

The Assembly met at 13:30.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRESENTING PETITIONS

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present petitions on behalf of citizens of the Humboldt constituency who would like to ensure that their community-based ambulance services are retained.

And the prayer reads as follows, Mr. Speaker:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to not implement the consolidation and centralization of ambulance services as recommended in the EMS report and affirm its intent to work to improve community-based ambulance services.

The petitioners are from the town of Cudworth, Aberdeen, Saskatoon, and Prud'homme.

I so present.

Mr. Stewart: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise, Mr. Speaker, to present a petition signed by citizens concerned with the conversion of paved highways to gravel.

And the prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to set aside any plans to revert Saskatchewan highways back to gravel, commit that the government will not download responsibility for current numbered highways onto local governments, and to consult with local residents, and to co-operate in finding and implementing other alternatives.

This petition is signed by individuals from the community of Briercrest.

I so present, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Wall: — Mr. Speaker, I rise again on behalf of the people in Swift Current and area concerned about their regional hospital.

And the prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners will humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the provincial government to carefully consider Swift Current's request for a new hospital.

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

And, Mr. Speaker, this petition's been signed by people from the city of Swift Current, from Pennant, from Morse, and from Kyle, as well as Vanguard.

I so present.

Ms. Bakken: — Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present a petition on behalf of residents of the constituency of Weyburn-Big Muddy who are concerned about their ambulance service. And the prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to not implement the consolidation and centralization of ambulance services as recommended in the EMS report and affirm its intent to work to improve community-based ambulance services.

And this is signed by the good citizens of Radville.

I so present.

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, today I rise with a petition from concerned citizens that are worried about the cuts at the Assiniboia Pioneer Lodge. And the petition reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to take the necessary action to ensure that, at the very least, current levels of services and care are maintained at Pioneer Lodge in Assiniboia.

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

And, Mr. Speaker, these concerned citizens are not only from the constituency of Wood River; they're from Assiniboia, Mossbank, Crane Valley, Limerick, and Moose Jaw.

I so present.

Mr. Hart: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too rise to present a petition dealing with ambulance services. The prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to not implement the consolidation and centralization of ambulance services as recommended in the EMS report and to affirm its intent to work to improve community-based ambulance services.

And the signatures to this petition come from the communities of Wynyard and Mozart.

I so present.

READING AND RECEIVING PETITIONS

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

Of citizens of the province petitioning the Assembly on the following matters:

The centralization of ambulance services;

Swift Current's request for a new hospital;

Plans to revert highways to gravel;

And the level of services and care at Pioneer Lodge.

NOTICES OF MOTIONS AND QUESTIONS

Mr. Hart: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I give notice that I shall on day no. 17 ask the government the following question:

To the Minister of Agriculture: what was the total administrative costs incurred by the government for the 2000-2001 fiscal year for the Saskatchewan farmland property tax rebate program?

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I give notice that I shall on day no. 17 ask the government the following question:

To the Minister of Crown Investments Corporation: how many vehicles will SGI, SaskTel, and Sask Water be purchasing in the 2001-2002 fiscal year; and how does this compare to the Crowns' vehicle replacement program of previous years?

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Speaker, it's my real pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to the entire Assembly two very distinguished guests in your gallery, Mr. Speaker.

First I would ask the Assembly to join me in welcoming Mr. Peter Irniq, Commissioner of Nunavut. Mr. Irniq has distinguished himself as a parliamentarian, an educator, and a communicator. He has taken a very active role in shaping the cultural future of Nunavut. And I want, on behalf of government and the people of Saskatchewan, to extend our very warm welcome.

Mr. Speaker, many members will know that Mr. Irniq was guest speaker this morning at the Saskatchewan Prayer Breakfast and I sincerely regret I could not be there, Mr. Speaker, the first time in many years. I am told by those who were there his presentation was very moving. And I appreciate very much that Mr. Irniq has left with us a copy of *The Nunavut Handbook*.

I would ask all members to join this very distinguished visitor to our gallery.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hermanson: — Well thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too would like to join with the Premier in welcoming the Commissioner of Nunavut, Mr. Peter Irniq, to the Legislative Assembly this afternoon.

I had the privilege this morning of sharing breakfast with the commissioner at the breakfast where he spoke this morning. I learned that in his early life he grew up in an igloo. And of course in my limited Saskatchewan experience I think I've built a couple little tunnels through the snow, but I didn't get as far

as you did, sir.

And we welcome you to Saskatchewan and wish you all the best as you serve your people in Nunavut. Thank you.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Speaker, the other very distinguished visitor in your gallery, sir, is a visitor that really needs no introduction in this House. I'd like to welcome His Honour, Mr. Harley Olsen, who has played an important role in the life of this province through his work as a public servant, through his work in the field of agriculture, and through his work in many volunteer organizations.

And we know that he and Her Honour continue to shape the future and the culture of our province. And I'd like us to welcome Mr. Harley Olsen.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I too would like to join with the Premier in welcoming Mr. Harley Olsen. I hope that you enjoy the proceedings this afternoon.

But, Mr. Speaker, I also want to introduce in your gallery a very well-known educator in the province of Saskatchewan, someone who has served this province for many, many years. I'd like to introduce Mr. Fred Herron who is sitting in your gallery. And we know that Fred has been a visitor to these galleries many a time in the past and we want to welcome him back.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Lorjé: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to join with the member opposite in welcoming Mr. Fred Herron to this Legislative Assembly.

We do know that he is a distinguished educator, a distinguished communicator, a distinguished lobbyist. But most importantly, he is a distinguished constituent of Saskatoon Southeast and I welcome Mr. Herron.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Goulet: — Yes, Mr. Speaker, I too would like to join all members in regards to welcoming Commissioner Peter Irniq to the legislature.

As an Aboriginal person, it is good to see important Inuit, Metis, and First Nations leaders make it in very key positions throughout the governance of territories, provinces, and Canada.

Mr. Speaker, it is very important to recognize the language of the Inuit people which is Inuktitut and to recognize that as an important part of it.

So I would like to as well welcome him in the Cree language and say Ta Waw to the legislature of the province of Saskatchewan, Haw egosi.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, to you and through you to the Assembly, I'd like to introduce somebody in the east gallery that's very near and dear to me. It's the hard-working person of the Huyghebaert family that keeps the potholes filled on the way into our little ranch. Would you please welcome my wife Phyllis.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wartman: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege to introduce to you, and to this House through you, 55 students from Centennial School in the northwest corner of the city, part of my constituency, and their teachers Jim Harrop and Jean Flett.

I would like all of you to join in welcoming these students here and I'm looking forward to meeting with them later.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the west gallery I note that we have a visitor today, Jeremy Morgan, formally of Saskatoon Wanuskewin Heritage Centre, now head of the Arts Board in Regina. So he'll be one of these ambassadors of all the good things happening in both cities. And I ask everyone to join me in welcoming Mr. Morgan to the legislature today.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McMorris: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To you and through you, I would also to the rest of the Assembly like to welcome Mr. Jeremy Morgan, the executive director of the Arts Board here to the Assembly today.

I've had the opportunity of meeting him a couple of times and have found the information that we've shared very useful in my benefits. So I'd like to welcome him here and hope he enjoys the proceedings today.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Axworthy: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to ask the members to welcome the person sitting in the gallery, Elizabeth Smith, who is our financial officer at the Department of Justice and is taking a well-earned six-month leave of absence. She says she's going to play and work. I don't know whether this is play or work.

But, Mr. Speaker, we don't often see the dedication of public servants coming to this Chamber on their day off. But I'd like you all to join me in welcoming Elizabeth.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

More Doctors for Rural Saskatchewan

Ms. Jones: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Even more good news for Saskatchewan.

Saskatchewan's health care system is thriving. Three new doctors have made their way to rural Saskatchewan. A 27-year-old doctor has made Unity his new home. And right next door a husband and wife doctor team has decided to plant their roots in Macklin. The addition of these new doctors to both Macklin and Unity will have a positive impact on each community respectively, Mr. Speaker.

There are new doctors settling in all over rural Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, and this government is committed to maintaining that trend. Our health care system is strengthening as I speak. We have the best health care system, Mr. Speaker, and we plan on keeping it that way.

We are attracting young, educated people to this province, making a solid foundation to build our future. And that future will be a prosperous one, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Saskatoon's Open Door Society

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of all members of the Assembly, I would like to extend sincere apologies for remarks made yesterday in the House by the NDP (New Democratic Party) member from Regina Dewdney.

Insensitive comments regarding an individual's lack of education or inability to read are disrespectful, unprofessional, and showed deplorable lack of regard for rules of this Assembly.

(13:45)

The members of this House recognize the hard work of Saskatoon's Open Door Society. As citizens of this province who welcome people from all walks of life, we are also aware that there are those who may have difficulty in reading and writing and know English only as a second language.

Respecting individuals' differences makes each of us unique. Learning to communicate, no matter what the method, is what allows us to become aware of others' cultures, traditions, and ways of life. In doing so, we celebrate our uniqueness.

While we cannot take back the remarks from yesterday, we can offer the humblest of apologies for his lack of sensitivity. We wish Saskatoon's Open Door Society continued success in its operations.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Saskatchewan Arts and Culture

Mr. Kasperski: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, somewhat overlooked in recent coverage of the provincial budget is this government's commitment to Saskatchewan arts and culture, which is substantial and unequivocal.

As the Finance minister said, the role of our arts and cultural communities is a critical part of our vision of the future, just as it was in 1948, Mr. Speaker, when the first provincial Arts Board was created here in Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, a budget is more than an accounting of revenues and expenditures; it is also a tally sheet of society's character. And this budget recognizes the richness and diversity of the Saskatchewan spirit as it is expressed by our artists, writers, actors, musicians, painters, moviemakers, and makers of crafts — richness and diversity indeed.

Mr. Speaker, there are substantial funds for the arts stabilization program, for a cultural industries development strategy, for the Saskatchewan Recording Industries Association, and for the Saskatchewan Craft Council, as well as ongoing support for the Arts Board and SaskFILM.

This is good news for the arts, Mr. Speaker, and another way the government is connecting to the future.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Skills Canada Competition

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, “Skills Work” — this was the motto of this year's annual Skills Canada competition. The event took place last Thursday, Friday, and Saturday in Moose Jaw.

Over 40 young people represented Nipawin's L.P. Miller School. Trades, technology, and careers were explored in an Olympic-style event where students competed for medals under the watchful eye of many of industry's leaders. They were judged on many criteria including creativity, accuracy, and skill. Five major areas that include about 30 skills were tested.

Nipawin and area students entered into 22 events, Mr. Speaker, and came home with 28 medals. It is probable that Nipawin was the best-represented town per capita of any place in Canada. Nipawin's skills coordinator, Mr. Tim Paetaku, was selected as the Skills Canada Saskatchewan secondary teacher of the year for his efforts in establishing and promoting Skills Canada.

Mr. Paetaku acknowledged the support of school board and an enthusiastic community as a major factor in L.P. Miller students' successes.

Mr. Speaker, I would ask that all members of the House join with me in congratulating the students of L.P. Miller School and Mr. Paetaku for all of these tremendous accomplishments.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Saskatchewan Science Centre Climate Change Workshop

Mr. Thomson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to inform the House that over the next two weeks, SaskPower will be sponsoring more than 300 students from elementary schools in rural Saskatchewan to visit Regina and participate in Saskatchewan Science Centre's Hot Science: Climate Change workshop.

These students will be introduced to the science of global climate change and learn about the issues and solutions relevant to individuals. We all know that climate change is a pressing issue and raising awareness about ways to combat that and that individuals can reduce greenhouse gas emissions will play a

major role in meeting this challenge.

Mr. Speaker, I ask you and other members of this Assembly to join me in welcoming these students, their parents and teachers, as they visit Regina and their Science Centre.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Swift Current Wins in Amateur Sports

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to commemorate the efforts of a number of amateur sports enthusiasts and teams in Swift Current over the past couple of weeks. This past weekend, Mr. Speaker, the Swift Current Pee Wee Mustangs won the Provincial A Tier II Championship. The Pee Wee Mustangs beat Melfort in the final, Mr. Speaker. The Mustang's coaching staff includes Coach Larry Johnson, the assistant coach is Lance Vachon, the manager is Cindy Slusar, and the trainer is Mark Marshall.

On the weekend of the 17 and 18, Mr. Speaker, the Swift Current Under-12 Girls Indoor Soccer Team captured the provincial championship. That's the first Swift Current soccer team ever to win a provincial title. Congratulations to the team and to the coaching staff, Dale Perry and Anita Evans for their efforts in that regard.

