us of mean-spirited policies. Unless of course he was just spouting political rhetoric.

If that's the case, then his leader has had too much of an effect on him and he should just reach inside and find the personal strength it would take to admit that Liberals are alive and well in Saskatchewan and living within the Saskatchewan Party. Their ideas are not only heard here but they are listened to and they are in the plans for the next election and the next government.

Mr. Speaker, the people of Kelvington-Wadena are interested in hearing about the money allocated within the budget for highways. My colleague from Cypress Hills will undoubtedly go into each detail and each aspect of the department but my constituents would like to remind the minister that Kelvington-Wadena is a long way from No. 1 Highway where the twinning will be done.

We understand the importance of twinning the highway and we are horrified when we hear of the many accidents and deaths in the area. But, Mr. Speaker, we need highways as well in Kelvington-Wadena. Our many businesses and our tourist facilities require immediate improvement of the highway and in order to remain viable. It's not good enough to get individual companies to pay for their share of the highway. Some companies just can't afford it.

In the area of health care we have only one question to ask. By adding more dollars, will you just be throwing good money after bad? The member from Canora-Pelly pointed out that really there wasn't \$200 million put into the budget this year. If you look at the mid-term report there was an additional \$35 million thereabouts put into the budget over last year. So touting 200 and some million dollars is not the correct message to be sending out to the people in this province. My colleague

from Melfort-Tisdale will no doubt raise the argument that you're preparing for it this time.

In the area of agriculture and rural revitalization I'd like to remind the members opposite that if they wouldn't have made a determined effort over the last 10 years to drain the life out of rural Saskatchewan, you wouldn't have to revitalize it.

Rural areas are still receiving lip service from this government. We now have three separate departments to deal with the 26 seats the NDP no longer hold. Maybe their goal is to hire enough people to just give everyone out there a job, so they think they're . . .

Mr. Speaker, on this side of the House, we know that the provincial coffers cannot compete against the coffers of the United States and Europe when it comes to the agricultural crisis. We know that long-term subsidies are not the answer. The answer lies within the power of the provincial government to raise the level of the bar and to bring the issue to such a point of importance that the federal government will take notice.

Former premier, Mr. Romanow, said when he was in opposition that the true measuring stick of a premier was that if he could go to Ottawa and bring money back for the farmers. I know that that former premier didn't do it, and I'm waiting to see if the Premier that we have right now can actually live up to that measuring stick. But I'm suggesting to the Premier that he goes to Ottawa. Don't go to Ottawa and ask if they have a plan. Go to Ottawa with the plan. Tell them what has to be done. We have the best, most entrepreneurial, most determined farmers in Canada. In fact we have the most farmers in Canada. Use their collective wisdom, and come up with a short-term solution. And I underline while the long-term safety net is being designed.

Mr. Speaker, we just can't say that value added is the solution and that we just have to wait until all those industries are in place to save our farmers because, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the farmers won't be here.

You can relate their story to the horror story your government designed with the wellness model for health. Everyone knows that staying well is better and more cost-effective than fixing people when they're sick. But it didn't work to say, we're going to close the hospital because we have a wellness system. We have to have people believing in it. We have to have people actually living a wellness style, and then they wouldn't need the hospitals.

The same thing is true in agriculture. Value added is the answer, but in the meantime, we just can't ignore the problem because farmers cannot hang on. Value added isn't there yet, and we need some interim answers. Our farmers are not getting it from the government, and they're not getting it from AIDA (Agricultural Income Disaster Assistance) or from CFIP (Canadian Farm Income Program), and you're killing three generations of farmers with one fell swoop. And just standing there, wringing your hands and saying, I don't know what to do, isn't the answer.

By the way, Mr. Deputy Speaker, farmers are asking for high speed Internet. They are asking for cell phone coverage, but it's not going to save their farms. The members opposite just don't

get the real, big problems. That's part of the solution, but it's not the big one. I guess it's again an issue of not having a long-term plan, so instead you just are kept busy spinning your wheels. Keep busy with details, rather than designing the broad plans and letting individuals fill in the details.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to further address the new Department of Rural Revitalization, but like everyone else in this province I have no idea of what it's going to do, what its mandate is, or who will evaluate the outcome. Does it mean it fails if we lose more schools, more communities, and more farmers?

Mr. Speaker, the one small area of government no one really talks about is the Women's Secretariat. It has an awesome responsibility, which will be made even more difficult with the intention noted in this budget to decrease the staff by one. The mandate of this secretariat is broad. How can one office look after all the responsibilities given to it?

The government is giving lip service to the whole issue of women in this province by relegating all the problems, policy advice, and new proposals to a handful of women and expecting them to carry on women's issues for the whole government. Luckily, Mr. Deputy Speaker, they're women.

I congratulate the women from the secretariat for the successful conference they just had. They did the government proud, even if the government doesn't do the women of this province proud.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to . . . before I take my place, I'd like to remind the Minister of Municipal Affairs, the member for Melville, though although he's told the Assembly that everything is wonderful and peachy-keen in Melville, he must know that his ministerial responsibility has failed the people in this province. He has not addressed the real concern of municipal governments who have been crying for years for the money to be able to keep up with their infrastructure program.

And I'm asking that this minister, who still would like the people of this province to believe that he's a Liberal, decide to do the right thing, to vote for the amendment, to know that the money that should be put into municipal government instead of building new jobs, 570 new jobs for this province, would be better spent out for the municipal department that he's responsible for.

Before I'd like to take my place, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'd like to say big government is not the answer to Saskatchewan problems. In fact, the conclusion of the Saskatchewan people is that the NDP is not the answer to Saskatchewan's problems. Therefore, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I will be supporting the amendment and I will not be supporting the budget.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Hamilton: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I want to say it's indeed a privilege for me to stand and support our eighth balanced budget, the first budget under our new Premier, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and to speak against the amendment that has been proposed by the members opposite.

Now, Mr. Speaker, tonight we've heard a lot about vision, and

one thing I would have to say is I was listening and trying to glimpse a visionary statement from the members opposite. Nothing, Mr. Deputy Speaker. They've not shared their vision — unless you call tearing down and trash-talking Saskatchewan a vision, Mr. Deputy Speaker. They have not talked about, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that you cannot have a vision unless you establish values. And it's very clear, Deputy Speaker, what we've established in this budget, a stark contrast, a contrast between our vision of connecting to the future, connecting with communities, and connecting with people, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and they, Mr. Speaker.

Now I could say a lot tonight about that, but I think I'll save some of my comments for tomorrow because I would really like to share with many people in Saskatchewan the glimpse I have of the debate that's been unfolding about this budget already. And many of the faces opposite who were here pre-1991 when I would come in as member of city council and want to talk about issues So they may say they're not Tories, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but they've cut their teeth on the right-wing philosophy of the Tories of the government before 1991, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I want to share that with the people of Saskatchewan.

So at this point, I think I'll save those comments for tomorrow, and I would now move to adjourn debate, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Debate adjourned.

The Assembly adjourned at 20:41.