And that same weekend, Mr. Speaker, in Swift Current, the Swift Current Bantam Tier II . . . (inaudible) . . . Eliminators won the provincial championship on March 17 and 18 in Swift Current. They defeated Kindersley in the final, Mr. Speaker. And a note, in the game that won the tournament for them, one of the goal scorers was Bobbi-Jo Slusar, Mr. Speaker, and I mention her not because Bobbi-Jo is a girl but because she's a great hockey player.

Congratulations to the players and the teams in Swift Current, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Makwa and Makwa River Lions Clubs Donation

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Mr. Minister, the spirit of this province is alive in rural Saskatchewan. The Makwa Lions Club and the Makwa River Lions Club received recognition for their generous donation of vehicles to the Canadian National Institute for the Blind on March 19 of this year.

The Makwa Lions clubs have been helping the blind for as long as they have been in existence. Over the past 10 years, these clubs have been able to donate two Cavaliers, and a 2000 Caravan to the CNIB (Canadian National Institute for the Blind). This is an amazing feat, Mr. Speaker, as the combined membership of these two clubs is only 45 people.

Out of the five vehicles in use by the Saskatoon CNIB office, three have been donated by the Makwa Lions clubs. The members of these clubs are hard-working and generous people in their community, Mr. Speaker. They truly demonstrate the spirit of Saskatchewan.

I too would like to recognize the efforts of these fine Saskatchewan citizens and commend them on a job well done. It is people like this that make Saskatchewan the best province in Canada to live, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Tribute to Volunteer Firefighters

Hon. Ms. Hamilton: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to pay tribute to some very brave men and women whom we often neglect to think about except in emergency situations. I'm talking about the thousands of volunteer firefighters that look after hundreds of volunteer fire departments throughout the province.

This past weekend, Mr. Speaker, many of these men and women gathered in Balgonie, a town in my constituency of Regina Wascana Plains, to attend a Volunteer Firefighters Association spring training symposium. The event drew close to 150 delegates and gave the volunteers a chance to practise their rescue and firefighting skills and provide them with an opportunity to share and knowledge and practices with each other. Courses included search and rescue, wild-land firefighting, vehicle firefighting, and fire investigations.

Mr. Speaker, volunteers are the foundation for many services we know and trust here in Saskatchewan. Volunteer firefighters deserve that much more credit for their efforts as they risk their lives to save others on every call.

I would like other members of the Assembly to join with me in congratulating Saskatchewan's volunteer firefighters in all of their efforts.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ORAL QUESTIONS

Funding for Municipal Governments

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my question again is for the Minister of Municipal Government.

On Monday the Saskatchewan Party moved a motion that would stop the NDP from forcing property tax increases on Saskatchewan families. Yesterday, Mr. Speaker, we asked the Minister of Municipal Government to support our motion, but the minister refused to listen. He refused to listen to us and he is refusing to listen to municipal taxpayers across Saskatchewan. Instead he chose to support the NDP's plans to grow the size of government and ignore municipalities.

Mr. Speaker, the minister has had 24 hours to think about it. Will he stand in this House today and support the Saskatchewan Party motion to hold the line on property tax increases, or does he continue to support the NDP's plans for bigger government?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again I am

appalled, as I'm sure all the people of this province are. The budget that was presented that will help communities throughout this province — throughout this great province of ours. Saskatchewan's a great place to live.

I'm appalled that the members opposite would ask us to not have 104 more people looking after forest firefighting, monitoring forestry activity and testing water initiatives. I'm amazed that they would not allow us to supply 88 full-time people to help work and rebuild our highways, Mr. Speaker . . .

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Order, order.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Municipal Government may be buying the NDP's song and dance but municipalities aren't being fooled.

The Saskatchewan Party has been getting letters from all over Saskatchewan supporting our proposal to increase municipal revenue-sharing grants instead of increasing the size of the NDP government.

Mr. Speaker, I quote the city of North Battleford:

. . . supports our amendment and is hopeful that the government will accept the proposal.

The town of Langenburg, Mr. Speaker:

. . . unanimously supports the Sask Party proposal for a \$30 million increase in municipal revenue sharing.

The village of Aneroid, Mr. Speaker:

We are definitely in support of your amendment calling on the government to provide another additional 30 million in revenue sharing this year.

Mr. Speaker, that's what the municipalities are saying. They support our proposal. Will the minister table all the letters he has received in support of the NDP's plan to ignore municipalities and grow the size of government?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Osika: — Mr. Speaker, once again, what do we have in communities that support local communities? We have services that are provided by working people, Mr. Speaker. Are the members opposite suggesting that we cut 60 people out of Social Services who help in the development of young people, who look after people that are in trouble, Mr. Speaker.

Ninety-one and a half persons in the justice system . . . They keep calling for additional help in law enforcement and in the areas of justice. This is happening, Mr. Speaker, under one of the best budgets that they've ever seen. That's why they find it difficult to accept the facts, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the

minister isn't going to table any letters from municipalities supporting his government's plans because he doesn't have any.

Municipalities have been paying their fair share of the responsibility, keeping the provincial budget balanced. Now the municipalities are saying it's time to share the load.

I quote — the town of Ituna, the minister . . . one of the minister's towns:

Without an increase in revenue sharing, our municipality is faced with no choice but to increase property taxes.

The town of Craik:

Municipalities tightened their belts to help balance the budget, now it's time to share the wealth.

Mr. Speaker, the Saskatchewan Party is tabling letters from 44 municipalities supporting our proposal to increase revenue sharing, instead of increasing the size of government.

Will the minister table all the letters he has received that is in support of his NDP government's plan to increase the size the government?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Osika: — Mr. Speaker, I'm amazed that the members opposite don't recognize the positive impact that has been . . . that we have had on rural Saskatchewan as far as provincial disaster assistance programs.

Our 911 programs, the Centenary Fund programs, and we have numerous of those that invest money in our small communities throughout this great province of ours, Mr. Speaker. The provincial disaster assistance program has been increased substantially, Sask 911 operation — this is all money that goes into our rural areas, into our rural communities to continue to make this a great place to live, Mr. Speaker.

I was in Humboldt to celebrate their becoming a city last Sunday and do you know what, Mr. Speaker? Everybody was upbeat, their spirits were up, and they were very happy to be living in this province, because they believe in themselves, they believe in this province, and they believe in their communities.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Minister, Mr. Speaker, these municipalities are saying you haven't been there to help them. That government has downloaded for 10 years and hasn't been helping them.

Maybe the minister, Mr. Speaker, has to hear more from the municipalities. The village of Broderick:

We hope that you are successful in persuading the government to amend their 2001 provincial budget, instead of adding 570 new government jobs.

RM of Reford:

We feel we do not need another government department to the tune of \$30 million. We need less bureaucracy, less taxes.

RM of Saltcoats:

We support the Sask Party's proposed amendment to the 2001 budget calling on the province to provide an additional 30 million in municipal revenue sharing.

(14:00)

Mr. Speaker, what we need is less government and lower taxes. Mr. Speaker, will the Minister of Municipal Government listen to the overwhelming voice of municipalities in Saskatchewan and support our party's motion to increase revenue-sharing grants instead of increasing the size of that coalition government?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Osika: — Mr. Speaker, the question I would ask the members opposite is who would they attack? Who would they go after in the public service? Who would they go after to eliminate the jobs that are necessary to maintain our communities, the health in our communities, our health care system . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. Order.

Hon. Mr. Osika: — Mr. Speaker, please allow me to quote from a recent clipping here — April 4, 2001 — from a well-known, respected columnist in this city:

From a political standpoint, (and I quote) it . . . sound(s) good for the Opposition to say . . . the government could have given \$30 million to property owners . . . (if it were) not hiring the extra 570 bureaucrats outlined in the budget.

. . . (however that argument) is both reckless and borderline irresponsible.

To begin with . . . to imply that these new . . . hirings are nothing but pencil-pushing bureaucrats . . . is unfair . . . we are talking about . . . 86 forest firefighters; 86 highways workers who are filling potholes; 46 more jail guards . . . (Mr. Speaker).

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Liberal Position on the Budget

Mr. Krawetz: — Mr. Speaker, my question is also for the Minister of Municipal Government.

Mr. Speaker, not only is the minister ignoring municipal government, he's ignoring his own election platform. All week the minister has been defending the NDP's decision to expand the civil service. But that's not what his party and his leader were saying back in 1999. The Liberal leader said his party would save \$24.7 million by eliminating 300 government jobs.

Mr. Speaker, what happened? What happened to that promise?

Why are the Liberals defending 570 new civil servants when they promised to cut 300 government jobs in the 1999 election campaign?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Osika: — Well, Mr. Speaker, just on that note — they're asking those questions — I wonder just out of curiosity how many employees were added to the Saskatchewan Party caucus office in the last year and a half since the election? They don't complain or say anything about that, Mr. Speaker.

And while we're talking about the Liberal Party platform, Mr. Speaker, I would like to just reiterate, in 1999 our platform said highways were a major priority. The coalition government this year . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. I would like to hear the response. Order. The minister will continue.

Hon. Mr. Osika: — This year, Mr. Speaker, the coalition government is making a \$950 million investment in highways over the next three years — to speed up the twinning of the western portion of the Trans Canada, upgrade 800 kilometres of thin membrane highways. It takes people to do that work, Mr. Speaker, and that's what those people are going to do to make our communities a better place to live.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to quote directly from the 1999 Liberal election platform. It says:

A Liberal government will save 24.7 million dollars by eliminating unnecessary middle management jobs, said the Leader of the Liberal Party. And this means we will eliminate about 300 jobs out of a total of almost 10,000.

That's the facts that the minister talks about, Mr. Speaker. The Liberals, you know, Mr. Speaker, the Liberals don't even have to go that far. They could save \$30 million by just holding the line on the size of government and then they could use that money to hold that money on property taxes.

Mr. Speaker, our amendment is more in line with the Liberal platform than anything the Liberals have done in the past two years.

My question is for the Minister of Education, the Leader of the Liberal Party: will you support the Saskatchewan Party amendment to hold the line on property taxes?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Melenchuk: — Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly myself and the Minister of Municipal Affairs will not be supporting the Sask Party amendment.

And certainly the budget program that we have put forward has been well received by the people of Saskatchewan. The highway spending has been well received. The new spending in education has been well received. The new spending in

technology has been well received.

Mr. Speaker, this is a good budget for the people of Saskatchewan. And when we talk about platforms, I would like to remind the members opposite about their platform for 20 per cent reductions in personal income tax, and more for highways and education and health care and social services — frozen. And off-loading of property taxes to the tune of \$60 million by their platform, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's amazing how quickly the Liberals have abandoned their own platform and have joined the NDP platform. They were going to eliminate 300 government jobs. The Liberal leader, I believe he called them hacks and flacks. In fact, Mr. Speaker, they were going to eliminate 61 jobs in the Premier's office.

And you know, Mr. Speaker, you know what's happened since 1998 in the Premier's office? We see an additional 11 people working in Executive Council. That member said he was going to cut all the hacks and flacks.

Mr. Speaker, people have been waiting for almost two years to finally see the Liberals make their mark on this government. This Friday it could be the day, Mr. Speaker. The Liberals will have the opportunity to finally stand up to the NDP and hold the line on the size of government.

My question, Mr. Speaker, is: will they vote to support our amendment?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Melenchuk: — As stated previously, Mr. Speaker, we will not be supporting the amendment by the Saskatchewan Party.

And I'll remind the members opposite that as recently as a few days ago the member from Kelvington-Wadena stated about her Liberal philosophy and what she was doing within the Saskatchewan Party. Well I can tell you for a fact, Mr. Speaker, that not one single Liberal policy has been implemented from that side, but from this side we've had significant improvements.

Mr. Speaker, to just provide one example, to provide just one example, when Mrs. Joan Kortje came in here with a wheelbarrow full of petitions and I accompanied her into this rotunda, what we talked about then was speeding up, accelerating the twinning of the Trans-Canada west. This was a promise that I made to Mrs. Kortje at that time, and we have met that promise in this budget, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Krawetz: — Now, Mr. Speaker, the Liberals have totally abandoned their own policy, and they're only listening to the NDP. They're not listening to municipalities. They're not listening to taxpayers. They're not even listening to their own party. The only people they listen to are their political masters, the NDP.

No wonder they're in single digits in the public support polls.

Mr. Speaker, the Liberals finally have the chance to show some independence. They can stand up to the NDP by providing fair funding to municipalities to hold the line on property taxes.

Mr. Speaker, I'll ask the question again. Will the ministers who currently are in the Liberal Party, will they support the amendment on Friday of this week?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Melnychuk: — Mr. Speaker, as stated earlier, we will not be supporting the amendment and the reasons are obvious. We have had full participation in developing this budget. The coalition government is a government of co-operation, of collaboration, and it's something that they would not understand, Mr. Speaker.

And when we brought forward our budget and we talked about the increased spending in Education, when we talked about the increased spending in Highways, when we talked about, when we talked about a first-strike support with regard to forest fires, when we talked about the improvements in corrections workers in Social Services, all of these things are very much, are very much a positive for the people of Saskatchewan. And we will be supporting the budget of this government.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Workers' Compensation Board

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are for the Minister of Labour. Mr. Speaker, yesterday I asked the minister why four management employees at the workmen's compensation board were fired and if they were paid severance. The minister wouldn't answer the questions in the House. And outside the House the minister told the media he was not nominally responsible for the board. Then when he couldn't take the heat, he ran away.

Mr. Speaker, to the minister: is he or is he not the minister responsible for workmen's compensation?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Trew: — I thank the member for that question. And let me explain the difference between a government line organization, a line department, and the Workers' Compensation Board.

In a line department taxpayers clearly fund and ministers clearly have a line responsibility. With the respect to the arm's-length Workers' Compensation Board, Mr. Speaker, the situation there is that employers fund the Workers' Compensation Board totally, and the Workers' Compensation Board does require legislation for which the Crown has a minister responsible for that legislation.

As such, my responsibility is to make sure that there are three members of the board and that the Workers' Compensation Board is functioning effectively and within the law.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Weekes: — Mr. Speaker, last year during budget estimates the Minister of Labour answered questions about WCB (Workers' Compensation Board) and WCB officials joined the minister in this House to help answer the questions.

The new Minister of Labour signed the order in council granting Stan Cameron \$150,000 in severance. The minister appoints the board of workmen's compensation. This is much more than a nominal responsibility, Mr. Speaker.

On March 21, the minister received a memo from Peter Federko, which states: the WCB released without cause four out-of-scope employees on January 31; these were all top management positions such as the manager of financial resources, and benefits and compensation administrator.

Mr. Speaker, to the minister, how is it that four top officials from WCB can be fired without cause? Why were these people fired?

Hon. Mr. Trew: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can confirm that there were . . . in fact that letter of March 21, which I shared with media yesterday, that I received that letter March 21.

I want to, with respect to the four individuals, Mr. Speaker, I want to say that they were released from the employment of the Workers' Compensation Board without cause. As such, the terms of their release remain covered under a confidentiality clause which is common business practice; it is very common under British common law.

This is a normal practice and because of the confidentiality clause, Mr. Speaker, between the Workers' Compensation Board and the four individuals, I cannot divulge the terms of their severance.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Weekes: — Mr. Speaker, I have to wonder if the minister has a clue about what is going on over at workmen's compensation board.

The minister signed an order in council granting the ex-chairman a huge severance package. Well, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to know if the minister's also attending the dinner being held in Mr. Cameron's honour.

We heard that next Monday both Workers' Compensation Board offices in Regina and Saskatoon will be shutdown for several hours during the business day. The workers from the office in Saskatoon will be bused to Regina and everyone will enjoy a dinner at the Delta Hotel for Mr. Cameron. We assume this will be paid by the WCB.

(14:15)

Mr. Speaker, is the minister aware of this dinner? Can he explain why it is being held and who will be paying for it?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Trew: — Well, Mr. Speaker, isn't it interesting, the members opposite are going to attack a nearly eight-year veteran, the Chair of the Workers' Compensation Board, who served that board honourably for nearly eight years.

Mr. Cameron left the Workers' Compensation Board due to ill health, Mr. Speaker — ill health — and the best that those members can come up with is a scurrilous attack on his person. I find that just awful, awful.

Mr. Speaker, Mr. Cameron . . . I'll deal with Mr. Cameron in terms that the members opposite might understand. Mr. Cameron has an illness that precludes him from returning to his full-time work as Chair of the Workers' Compensation Board. What we did, Mr. Speaker, is found a way to allow Mr. Cameron to retire and for us to appoint a new Chair which we will be doing in due course.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Weekes: — Mr. Speaker, it makes you wonder if the ex-chairman of the workman's compensation board left for health reasons, why did he receive the severance pay, why is he not receiving workman's comp?

Mr. Speaker, the Workers' Compensation Board is funded by the businesses of Saskatchewan. They have questions about why four top management officials were fired and the chairman left, and no one is giving them any answers.

Now they are hearing that WCB is throwing a big farewell dinner for Mr. Cameron. Mr. Speaker, who is minding the shop? The minister can run but he can't hide. Are the premiums businesses are paying to WCB to operate being used to throw this farewell party?

Mr. Speaker, to the minister: why is WCB throwing a farewell dinner for ex-chairman who was paid a severance package of \$150,000?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Trew: — Mr. Speaker, Stan Cameron, who became ill and unable to proceed as chairman of the Workers' Compensation Board, could have received three years of long-term disability pay and that would have been more expensive than the retirement allowance that the Workers' Compensation Board arranged with Mr. Cameron. That's point one.

Point two, had Mr. Cameron been off on long-term disability, it would have been very difficult to appoint a new chairperson of the Workers' Compensation Board. I hear the members opposite say, oh. They would have us paying more money. Under any other scenario, Mr. Speaker, they would have a more expensive separation for the former Chair.

This is their attack on a gentleman who cannot complete the terms of his contract because of illness, Mr. Speaker.

I wonder, while we're at it: what would the cost be if all of the civil servants that you members would have . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. I would like to, before we go on to the next item, thank all members for their valiant attempts at using the proper procedure and addressing their remarks through the Chair. But I would ask the minister in his last remark to check his statement because I think he failed to do so and remind him to do that next time.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 208 — The Saskatchewan Property Rights Act

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move first reading the Bill No. 208. The Saskatchewan Property Rights Act.

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

Bill No. 8 — The Provincial Emblems and Honours Amendment Act, 2001

Hon. Ms. Lorjé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 8, The Provincial Emblems and Honours Amendment Act, 2001 be now introduced and read the first time.

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

Bill No. 9 — The Power Corporation Amendment Act, 2001

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 9, The Power Corporation Amendment Act, 2001 be now introduced and read the first time.

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

ORDERS OF THE DAY

WRITTEN QUESTIONS

Mr. Yates: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to stand up on behalf of the government and table responses to questions no. 9 and 10.

The Speaker: — The answer to question 9 is tabled. The answer to question 10 is tabled.

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.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker,

as I was discussing yesterday about the rear-view mirror view of this particular budget, Mr. Speaker, while the minister may have entitled it *Connecting to the Future*, it is the future that he sees in his rear-view mirror.

There's a lot of things, Mr. Speaker, similar between this budget and the budget of the government from the 1980s. In both of these cases, Mr. Speaker, they're unsustainable.

In this particular case we have a government that is spending more money than it's bringing in. Under everybody's terminology, Mr. Speaker, to do that is to run a deficit. Now that doesn't mean, Mr. Speaker, that there is going to incur more debt but that simply in this fiscal year the government is spending more than they are collecting. And that, Mr. Speaker, means that you cannot carry that forward for very many years until your savings account is used up.

Well what we have in this province, Mr. Speaker, for a savings account is now called the FSS, or as we like to term it, Mr. Speaker, the fancy slush fund.

Now the minister opposite says that he can't possibly utilize these funds to any great extent, that he can't draw these funds down because the province has to have in its hand a rainy day fund for emergencies.

Well, you know, I kind of wonder, Mr. Speaker, what the minister means by the rainy day fund for emergencies. What does he constitute as an emergency?

Is too high a burden on property taxes that people are starting to not pay their property taxes because they can't afford it, too high of a burden? It would seem that the minister opposite doesn't believe that is a cause for a rainy day.

It doesn't seem, Mr. Speaker, that the Minister of Finance believes taxes that are completely out of line in the areas of income taxes or corporate taxes, in comparison to our neighbours, is any cause for concern or crisis or for utilization of the rainy day fund.

It seems, Mr. Speaker, that the minister doesn't believe having the longest waiting lists in health care to be a cause for concern, that that would constitute a rainy day fund . . . the need to utilize the rainy day fund.

So what does constitute a rainy day for the Minister of Finance?

Well, Mr. Speaker, I went looking in historical documents to see what this minister might think of as a rainy day. So I looked back, Mr. Speaker, into two documents. One of them is called *Moving Forward Together*, the Saskatchewan Estimates for 1999-2000 or the budget, Mr. Speaker, for the year 1999-2000.

At this particular point in time, the fancy slush fund, Mr. Speaker, had a different name. It was called the Saskatchewan Liquor and Gaming Authority. And at that particular point in time, in 1999, in the budget, the minister pulled \$485 million out of the Liquor and Gaming Authority, Mr. Speaker, a substantial withdrawal from that fund, in comparison to the 232, \$39 million that he's pulling out of the fancy slush fund this year.

What kind of an impact did that have on that particular fund? The minister is saying that he can't possibly pull out any more money out of that fancy slush fund; that he has to keep it for the rainy day.

Well if we look at *A Plan for Growth and Opportunity*, Saskatchewan Estimates, 2000-2001, Mr. Speaker, the budget document, which shows the Saskatchewan Liquor and Gaming Authority retained earnings this time.

The other book didn't list retained earnings but this one does. The estimate for 1999-2000 was to draw that fund down to \$190 million. This year the minister is saying he can't possibly go lower than \$500 million in the fancy slush fund, but in 1999 in the budget process he was prepared to go down to \$190 million.

And then in the forecast, Mr. Speaker, the forecast for 1999-2000 it lists no money in retained earnings for the Liquor and Gaming Authority. So I have to ask: if you're prepared to draw down that entire fund, which is suppose to be for a rainy day, what was the rainy day?

Mr. Speaker, 1999 was an election year. That, Mr. Speaker, is what this government thinks of as a rainy day. Whenever there's an opportunity for the public to review the performance of the government opposite, indeed, Mr. Speaker, that is a black day for the government. That is a true rainy day. And for that reason, Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance had no problem spending his entire rainy day fund.

So, Mr. Speaker, the same thing is true today. It's not because the Minister of Finance wants to be fiscally responsible. It's not because there is a need to have those monies available for a rainy day. Mr. Speaker, the reason is, is that minister wants to retain those funds for the election year. That's the only reason, Mr. Speaker, that those monies are not being allowed to be utilized. Not to increase the size of government, Mr. Speaker, but to create an economic climate in this province that will allow this province to grow.

When we compare ourselves to our neighbouring jurisdictions, every year, Mr. Speaker, they have job growth; we do not. They have more people moving into those provinces; we have people leaving. It's because of the governing philosophy of the members opposite that only, Mr. Speaker, only government can do it.

Well, Mr. Speaker, around the world it's being proven that government is more of an impediment than they are a developer of business. The best thing government can do is step aside and let people develop the economy and grow. And government's role is to be a regulator, not an owner, Mr. Speaker.

(14:30)

Choices that this government could have made, Mr. Speaker — let's take highways. Mr. Speaker, they're proposing to hire 72 new employees. While there certainly is a need, Mr. Speaker, for work in the highways area, everyone in this province knows and understands the critical mess that this government has created in highways over the last 10 years. Critical mess, Mr. Speaker.

Citizens are going out and fixing their own highways because this government has been ignoring them too long. But what's the solution this government proposes? To hire 72 new employees.

Now, Mr. Speaker, hopefully the employees that are already there in Highways are working. Hopefully those people have the equipment necessary to carry out their duties. If that's the case, Mr. Speaker, then we're going to have to go out and buy more equipment to provide equipment for the 72 new employees that they're proposing to hire. How much money, Mr. Speaker, once you pay the salaries, once you buy all this new fancy equipment, is actually going to be left to put asphalt on a highway?

Mr. Speaker, it looks to me like there's not going to be a lot of extra money left to do that with. It's all going to go into employees and equipment and not on to building highways, Mr. Speaker.

In hiring 72 new employees, if you drive around the province, Mr. Speaker, in the wintertime our highways are getting cleaned off. You know, they're doing a good job, Mr. Speaker; they're clearing the highways off.

I know that when Andy Renaud was the minister of Highways at one time, he was going to slow down the clearing of snow on the highways in the wintertime. But the first storm that hit, everybody complained bitterly to the minister and he changed his mind and carried out snow cleaning both during the week between 8 o'clock in the morning and 5, after 5 o'clock, and on weekends, after people complained. He wasn't going to do that initially, but after he received a lot of complaints, Mr. Speaker, he did.

So what are you going to do with those 72 new employees in the wintertime, Mr. Speaker? The roads are already being cleared of snow; they're not going to be laying asphalt in the wintertime. So are they just going to sit there? What are they going to do?

Mr. Speaker, a much better, much better thing to do would be to take that money going to hire new employees, going to buy a new shovel for them, and hire the contractors that are already available in this province, put them to work all summer long, building highways, rather than simply new shovels . . . buying new shovels for them, Mr. Speaker, and we would get a lot more work done, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, this government is more, as I said earlier, more about bigger government and less about providing services to the people. The Minister of Finance was very exuberant on the budget day, Mr. Speaker, in talking about health and education and highways. But, Mr. Speaker, the minister has turn-of-the-century health care in mind. But, Mr. Speaker, it's turn of the 19th century that we're having in this province.

A large areas of this province have the same health care they did when the pioneers arrived, Mr. Speaker — no health care. And we saw this same sort of thing happening with some of the other areas that the minister was bragging about.

He's standing up there, Mr. Speaker, and saying that's progress.

Well, Mr. Speaker, it seems the minister's idea of progress is a two-storey outhouse. I'll give you an example, Mr. Speaker, he's talking about highways and saying, we are going to take alongside our thin-membrane highways, we're going to build a good gravel road. So we're going to have twin highways, Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan style — thin-membrane for some people and gravel for the rest.

Well, Mr. Speaker, that is simply rear-view mirror thinking. That's going back to the last century, Mr. Speaker. It has nothing to do with the future.

Mr. Speaker, as was discussed today in question period, the government has a choice that they can make. They can continue down their road of bigger government, spending dollars in that area, or they have a choice. They can help out municipalities, both rural and urban, in controlling their property tax increases.

If the government carries on in the direction they are seem to be bent on going, then the net result will be for most municipalities — city, town, small cities, rural — is the property taxes are going to have to go up. Because the government's increasing all of their other costs.

When you drive the city bus down the street, the fuel taxes are going up. The cost of fuel has gone up — not necessarily the tax — the cost of fuel has gone up. Your cost of natural gas has gone up; your cost of telephone is going up; your cost of power is going up. There's only one area, Mr. Speaker, that those costs are recovered from and that's the property tax base. All of those things are going back to the property taxpayer.

And it doesn't matter, Mr. Speaker, whether you live in Elphinstone, whether you live in Wascana Plains, whether you live down at Coronach, or you live at Pinehouse, your taxes are going to go up as a result of this government's decision.

A wrong decision, Mr. Speaker, but the opportunity is not too late to change that. The government, or government members individually, could vote to support the amendment being put forward by the Saskatchewan Party to roll that back, Mr. Speaker, and to provide the funding to municipalities rather than simply growing government.

This government, Mr. Speaker, has also basically forgotten agriculture. They signed on to a farm program that they refused to participate in the development of; simply signing on to an extremely flawed program that was in place before because they wouldn't even sit to negotiate with it, that one. We have been waiting over eight long years, Mr. Speaker, since this government destroyed the last long-term safety net program we had in this province. They keep promising it, Mr. Speaker, but every year they break that promise to agriculture and they fail to develop a long-term safety net program.

Mr. Speaker, many of my other colleagues wish to have a chance to talk about their critic areas and their constituencies. Clearly this budget is headed in the wrong direction, Mr. Speaker. It's got nothing to do with the future. It's all about going back to Allan Blakeney's 1970s, Mr. Speaker. The future in their rear-view mirror is not good enough for the people of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, I will be supporting the amendment and not the budget.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Thomson: — Well thank you, Mr. Speaker. What an unexpected and pleasant opportunity to address you and the rest of the House today about this budget.

Mr. Speaker, this budget is full of good news in many things that I want to talk about today. In particular focusing in on the city of Regina, some of the good news for my constituents, some of the good news for my university — the University of Regina — and some very positive things that we are looking at in terms of the economy.

Mr. Speaker, one of the things that impresses me most about this budget is how it builds on the many successes that we have seen over the past several years and much of the hard work that has been done by Saskatchewan people to turn around the finances of this province.

Mr. Speaker, we can take a look at this budget as making a significant investment in our economy, a significant investment in our people, and a significant investment in Saskatchewan.

I think one of the things that's most interesting about this budget is the fact that it receives support both from business and from labour. I'm not sure what exactly it takes in terms of, in terms of an ability to get both business and labour on side but we have been able to see great success that way.

I was very pleased to read the comments by Marilyn Braun of the Federation of Independent Business saying that what this budget will do — and I'm quoting Ms. Braun saying:

What this will do is encourage small firms to grow and expand. And that is something we've recommended to the government and it's apparent that they were listening.

Mr. Speaker, we have heard this time and again from people over the last week, or at least over the weekend. And I've had the opportunity to meet with my constituents to hear them say that people think the government heard them. They believe that we listened to what they were saying.

In my riding I can tell you the number one issue people mention to me time and again are taxes. Mr. Speaker, the Finance minister said at the very start of his budget speech that this budget continues with the massive record tax cuts that we introduced last year. That's something we have to be very proud of, Mr. Speaker.

We were able to proceed in this direction, able to proceed in this direction, Mr. Speaker, because of the wise financial management and the decisions of those ministers previously who had introduced budgets

And I want to recognize the former minister from . . . of Finance from Saskatoon Idylwyld, who of course has done a great deal in terms of making sure that the work . . . that this budget was able to proceed both in terms of the tax cuts and in terms of the reinvestment in public services — both in terms of

the University of Regina and the University of Saskatchewan in Saskatoon. And I think it's a testament to that.

I was particularly pleased also, Mr. Speaker, to see my former boss, Ed Tchorzewski here on budget day. And I know that he had a very big smile on his face at the end of this budget, knowing that a lot of the work that they put in, in the early part of the '90s through some very, very difficult days of having to get the books balanced, having to get the budget spending under control, that those days had begun to pay off.

I want to talk a little bit about education, Mr. Speaker, in terms of the support that we have been able to see for our universities. It is very important I think that we take a look at the fact that today we are spending nearly twice as much on education as we are on interest payments. That's a very significant, that's a very significant investment. And I think it does say that the time that we have spent reducing debt, the time that we have spent in terms of reducing income taxes, the time that we have spent investing in public services is paying off, Mr. Speaker. And it's something that I am very proud of.

I don't think it's any secret to members in this Assembly that my interest is primarily on the business side of this budget; that I have a great interest in seeing us reduce income taxes to encourage both investment in public services, but also investment by the private sector in our economy. And this budget does that.

The continued cuts in income taxes, the fact that we are able to see, the fact that we are able to see that Saskatchewan receives the smallest amount of its budget from income taxes of all the provinces in the nation, I think speaks very well to how we have been able to move forward.

Mr. Speaker, it is no small measure that we have been reading in the newspapers over the past several days . . . And I have a clipping here, in front of me, from the Saskatoon *StarPhoenix* of April 3. The headline reads "High marks for Saskatchewan budget." Sub-headline is "Prudence earns praise from the TD, Scotiabank."

Now these are not exactly the reddest of organizations. These are not exactly the group that you would think would immediately leap to the defence of an NDP government. But both of these banks — and in fact today, the Royal Bank — speaks highly of the work that has been done in terms of the investment of this budget and how it will allow our economy to grow.

The Royal Bank was said to be bullish in terms of our approach today. They talk about the fact that we are looking at more than 3 per cent growth in our economy, growth in a great number of sectors not the least of which is oil and gas sector, Mr. Speaker. And I'm particularly pleased to see some of the movement forward in terms of our oil and gas strategy.

I talked to some during my response to the Throne Speech about how I was pleased that we were investing not simply in the oil and gas sector through a royalty strategy and a fair taxation strategy, but that we were also investing in things like the Petroleum Technology Research Centre at the University of Regina, which will allow these companies to continue to partner

with government in terms of moving forward in economic development.

I have talked to some about the investments that they are making in terms of energy conservation; and we look at the CO₂ project in Weyburn, which I think members on both sides of this House are particularly proud of.

These are areas, Mr. Speaker, that we are seeing that this government is helping business move forward. We are able to see these things progress and our budget moves forward on a lot of these.

(14:45)

One of the things, Mr. Speaker, I do want to talk a little about today, because it has been certainly dominating the discussion in question period, are some of the investments that we are making back into public services.

Over the past five years that I . . . almost six years now, that I've had the pleasure to represent the people of Regina South in this legislature, we have seen a great progress in terms of the finances of this province. When this government first took office in 1991, it'll be no secret to people that the government of the day that we had replaced was spending nearly a dollar and a quarter for every dollar they brought in. Nearly a dollar and a quarter for every dollar they brought in.

The result was a massive, massive debt hanging over this province. I believe at its peak we were paying nearly \$875 million a year in interest payments alone on that debt. If you can imagine, Mr. Speaker, that was more money than we spent to educate the young people of this province. We've spent that simply to pay the bankers for the money that the party that we replaced rang up.

And the members opposite have used some form of voodoo economics to try and show that the debt, in fact, has increased. This is not true. The debt of this province has not increased, Mr. Speaker. And it doesn't matter by what indicator you use, it has gone down.

This year the debt of this province will drop by another, I believe it's \$200 million, thanks to wise investments on the part of this government. We have seen that the debt of this province has gone down as a percentage of GDP (gross domestic product). I particularly like that indicator because it says two things. One is that the actual level of debt is dropping; the second is that our economy is growing.

Mr. Speaker, I was a young person at university when the opposition's predecessor were in power, when Grant Devine's government was here. I can tell you that there was a sense of pessimism on those campuses. I can tell you that there was a sense of concern that the economy was in the tank.

The response of the party in government at that point, and I know the member for Estevan, who has great affection for the former premier Grant Devine, will be appreciative of this. Their response, Mr. Speaker, was to bring in a tax regime in 1990 that saw an increase — an increase — in the sales tax. Not only was it an increase in the actual amount that it went up, to 7 per cent,

but they decided that they would apply it to everything. Harmonize it completely, following in that great economist, Mr. Brian Mulroney's view that they would lay on . . . by increasing the consumption taxes that somehow this would spur on the economy.

Mr. Speaker, it simply didn't work. It did not work. When we came into office, I was happy to in 1991, join this government's staff in terms of working to restore some of the fiscal health to this province.

The work that was done was difficult work. I had the opportunity to work for Ed Tchorzewski when he was the Finance minister, and I can tell you that the decisions that members on this side made were tough ones. Tough ones not simply in terms of being tough medicine, but tough on the individuals who were making them.

I think about these people today as I stand in this House and talk about this budget because I think that it was a lot of the foresight that they had and the ability to build I think a common interest among Saskatchewan people that we wanted to dig ourselves out of this debt. We wanted to dig ourselves out of the trench that the Tory government of the day had dug Saskatchewan people into. Part of that trench served as a schism between urban and rural Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker. And I think that this was something which caused great concern for many of us.

There was a sense of divide and conquer in their budgets. There was a sense that you could only give to one by taking from the other. I think we all know, Mr. Speaker, that that is simply not the way that we want Saskatchewan to proceed.

This budget today that the Minister of Finance introduced is a good budget for urban people, it is a good budget for rural people, it's a good budget for working people, it's a good budget for farmers, it's a good budget for Northerners, it's a good budget for seniors, it's a good budget for students, it's a good budget for young people.

Mr. Speaker, this is a good budget because it's a balanced budget; it's a fair budget.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Thomson: — One of the great successes of this budget, Mr. Speaker, I think comes in the fact that we today are able to reinvest in many of the public services the Saskatchewan people have asked us for over the years.

I want to just review very briefly some of those investments. We heard a great deal, and in fact the amendment before us today proposed by the Leader of the Opposition, I believe, is that we should eliminate — eliminate — that part of the budget which would see that reinvestment in public services. That we should pass a motion in this House, a rider on this budget in essence, to fire the additional people that this budget would hire to provide community services.

Well these are not the big, nasty, evil bureaucrats that they think sit in ivory towers around Regina, Mr. Speaker. I've yet to meet anybody who is that. But the members opposite certainly

present that in question period and present that in terms of their approach to the media.

I'm not sure how these 88 new full-time positions that are going to deal with forest fighting are big, bad bureaucrats. I'm not sure why the members opposite would oppose us making an investment in those new 88 full-time positions. I'm not sure what it's going to translate into because we all understand that there's not many forest fires in the winter. Most of those positions will hit the ground this summer as we start to look at how we deal with forest firefighting.

The forest fire situation, I want to say to my colleague, the minister for SERM (Saskatchewan Environment and Resource Management), I have been very pleased with the new approach that has been taken in terms of a rapid response for us, both employing northerners but also being able to get into those fires to protect our forests on a much faster basis. And I think that we are seeing a great, great success there.

This is not only an investment in forest firefighting, this will not only be an investment in the people in the northern part of this province who will be employed to go and fight those fires — this is a support to our forest industry, Mr. Speaker. And we need to understand that, that businesses in this province rely also on public services in order for them to have a good environment in which to conduct their businesses.

And I think all those members opposite need to do is to go and talk to Weyerhaeuser or talk to any of the forest companies in the North, and you will hear them say that one of the single most important things that the Government of Saskatchewan provides to them is decent forest firefighting protection. And they say that because we are protecting their opportunity to go and create jobs and to create wealth. That's part of what we do. It's one of the successes of SERM; it's one of the successes of the way that we organize our public services. And the businesses will support that.

Mr. Speaker, there's an additional 86 full-time employees to work on highway construction. The members opposite spent all of last term, all of last session, asking us what we were going to do in terms of the highways.

This budget comes forward with a plan to invest over \$900 million over the next three years in highways. It is an investment in terms of maintenance of our highways; we will be dealing with advanced twinning of the Trans Canada Highway, which is particularly important to those of us in the southern part of this province.

I can tell you while the Trans Canada Highway barely skirts my riding — I think I have the east-bound lane in it; no actually I have the west-bound lane that runs in my riding, the east-bound lane, I think, is in the member for Wascana Plains's riding — we have a great interest in being able to see that this highway is able to move forward because it's important to the economy of our province.

It is no surprise that the city of Regina speaks at great length about the need for us to protect Highway 1 and move forward with enhancing it so that we are able to protect that east-west route.

I think that it's unfortunate that the federal government was not able to come up with a north-south entrance for us under the new approach to NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement) in the highway system, so we're not able to have a portal directly into the province.

But what we do know is that there is a portal in Winnipeg, south of Winnipeg in Emerson. We know that there is one in Alberta where truck traffic will move up from the US (United States) into Canada. That necessitates us to deal with the Highway 1 situation. Because that truck traffic, Mr. Speaker, will come up from the United States from the trade corridors there, will move across our province, and will allow businesses to take better advantage of those transportation routes.

We need to make sure that that investment is protected. We need to make sure that the money is there to advance our highway system. We need to make sure the Highway 1 is safe — not only for the truckers but for the citizens who travel on it back and forth to visit family and friends in other provinces, and perhaps even take a vacation.

Mr. Speaker, that's part of what this budget does. And it's something that I'm very proud of. We're also making an investment in terms of resurfacing many of the highways that currently are twinned. And I use as an example, Highway 11.

I'm not sure if the members travel much between Saskatoon and Regina on Highway 11, but it is a very heavily used route. And I am very pleased that we have announced that we will be resurfacing a great amount of that highway this year.

That's money in this budget. That's money that will be done not only by private sector companies, but will also be done by government employees — those same evil bureaucrats that the members opposite seem always fit to attack.

Mr. Speaker, this is I think an important thing. One of the reasons we have made an investment to hire more people in the Highways department for construction and repair is because in our discussions with the highways builders, they have told us that they did not want us to ramp up too quickly because they feared what? — they feared the companies from out of province would come in and take the work.

Could we more aggressively twin our highways? Yes we could, but we know that the jobs would not go to Saskatchewan people, Mr. Speaker. We know that the risk of this — and this is not from us saying it, not the NDP; this is the road builders saying it — they know that the risk is that we would see companies come in from Manitoba, companies come from Alberta, to compete with them for that work.

And I think that this is something, that this is a very creative and positive approach because it invests in Saskatchewan people and in Saskatchewan's road builders.

Mr. Speaker, another great . . . another issue of significant importance for our reinvestment, and particularly important to Regina, is the investment in 71 new full-time employees, full-time equivalents, to deal with the correction . . . with the correction system.

The Regina Correctional Centre, Mr. Speaker, is under great stress. We understand that both in terms of its capital needs but also in terms of the stress it puts its workers under. These investments, these additional 71 full-time positions will help deal with some of the pressures that these employees have been feeling in terms of overtime.

I think as members opposite if they . . . or all members in this House, if they happened to watch CBC (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation) news last night would have seen a very interesting — I guess you don't call it article — a news items, feature documentary almost, on the correction systems and some of the pressures that are in it. These are very stressful positions.

We know that here in Regina at the Regina Correctional Centre there are unique circumstances. Some of these 71 new, full-time positions will help to deal with that, will help to support these employees so that they have a safer environment in which to work.

That's a reinvestment I'm proud of. I don't believe that these are just big, bloated bureaucracies. These are people that are necessary to protect the public safety.

Mr. Speaker, the other thing that's important for us to take a look at is our ability to respond in those areas where officers of this Assembly have pointed out that we have been deficient.

One such investment clearly is that which was pointed out in the Child Advocate's report and our need to respond with an additional 60 full-time equivalent positions in terms of child protection. We are all aware of some of the very heart-wrenching, heart-wrenching cases that have been brought forward where we have seen children slip through the cracks because we have not been able to have that investment there. Where we have social workers overworked.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, that is a shame and it is something that this Assembly has dedicated time debating. It is something that now this government has responded to in a very positive and proactive way.

I could continue going through the list, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but I'm not sure that it serves any purpose other than to highlight the fact that these 570 full-time positions are not big, bad, scary, bloated bureaucrats. These are people who work in our communities and provide services the Saskatchewan people have called for.

And yet the members opposite have in front of us today an amendment which would roll back all those positions. We have to assume that by their amendment what they're saying is we don't need to protect those forests. That we don't need to put those additional resources into highways — that the highways can wait. That we don't need to fix the safety problems that we have that the unions have pointed out time and again at the Regina Correctional Centre. That we don't need to look after those children who may be at risk as a result of the caseloads being too high in Social Services.

(15:00)

That's the impact of the amendment to this resolution and that

is why we cannot — should not — support it. A reinvestment in public services can be a positive thing. A reinvestment in the people who work in our communities is a positive thing when those people are in the front lines. That's what these 570 positions deal with.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, could we have simply buried it in the budget? Certainly. Could we have not made a big deal of it? Could we have hidden it? Could we have found some other way? Probably.

But you know what, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we believe that people have a right to know what their money is being spent on. To this day, I could not tell you what those billions and billions and billions and billions — and I could say it 12 to 15 times — those billions of dollars that the members opposite rang up when they were in government, I couldn't tell you what it went to.

Because I look around and I say, what were the public services? What did they invest in? We had a situation that wasn't sustainable — a dollar and a quarter in spending for every dollar they took in.

Well, Mr. Speaker, today I have to say, and I know business points this out and other people point it out, we should be more aggressive in paying down the debt. We have taken a balanced approach in this. We responded when people said that they needed tax cuts. We did that. We responded in every one of the last five budgets by reducing taxes — taxes for people, taxes for business.

Why? Because it was good for the economy. Why? Because it was good for our families. That's what we did, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

We have gone and we have reduced the debt. We have reduced the debt as a percentage of the GDP, we have reduced the debt in real dollars. Mr. Deputy Speaker, that's something that we have to be proud of. Those reductions have allowed us to reduce our interest payments so that today we spend twice as much on education as we do on interest. Much different when we took office when the interest payment sucked up more money than we could spend to educate our children.

Today, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we are making a third set of steps that are necessary, and that is the reinvestment of our public services.

As I talked to people around my constituency over the weekend about this budget, they tell me that they are . . . well to be very honest, well they tell me they're pleasantly surprised. That this is a side of the NDP government that they hadn't seen in a long time and they're very pleased that we have been able to move forward to terms of those reinvestments.

I would be remiss . . . I don't want to spend a great deal of time — I know there are other members who have a great deal to say today and in the days ahead. But I do want to say that I am pleased with the investments we are also making in terms of infrastructure in our universities.

The University of Regina is a very important institution to

Saskatchewan. We are very lucky to have two excellent world-class universities here in our province. There's no doubt that the University of Saskatchewan as a full-service university is extremely important in terms of the work that it does to educate Saskatchewan people in all professions.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'm particularly pleased in the investments we made in the past budgets in things that'll allow our scientific community to move forward, like the synchrotron. Investments that we are making, I can tell you, in terms of changes to student aid.

As a former Student Union president at the U of S (University of Saskatchewan), it's something near and dear to my heart that we are able to provide financial assistance to people from all classes or all walks of life to be able to go back to university, go into the universities, and retrain, re-educate, and move forward into very successful, productive careers.

The way that the universities have established themselves I think speaks well in that we are able to have here, in Regina, a discrete set of programs which assist also in terms of our economy growing. The investments that we have made over the past few years in the research park here in Regina are very important. And I think we've taken a look at what has happened in terms of the Innovation Place, the investments that were made 20 years ago at the University of Saskatchewan — and continue to be made — are very positive.

I believe that in the next decade we will see our investment today, the seeds that we've planted at the University of Regina — it's not an Innovation Place research centre — research park, you'll see that bear fruit too.

Those investments are not competing with Saskatoon's Innovation Place. They are not competing with investments elsewhere. What they are doing is allowing this university to establish itself in a niche area that is of great interest to Canadians.

Take for example the work that's being done at the Toronto technology research centre. Take for example the fact that we will have Canada's centre for greenhouse gas study. That'll be here in Saskatchewan. That's an investment we are pleased to support through our capital spending. That is something that we will continue to support in terms of providing research and educational opportunities to Saskatchewan students, and indeed, Canadian students. That's part of what we are doing here in Saskatchewan. It's one of the things that Saskatchewan people can be proud of.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, people will often ask why do we need such a big investment in our universities? I say simply take a look back at the work that has been done, the investments that were made many, many years ago in terms of agriculture at the University of Saskatchewan. Take a look at the work that was done by folks like Seager Wheeler and look at how that has supported our economy today.

It's interesting, when I was a Student Union president, one of the very big investments that happened at the time was an investment in the College of Agriculture building. I think it's interesting to note that it was one of the first times that the

Hutterites put money directly into the universities. They did it even though they don't send their people off to the university. They did it because they understand the research that is being done there helps them move forward in terms of farming. I think all of us, Mr. Deputy Speaker, can be proud of the work our universities are doing.

When I look at Saskatoon, I see the successes that are spinning off today as a result of that and how it's made our economy stronger. When I look at the research park which is down the street from me, I know that in 10 or 15 years a new member for Regina South — perhaps the same member for Regina South — will have an opportunity to stand and talk about the great work that it's doing.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I won't take a great deal more time today, except to say that I will be voting against what I consider to be a mean-spirited amendment which attacks working people and attacks the services that Saskatchewan people have been asking for. And I will be voting for the budget that has been presented by the Minister of Finance that reinvests in Saskatchewan's people and our economy.

Thank you very much.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Harpauer: — It's an honour today to stand before this Assembly and enter the debate about the budget on behalf of the innovative people of Watrous.

I've listened intently to this debate so far and I'm quite willing to give credit where credit is due. I am very impressed that the government is adding money in education, highways, agriculture, and health. All of these areas are of critical importance to our province and all of these areas were in dire need of increased funding.

I'm also willing to give the government credit in another area. And they've managed in just over two short weeks to completely overwork a new phrase, and I have no doubt they will continue to use it to nauseam in the weeks and months to come. The phrase I mean is gloom and doom. There has not been one speech given by a member opposite that the phrase has not been used. So they do deserve credit for their lemming mentality, their lack of originality, and their mindless parroting abilities.

So as not to disappoint them allow me to quickly shed my doom and gloom philosophy on the four major areas of spending in the budget. For health, there's been years where they've ignored the problem. If they're not willing to fix it or even recognize that there are problems, then they are going to have to keep throwing money at it.

In the areas of education, highways, and agriculture, I will repeat, additional funding was essential so it was good to see it in the budget.

But I hardly think the members opposite should be patting themselves on the back too hard for their efforts. It's the same reasoning as the little child that keeps going to the cookie jar and taking out cookies and when he has taken out the last one

he realizes that there will be none left so he returns it and says, what a good boy am I. Well, I'm sorry. The fact that the budget has been increased after nine years of cutbacks is hardly something to be proud of.

The SSTA (Saskatchewan School Trustees Association) stated some time ago that it needed a \$32 million increase just to maintain the status quo. So with a \$33 million increase to our K to 12 education system, they will be able to maintain the status quo, and the 1.7 million that they receive over and above what they requested will, hopefully, cover the increased expenses of their power and energy . . .

If it does, then maintaining the status quo will be a real breeze for our school boards. And in Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, we call that progress, NDP style.

Agriculture, Mr. Speaker, is a very important industry to the Watrous constituency. We've spoken numerous times in this House about the NDP government tearing up the GRIP (gross revenue insurance program) contract and leaving the farmers with no effective safety net.

The farmers have defended their position at times by saying that GRIP was just too costly to maintain. And in 1991 and '92, there were bad years for our agriculture producers. The grain prices were not great and in areas the yields were very low.

But the NDP government promised to look for another more sustainable program. And they even went so far as to put together a Farm Support Review Committee. And the Farm Support Review Committee tabled a report in 1994 that contained three recommendations. And what did the government do with that report? Absolutely nothing, Mr. Speaker.

So why would we do anything to protect the future of this industry? Unfortunately that was the time that they should have done something. It was the time that they should have taken action.

The producers were doing relatively well. The revenue was allowing them a profit margin that they could live in. So had the government implemented a safety net during those years, it would have accumulated a surplus in the good years which could be drawn down from today.

But the NDP government had no long-term vision then and it has no vision now. And the members opposite can call it gloom and doom if they like. But, Mr. Speaker, in the Watrous constituency I call it reality.

Mr. Speaker, on March 26 the member from Regina Qu'Appelle Valley spoke about a book by the name of *The Last Battle*. And he spoke about the ending of the book and how it illustrated the difference of viewpoints amongst different groups of people.

And he compared this illustration to the difference between the members of the government and the members of the official opposition. He came to the conclusion that the members of the opposition were convinced that there was no hope for Saskatchewan, no possibility.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I too would like to use a comparison today, and it's similar to that of the member opposite, but it comes to a slightly different conclusion. I have mentioned numerous times in the House that I have three daughters.

When the oldest two were quite young, I used to marvel at their unique and very, very different personalities. The oldest was a delightful, dreamy kind of child, who only saw the positive things in life, who would always be taken by surprise if something negative confronted her. The second was more of a realist. She was a perfectionist who was very task-orientated.

One time when I was driving with the two girls, they were sitting by their respective windows and they were watching the ditch go by. And my oldest one commented, look, Mom, look at all the flowers. And the second one quickly chirped in, yes, but they're surrounded by weeds.

I was not appalled by my daughter's negativity, nor did I reprimand her for talking about doom and gloom. She saw the flowers, but she also recognized a potential threat to those flowers.

Mr. Speaker, I love Saskatchewan and I love Saskatchewan people. And I can assure you that all the members of the official opposition have the same sentiments for our great province. But my job, as a member of the official opposition, is to put forward concerns of the people of the Watrous constituency and hope that the government will listen and will address those concerns. That is the purpose of the official opposition.

But let's imagine for a moment, and I'm sure the members opposite will help me out here, that we had a day in House that the official opposition did not do their job. The member from Melfort-Tisdale could stand up and bellow across the floor, as we all know he does so well.

Mr. Speaker, last week, a young gentleman from my constituency was in a motor vehicle accident and was rushed to the Melfort hospital where he was immediately stabilized. And from there he was taken by ambulance to Saskatoon, and he was admitted immediately and a surgeon was waiting for his arrival, along with an available operating room and a full O.R. (operating room) staff. The young man was operated on within minutes of his arrival and he's doing great.

Mr. Speaker, could the Minister of Health kindly tell the members in this House how this happened?

The minister could stand up and reply, Mr. Speaker, I would gladly like to tell the member opposite how this happened. It's because the young man ate fruit salad every day and he is in the best of health. And I'm quite proud to say that he'll mend nicely.

The question could be followed by the member from Kindersley. He could say, Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Agriculture. Mr. Speaker, one of my constituents phoned and said that he's one of those producers that we keep hearing about somewhere, that has a negative income, and he doesn't know how he's going to pay his increased power bill.

Mr. Speaker, I assured him not to worry. A \$25 cheque is on the

way to help him out. So he should just take his mind off his worries, check his high-speed Internet, see what the prices are like on the CWB (Canadian Wheat Board) Web site. Mr. Speaker, the guy still seemed a little depressed, so could the Minister of Agriculture please tell us here today what other good news we can give this producer.

(15:15)

The Minister of Agriculture could reply certainly, Mr. Speaker, I would be more than delighted to give this producer more good news. Due to the vision of this NDP government he can seed 50 acres to grass, Mr. Speaker, and he can buy himself a cow. Mr. Speaker, if he milks that cow he will cut down on his grocery bill, and in this province we call that value added.

Mr. Speaker, the headlines the next day could read: The fruit salad is an answer to Saskatchewan's health care. And drink milk — value-added diversification ends agriculture crisis in Saskatchewan. And we could all feel good and go home to our constituencies. Somehow I don't think that would be effective government.

Mr. Speaker, the official opposition has a job to do. Both sides of the House can see the flowers, and we believe in Saskatchewan and that is why we're all here. The potential of this province is astounding, and the potential of the people in this province cannot be measured, but we've got to recognize the weeds, Mr. Speaker. And we've got to have the ability to recognize what is holding this province back, and we've got to fix it.

Mr. Speaker, we've got to have a vision. If there are no problems, if everything in this province is just good news, then why is our population growth stagnant? Why is a third of the out-migration of this province in the age group of 15 to 24 years, and over half of the age group, 15 to 34 years? Why are we the only province in Canada that showed a net job loss in the last year, according to StatsCanada?

Why is our health care waiting list significantly longer than other provinces? And perhaps the most important question is, why is this NDP government remaining naive ostriches, and totally in denial of those real statistics?

You know, Mr. Speaker, since the session's began, I've been called mean-spirited, I've been called hard-hearted, a trash-talker, and on Monday night I think I was even called a duck. And, Mr. Speaker, I've been told that the NDP government are the only ones who care about social programs and the quality of life for all of Saskatchewan people. I've even had that shouted across the floor to me since I began speaking today. We have to care about all Saskatchewan people, not just the rich.

Well Mr. Speaker, I would like to tell the members opposite two things. You do not have to be a socialist to have a social conscience. And you do not have to worry about the quality of life for the rich in this province because the handful of six-figure income earners that are left in this province, the ones that are not working for the government, probably won't be here for long if we continue down the path that we're going.

Do I think social programs are important? Absolutely. Do I think publicly funded essential health care is important? Definitely.

But how are we going to continue to fund education, health care and social programs if we continue to tax the people out of the province; if we continue to have red tape, fees, rules, regulations and laws that do everything possible to discourage the growth of a private sector economy? How are we going to continue to finance social programs if the number one employer in this province is the government? If more people in this province are taking out more than they're contributing, how can we sustain that for years to come?

We have a diminishing private sector in this province, Mr. Speaker, and we need to get past the Robin Hood mentality or our private sector will deplete to a crisis level.

Mr. Speaker, my constituency assistant recently phoned 40 businesses in the Watrous constituency. Most of those businesses could be categorized as medium-sized businesses. They would employ between 10 to 80 employees. And the question that she asked them was when did they establish?

Mr. Speaker, only two businesses have opened their doors since 1991. That is two out of 40. Watrous is not a remote area. Watrous is our centre of Saskatchewan. It is the core of our province and only two out of 40 phone calls were to businesses that established since 1991.

With the diminishing working age people and diminishing businesses and subsequently diminishing job opportunity, how in the world does this government plan to maintain our publicly funded social programs, health care and education that they believe they're the only ones that care about?

This budget spent money and it spent money in areas where it was desperately needed. But it didn't address the problems of this province and it's not going to be sustainable for the future of our province.

Someone needs to explain to this government that job creation does not mean that the number one employer is government. Five hundred and seventy new employees. They should be ashamed. And they explain it by saying that they're front line employees. And if they are, I applaud that.

However, everyone had to tighten their belts — from our farmers to our education system to our municipal governments to our health boards — but not our NDP government. They could have looked within their departments, streamlined their departments, and found the funding within their own departments to hire those very front-line workers that we so desperately need.

Thirty million dollars extra for government. Thirty million dollars spent for people that will be taking more out of the government budget than will be contributing back in.

And yet the members opposite sit and sanctimoniously accuse us of Alberta envy, as if Alberta was a distasteful, disgusting place on this earth. And I suggest to them, Mr. Speaker, that they suffer from Alberta blindness. And I think it is totally

irresponsible on their part not to look at Alberta and not to look at all the provinces of Canada and examine what they're doing right and what they're doing wrong and learning from that.

You know, Mr. Speaker, when you look at Alberta's budget you'll notice the revenue page is laid out similar to ours with one major difference. When you look at our numbers, you have to add three zeros because the numbers are in thousands of dollars. When you look at Alberta's numbers, you have to add six zeros because their numbers are in millions of dollars. Basically it's a difference in revenue from 6 billion to 19 billion.

Well, hello, that's just a little bit more than a minor difference, Mr. Speaker. And the government's excuse that the difference is solely due to oil revenues is wearing a little bit thin.

Are they doing something right? I think so. Are they more likely going to be able to sustain social programs and publicly funded services than we are? I suggest they are.

Mr. Speaker, this budget has little to offer the people of the Watrous constituency. Hopefully it will keep the doors to the Lanigan and Watrous hospitals open — but we're not sure. Hopefully it will address the major potholes on highways 15 and 20 — but we're not sure about that either.

The people of the Watrous constituency have been ignored for so long by this NDP government that a little bit of hope is all they have left because they certainly have no trust in their government. The people of Watrous will not see any cuts to the PST (provincial sales tax), any cuts to gas tax, or any cuts to their income tax, but they will have increases to their power bills and to their energy bills. And in all good likelihood, due to the lack of the NDP vision and lack of support to our municipal governments, they'll see an increase to their property taxes.

Mr. Speaker, in the current school year the Watrous constituency had more students enrolled at the U of S than any other constituency in this province. When these students graduate, are they going to find that the number one creator of new jobs in this province is our own government?

Mr. Speaker, this is not a sustainable environment in which to grow our province. The direction that this government is heading is just plain wrong.

So if the members opposite are so disturbed by our gloom and doom dialogue, then I suggest they start to govern with responsibility and start working for the Saskatchewan people — all the people of Saskatchewan — instead of building an empire of bureaucrats.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I would like to say that I will not be supporting the budget; however I will support the amendment put forward by my colleague from Canora-Pelly.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I rise in this House today to support the budget

because, Mr. Speaker, I believe we've got the best budget in Canada. And furthermore, Mr. Speaker, I believe we have the best Finance minister in all the free world.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Mr. Speaker, my message is a message of optimism and confidence. The people of Saskatchewan want their government to be confident and they want their leaders to be confident. And I tell you today on this side of the Assembly the coalition government has been deflecting constant criticism from that opposition side, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because they have no plan.

And a moment ago the member from Watrous was talking about the cookie jar. Well let me refresh the memories of the people of Saskatchewan. When they were in power, Mr. Speaker, not only did they take all the cookies, but they took the mills that were associated with making those cookies and they took the fields that grow the flour to make the cookies, and they took the cookie jar, Mr. Speaker. So when they talk about cookies, Mr. Speaker, they're the cookie monsters right across the way, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Furthermore, they talk about Alberta envy — Alberta envy, Mr. Speaker. They talk about Alberta envy. They accuse us of being Alberta blind. Well I want to tell you, Mr. Speaker, after eight balanced budgets . . . count them, eight in a row, balanced budgets, something that they're immune to. Eight balanced budgets.

I want to show reference to this budget 2000 article in the Regina *Leader-Post*. And it does an across Canada analysis of what Saskatchewan costs all the families. And what I want to point out, Mr. Speaker, to their beloved Alberta — health premiums in Calgary is \$816; health premiums in Saskatchewan is zero.

Mortgage costs in Calgary is 8,691, Mr. Deputy Speaker; in Saskatchewan it's \$5,503. Home heating in Calgary, \$1,913; in Saskatchewan, \$1,087. Electricity in Calgary, 1,458; in Saskatoon, 836. You look at telephone costs: 289 in Calgary; Saskatoon is 282. Auto insurance: 1,909 in Calgary; in Saskatoon, 996, Mr. Deputy Speaker, 996.

So you look at the difference. In Calgary the cost of living is 17,264; in Saskatoon, it's 14,526.

And, Mr. Speaker, I want to present this particular information to those members across the way, and especially the member from Rosthern who keeps bad-mouthing Saskatchewan and saying that Saskatchewan is a bad place to live.

We don't have Alberta envy on this side. They want to move to Alberta? I say time and time again: there's the highway, see you later. We've got a province to build, Mr. Speaker, and we've got a budget that builds the province of Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Mr. Speaker, this budget talks about

transportation, talks about technology, talks about a wide variety of challenges that we have. And I just wanted to for one second talk about some of the educational support that we have.

This budget makes the largest investment ever in Education, Post-Secondary Education and Skills Training, it's \$1.1 billion, Mr. Speaker. That is good news — 1.1 million. School operating grants up 40.8 million to attract and retain the best teachers; 21 new elementary and 21 new secondary community schools in rural and urban Saskatchewan; high-speed Internet. Mr. Speaker, the list goes on.

And I want to send this list over to the member from Rosthern so she knows exactly what's so positive about Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, I want to show this letter from . . . this letter, Mr. Speaker — don't take our word, I got another letter here — and the letter is from the Canadian Association for Community Education. And it's a letter addressed to myself, certainly as a member of this government. It says, quote:

Thank you for caring about our children and for expanding the community school program for at risk and Indian and Metis children and youth in our province.

It goes on to say, Mr. Speaker:

I am so proud to say that I come from a province that puts our children first. Providing service to those who are most in need is appreciated more than you will ever know.

(15:30)

And that's an unquote, Mr. Speaker, and I'm done, I'm finished there. And this letter is coming from Fay Stupnikoff who is a counsellor at the Prince Albert Northcote . . . Sorry. She's the president of the Wesmor Community High School, and of course, that's in Prince Albert.

Mr. Speaker, I also want to send this letter over to the members opposite, the doom and gloom members.

Now I told people in Saskatchewan, you don't have to take our word for us that this government's on the right track; this coalition government is making things happen — making things happen — \$960 million in Highways spending for the next three years. Oh that's not good enough for that side.

The greatest income tax cut in the history of Saskatchewan's politics — oh, that's not good on that side. Massive injection into the health care system — oh, that's not good on that side. Education — 1.1 billion — it's still not good that side.

So, Mr. Speaker, what are you guys about? What are you guys about? Tell us: what is your plan? You get up every day in the Assembly and you rant and you rave. The bottom line is you have not got a plan. What is your plan? What is your plan? No plan.

And, Mr. Speaker, I'll say this. This budget — this budget — has all the components to build a brave new Saskatchewan. And I say to those folks across the way: every error that has negative impacts, they created. And I say shame on them. Shame on you

guys for doing that. They should never ever create division in this province, but that's how they thrive.

Mr. Speaker, I've got lists and lists and lists of what the budget does. And again, if the members opposite want me to share them with them, I most certainly will do that.

But the most important message I have today, Mr. Speaker, is about the budget itself and what it says. We have a brand new leader and the brand new leader's making a bold statement as part of this coalition government. And that statement says it is now your turn Saskatchewan, we're going to invest into you. We're going to invest into the roads, into the kids, and into schools, and the list goes on and on and on.

And I say very carefully, Mr. Speaker, what is their plan? What is their plan? They have no plan. They never had no plan. And every day they get up in the Assembly and they pick something out of the sky. Oh, the sky's going to fall tomorrow, Mr. Minister of the Environment, what are you going to do about it?

Well let's wait for that to happen. The sky's not going to fall. The sky's not going to fall at all. And I would urge the people of Saskatchewan to believe in your province — to believe in your province, to believe in your children, to believe in your community, so we're able to build together as a government and as the people of Saskatchewan a bold and brave new future.

Mr. Speaker, I don't know how many more times I've got to tell the folks throughout my constituency and the province of Saskatchewan that we've got one terrific budget, one terrific team, and one terrific future, and that they should not listen to the doom and gloom. And what's so shameful, Mr. Speaker, about this budget is not that it's good; what's so shameful is those folks out there are writing to all the people and they're saying, oh, this is what's bad about it.

Well the doom and gloom I say to them is resist — resist that doom and gloom because we have to have confidence in Saskatchewan. And this side certainly does. That side wishes they were Alberta. Well as I mentioned, move to Alberta, we'll see you later.

Mr. Speaker, very important. In northern Saskatchewan, SERM now has a budget of \$130 million, Mr. Speaker. A 30 per cent increase from two years ago. And how we're using that money, Mr. Speaker? We're talking about safe drinking water. As my colleague from Melville says we're talking about protection of the forest and monitoring of the forest. We're also talking about fire management — very, very good. We're talking about SARCAN.

We're talking about all these support systems out there for the people of Saskatchewan and that's where the money's going. And what's wrong with that? Well they'll get up and say, well, there's something wrong somewhere, we'll find it. And, Mr. Speaker, they're going to find it.

And I also say shame on those folks. Shame on the folks across the way for saying that those people you hired are pencil-pushing bureaucrats, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, that is far from the truth. Those people are coming off the unemployment lines. They're beginning to work. And those

working people pay taxes.

Shame on them for attacking the working people. The working people have a right to work.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Shame I say to them, Mr. Speaker.

And you go down the list, Mr. Speaker, you go down the list. And the most impressive, the most impressive message people caught throughout the whole province was when the Minister of Finance got up and said, in 1993 when he took over the mess after a couple years, we're paying more on interest than we were on education. And today the progress, eight years later — eight years later, Mr. Speaker — it's now double what we spend on education as opposed to the interest. Now that is progress.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — And I look across the way on budget day, Mr. Speaker, on budget day when the Minister of Finance was giving up . . . was giving his speech and giving up a lot of good information to folks, I looked across the way, Mr. Speaker, and body language showed that they were depressed.

And the reason they're depressed, Mr. Speaker, is because of my message from day one when I said to them, you are going to admit that this is a good government; and you may not say it, but you're going to admit it.

And last Friday, Mr. Speaker, as we done our budget, I looked across the way and there was a long, long line of sorry folks that said, geez, these guys are good, these guys are good, they know what they're doing, Mr. Speaker. But we know we have a lot of work ahead of us and that work will continue.

Now they talk about the coalition government across the way, and you look at the makeup of the Saskatchewan Party. There's a coalition of sorts right there, Mr. Speaker. Reformers, do they have Reformers in there? Yes, they do. Have they got the disaffected Liberals that were thrown away? Yes, they're gone. And have they got PC (Progressive Conservative) members in there? Oh yes, they do. There's Tories in there. And have they got Canadian Alliance supporters? Oh yes, they do. They're all in there.

But do you know what happened, Mr. Speaker? The attention is, oh, let's not have the attention on the coalition across the way. Let's have the attention on the coalition this way. Well do you know what's so bloody bad, Mr. Speaker, about this whole arrangement? It's people in Saskatchewan know there's a coalition across the way. And that coalition, I say to you, Mr. Speaker, never had Saskatchewan's interests at heart and that's why it's to their advantage to create doom and gloom and division throughout the province.

And we are going to fight back, Mr. Speaker. We're not taking that any more, as the people of the province have indicated to us on numerous occasions.

Now I spoke about . . . I spoke, Mr. Speaker, about some of the challenges with the health care system. And across the way they

say, privatize everything. That's their solution. And we say, no way. No way. We don't believe in that.

We believe that health care has to be affordable to everybody. Everybody in the North, East, West, southern Saskatchewan — everybody's got to be covered. And . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Well no, no, no. The rich can take care of the better part of health care. We'll look after the rich. That's their solution.

Well I say to you that on this side of the Assembly we will look after every Saskatchewan resident through our health care to make sure that it responds to their needs, not to their pocketbook, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Now I focused a bit of attention on their agenda and I say, you guys today that as always, their little honeymoon just ended with this budget on Friday. Their little honeymoon is over and the people of Saskatchewan are going to quickly learn about that bride over there that's never going to be wed. That bride over there has a lot of hidden things.

Now let's go back a bit, Mr. Speaker, to another mantra, when they talk about privatization, Mr. Speaker. Let's privatize. Let's sell out the Crowns. Well you know what happens, Mr. Speaker, if you sell off SaskEnergy and SaskTel and the likes? The cost of operating a home in the province of Saskatchewan will escalate.

But the real danger, Mr. Speaker, and the real danger . . . And those people across the way, the right-wing individuals across the way, they say, let's sell out those Crowns and we'll have a whole bunch of money to play with.

What happens now if the Crowns become private, Mr. Speaker? No more dividends for the people of Saskatchewan to keep these costs down. Higher costs. But if you're a private corporation and you have, say, a SaskTel or you have, more importantly, a SaskPower, then you will sell your power to the highest bidder. That makes economic sense.

So the highest bidder may be somebody from the States. And what happens to the service in the province of Saskatchewan? It goes down. We'll have blackouts. We'll have brownouts. We'll have loss of service. But these guys no, no, no, that's fine. We're okay, we'll take care of Saskatchewan. Well I say to you that private . . . the Crown corporations will never be privatized on this side of the House. And the people of Saskatchewan have got to watch out across the way, because their privatization mantra will not protect Saskatchewan people at all.

Mr. Speaker, very important, very important. The budget sets a bold new course. We will fix the highways. That song went right through Saskatchewan, and it was such an effective message, Mr. Speaker, that it knocked the member off of his chair. Now that's very important for people to know, is nobody expected that kind of spending — including the members opposite.

Now the most amazing thing as well, Mr. Speaker . . . I've said it again and I'll say it again, is that their hero, their national hero, Stockwell Day, said, well, we do have a western

conscience; we elect Western Canada. So I'm going to stop at the Regina airport. I'm going to say hello for an hour or so. Then I'm going to meet with the Sask Party guys. The member from Kindersley was supporting me last time in this leadership race. He's my buddy.

And the member from Arm River was supporting the other guy — what's the other guy's name? I forgot his name; he's gone — Preston Manning. And the Leader of the Opposition was saying, oh, Preston's a good guy. Well the Leader of the Opposition lost. The member for Kindersley forces won that side, so they all backed up Mr. Day, and as a result, Mr. Day was their national hero.

And what does he do when he comes here, Mr. Deputy Speaker? He comes to Regina, what does he tell them? There's no subsidies. No subsidies. Mr. Manning said that too. There's no subsidies for farmers. No subsidies; zero. But nobody showed the attention to that fact, they all said no subsidies. But these guys say oh no, no, no, that's not what he meant. Well why don't you guys echo what your national leaders have said — no subsidies for the farmers.

Now on this side we put our money where our mouth is. We don't hope that some national leader will come along and save the day. We're taking a leadership role and, Mr. Speaker, agriculture — we're moving forward. We're moving forward. We're going to bring back them flour mills and bring back them cookies, Mr. Speaker, because the people of Saskatchewan want us to.

So I say to you today that privatization . . . the fact that the opposition over there, they spend left and they vote right. Now you can't figure that out. How do you spend left and vote right? And everything that they offer to the people of Saskatchewan, they will find out very quickly that the people of Saskatchewan will not buy into that kind of thinking — the voodoo economics, the snake oil economics, as our Minister of Finance likes to say.

And the bottom line is that's the weakness of the opposition; is they try and be everything to everybody, but they just don't know how to balance those numbers, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, this budget is a good budget and it's going to continue on. We are proud of Saskatchewan. A lot of successful stories in this province, a lot of successful stories. And I say to the members opposite, perhaps it is time that you sent up that white flag and say yes, this is a good government, that coalition government is getting things gone. Look at the spending. Look at the stats. These speak for themselves.

And I tell the people of Saskatchewan, to both their hearts and to their minds, that that bride that we almost wed, well, the honeymoon's over. The real facts are going to come out, the real facts are going to come out that that particular bride . . . Perhaps we should not have had those cookies in bed, Mr. Speaker, because that will be a crumby bride. And that's where I think the problem is, is people will soon find out, after the first night with these guys, that is not what the people of Saskatchewan want nor what the people of Saskatchewan deserve.

Mr. Speaker, when it comes to budget advice and it comes to managing this province, the last place that I'm going to go look for advice is from the opposition. Thanks, but no thanks. We took your advice and that resulted in \$15 billion in debt — 15 billion.

We are not going there for financial advice. We will not go there for financial advice. I had to say it twice so they understand.

And that's why today, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that's why today in the constituency of Athabasca, there's good news in the budget. For SERM, there's good news in the budget. For environmental protection, good news in the budget. For income tax, for highways, information technology, for students, Crown investments — the list goes on and on and on.

And I know, and I know, Mr. Speaker, that across the way, based on the body language last Friday, they're saying: geez, these guys are good, they're good.

But we know we got to get a lot better, make sure that all of Saskatchewan buys into the program because it is going to be a good program.

So in closing, Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pride, on behalf of the constituents of Athabasca and the entire staff members of SERM — many of whom are doing some very good work in water quality testing; good support of the communities out there in environmental protection and forest protection and the list goes on and on — that I stand today very proud, very proudly in support of the best budget that this good Finance minister has delivered over the past eight years. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(15:45)

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And may I say how much I appreciate this opportunity to participate in this budget debate, and the operative word is opportunity. I, however, Mr. Deputy Speaker, will attempt to limit my remarks to the budget. I won't be offering up a dissertation on cookies as the member from Athabasca.

This in fact is an opportunity for me to say you're welcome to the new Premier, who is participating in his first budget as the leader of the government. And after listening to this government's fiscal plan, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I have no choice but to say you're welcome because this is a very predictable piece of work.

In fact, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I predicted exactly what would be in it when I addressed the Assembly during the Throne Speech debate. At that time, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I predicted that this government had lost its way and that it was about to revert to the old NDP default position — bigger government, more spending, all of that as the tonic to solve our problems. And the budget address, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in fact confirmed those suspicions.

This government has no vision for the future so it's looking

backwards for answers. If nothing else, Mr. Speaker, the government has found its way back to the '70s. We're back to the future. Mr. Speaker, this government is a Commodore 64 in a Pentium world.

Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, the issues facing this House and this province cannot be solved by invoking the old images of the good old days. Our problems and the opportunities that present themselves will require a bold, new direction not some worn out political manifesto that has been a total, unmitigated disaster.

In the last 30 years, Mr. Deputy Speaker, Canada's population has doubled, Alberta's population has tripled, our's has stagnated — just like the government opposite. And what is that government's answer to that sad reality? Another 570 employees.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I can't help but wonder if the Minister of Finance even read the material in his own budget documents. It quotes analysts who say economic strength is the result of lower taxes and growing consumer spending spawned by tax cuts. These analysts do not say more government spending is at the heart of any economic success. In fact they say just the opposite, Mr. Deputy Speaker, less intrusive government spurs the economy.

So what does this government do in the face of the advice contained in its very own budget document? It does exactly the opposite. It increases spending and hires another 570 people.

Mr. Speaker, the government has missed the entire point of the exercise. Instead of reading its own tea leaves, it reverts to the tried-and-true socialist dogma — more and bigger intrusive government. In fact, they in one fell swoop have reversed nearly a decade of budgetary balance. This is the first budget in nearly a decade where expenditures have exceeded . . .

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

Mr. McCall: — With the indulgence of the member and leave of the Speaker, to introduce guests.

Leave granted.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Mr. McCall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would just like to take this quick opportunity to introduce Messrs. Daniel Malik and Ted Flett. They're with the Queen's Park legislative intern program. They're here to study us, they're here to see how we do our business for the people, and I just wish them well with their time here and encourage the members of the Assembly to do the same.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ORDERS OF THE DAY

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.

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Mr. Deputy Speaker, this is the first budget in nearly a decade that has expenditures exceeding revenues. Welcome to the socialist utopia — spend today and spend again tomorrow.

Now, Mr. Speaker, this government will try, they will try, they will try and tell us that these excessive expenditures are reasonable because we are using our savings to balance the spendthrift ways of this new administration. That, I guess, is supposed to make it better. But I wonder who the minister's really kidding when he utters such nonsense. He tries to make it look like he has a surplus budget — he doesn't. This is a deficit budget. Whether he covers the shortfall out of cash or he incurs debt, the result is the same, Mr. Deputy Speaker — the province's balance sheet is diminished.

We get to hold on to some extra debt, roughly a quarter of a billion dollars worth, instead of paying it off. So let's not kid ourselves by saying this is a balanced budget. It's not. And all of this, Mr. Deputy Speaker, just to reaffirm the government members' socialist credentials. And a quarter of a billion dollars is a lot of money, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Last year this same Minister of Finance thought a quarter of a billion dollars was enough money for the Highways department. It's enough money to increase the energy rebate by 25 times if he so chose.

Unfortunately, Mr. Deputy Speaker, this is the price of having socialism restored in Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — And what will we have to show for all of this government expansion? Well we'll have the pleasure of being advised by Mr. Dennis Gruending. Wonderful! I'm sure everyone is looking forward to that.

And I'm even more sure that the people of Saskatchewan will draw great consolation and comfort in the revelation that a defeated NDP Member of Parliament will be working on their behalf; earning a big pay cheque as they bounce down our crumbling highways or as they wait in pain for a spot in surgical ward.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this government has lost its way. That became abundantly clear in the leadership race that chose our new Premier. The party opposite has discarded any sense, any sense whatsoever of fiscal restraint. Within days of his selection, the new Premier put his stamp on government by spending more money than the government will take in, and that in the face of record revenues.

No, Mr. Speaker, this is not a government with an eye to the future. This is an outfit with its course firmly charted on

heading right back to the bad old days as ideology prevails over reality.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, this government is the problem. It has no vision; it has no plan. Its best strategy for economic growth is to put political hacks on the payroll. And now they want to make the problem bigger by making the government bigger.

They have increased their spending in virtually every department. The members opposite make a lot of noise about the new spending in health and education and highways, but the reality is they are spending increasing amounts all across government. And that spending is out of line, Mr. Deputy Speaker, with every other measure that we recognize and know. It exceeds inflation. It defies the reality faced by so many people in this province. As our farmers watch their incomes erode, the members opposite inflate their expenditures and bring their buddies onto the payroll.

Mr. Speaker, this is not only a disgrace, it defies the Saskatchewan reality. When families in this province are cutting back to make way for increases in electrical and gas rates, this government is headed the other way. It's spending more money than it takes in. It's increasing spending, while the people it's here to serve are coping with rising utility bills, approved by the members opposite.

No, Mr. Speaker, the only people this government is in touch with is the Saskatchewan Federation of Labour. And we now know what the government's number one priority is, Mr. Deputy Speaker — helping their friends in the big unions. When the head of the Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities was complaining that rural Saskatchewan was ignored in this budget, the head of the SFL (Saskatchewan Federation of Labour) was crowing about how wonderful it was. And no wonder. There are 570 new workers, government workers, to pay union dues to the SFL and its unions.

If nothing else, Mr. Speaker, at least we know that the government's priorities are. They've made that abundantly clear. It's the typical socialist mantra, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Big government is good; so a bigger government, a more expensive government, must be better.

Mr. Speaker, I know all too well how this government has lost touch with reality, and how it's mired down . . . it's being mired down, and with the big unions, and that they've thrown their support behind the new Premier, and how that has taken them completely off of track.

And I guess, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it would also be incumbent upon one to also ask where the Liberals are in this coalition, Mr. Deputy Speaker. As I understand it, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Liberals are in fact going to support this growing monstrosity of government, when during the election campaign they in fact promised to reduce government by 300. And if I remember the words of the Leader of the Liberal Party at the time correctly: going to be reducing government by something in the order of 300 hacks and flacks, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Well what happened to the election promise? Where are they now? They're right in bed with the NDP, voting right along with them, supporting bigger government, more government,

and more intrusive government.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, as the mayor of Porcupine Plain, I saw how this government ignored the needs of this province's municipalities, and how at one point, Mr. Deputy Speaker, they attempted to obliterate them completely through their forced amalgamation scheme. And how they always put the interest of their political supporters ahead of local government.

Local governments have been put in an untenable position, Mr. Deputy Speaker. They have had their revenue sharing cut back, and they have had to make some pretty scary decisions. Decisions that were very, very difficult. But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I think we all in this House realize that they made those decisions. They understood that that was their role, their responsibility, their way to contribute to the well-being of the province.

And what do they get for that co-operation? What do they get for that effort in this budget, Mr. Deputy Speaker? Absolutely nothing. As a matter of fact, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I just received a letter from my hometown of Porcupine Plain, the town of which I served three times as mayor, and they were responding to our amendments on the budget. And, Mr. Speaker, I would like to read this letter into the record. The letter goes as follows:

Dear Mr. Bjornerud:

While the province basks in revenues from PST, fuel tax, personal and corporate income tax that have increased from 660 million in 1978 to more than 2.7 billion, the revenue-sharing pool has shrunk 60 per cent, from a high of 68 million in 1988 to its current 27 million.

The province forced municipalities to tighten their belts and to increase property taxes to perilously high levels to help compensate for decreasing federal transfers and high debt charges. However, now that the federal transfers are on the rise and the province's fiscal house is in order, municipalities that were asked to share the pain, get to see no gain.

My council was very disappointed with the lack of commitment to municipalities in this year's budget, the same municipalities that through the delivery of essential services, provides the core of a quality Saskatchewan lifestyle.

My council supports the Saskatchewan Party's proposed amendment to the 2001 provincial budget calling on the provincial government to provide an additional \$30 million in municipal revenue-sharing grants this year. Thank you.
Yours truly,

Signed Barry Warsylewicz, town administrator, town of Porcupine Plain.

(16:00)

I think it's very, very obvious, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that if we don't get some assistance for our municipalities in this budget and if the government members opposite and the Liberal

members of the government don't support our amendment, taxes are going to go up. People will see their property taxes increase and it will all be entirely the fault of that government.

Mr. Speaker, we can see through the members opposite. They know exactly what they're doing and we know it too. Mr. Speaker, they see the writing on the wall. They know what's in store for them in the next election and they've resorted to the lowest form of politics — pork-barrelling.

They're spending hard-earned tax money on padding union membership lists. They're spending hard-earned tax money to hire their buddies. And they're leaving the citizens of this province out in the cold to fend for themselves, to cut their own budgets, while the government opens the tap on this new spending for all their buddies.

That's the new vision, Mr. Deputy Speaker, offered by the government members opposite. Let's take care of our own because we don't have much time left, is what they're saying with this budget. They have put their own partisan interests and political payoffs ahead of the interests of the people that they were sent here to serve.

Mr. Speaker, the cat's out of the bag. This government can't hide any longer. We've seen their true stripes, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and it's not a pretty picture. They're spending like drunken sailors. And what will we have to show for it at the end of the year? Well, Mr. Speaker, we will have Mr. Gruending in Regina, organized labour is the new elite, and all of that is clearly on display for everyone to see. The big unions who backed the winner during the leadership campaign are now calling the tune.

Sadly, the people of this province are the ones who are paying, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And I suppose they consider that quite an achievement.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in good conscience, I cannot support this budget. But I will be supporting the amendment that recognizes and respects our third level of government and the people they serve. Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Trew: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It is indeed a thrill to stand and speak to this budget, this wonderful budget for the people of Saskatchewan. Mr. Speaker, I can't help but feel somewhat sorry for the poor souls stuck in the opposition benches where they're going to be stuck a long time. It must be, Mr. Speaker, very, very painful.

This is a group that says, gee, there haven't been tax cuts. They're saying, haven't been tax cuts. Well it kind of flies in the face of what happened January 1, 2001, which is January, February, March — it's not a hundred days ago — three months ago. January 1 this year, the flat tax in Saskatchewan was eliminated. It's gone. Gone. Who introduced the flat tax? They did, Mr. Speaker. They did when they were in government.

January 1 the debt-reduction surtax was eliminated. Gone. Gone. January 1 this year, the high-income surtax in Saskatchewan — gone. Who introduced those three hated

taxes? The Tories on the other side.

Mr. Speaker, we have tax reductions happening in record amounts this very year. We have a wonderful budget that continues to build, continues to build on the successes that we have enjoyed for a number of years.

Mr. Speaker, we've heard people say, and I hear it in my constituency, I hear it when I'm around the province, this wonderful province of Saskatchewan — people say there are areas that concern them hugely.

One of them has been highways. We've listened. In fact we drive these highways, and frankly it's hard to maintain highways when you have so much money going to interest on the debt and other things like health care and education and all of the needed services.

Couple that with rail-line abandonment and the resulting increased heavy traffic flow, the grain that's shifted from rail to our highways, mostly . . . I shouldn't say mostly, but much of it goes on our tertiary highway system, the thin membrane system, and it was just never, ever designed for B-trains or heavy traffic, Mr. Speaker.

But this budget, what have we got? Highways and Transportation, more than 311 million being spent on Highways and Transportation this year. That is very, very close to a 25 per cent increase in expenditures for Highways. Mr. Speaker, I don't know how you'd describe this as anything other than fabulous news for Highways.

Couple that with the commitment we have to do even more in Highways. We have a commitment, Mr. Speaker, that Highway 1 West is going to be twinned by the fall of 2004 all the way to the Alberta border. That's been a long-standing sore spot with many people and we're delighted that we're able to accelerate the twinning of that highway.

Primary pavements are going to be upgraded to a 20-year lifespan. Regional pavements are going to be upgraded to a 25-year lifespan. And 800 kilometres of thin membrane surface road is going to be upgraded to granular pavement. Northern roads, highways, and airports are going to be improved. There's other safety improvements.

Mr. Speaker, great news for Highways. A great budget where we have seen the budget increase by nearly 20 . . . well 24.7 per cent. I'll call it 25 per cent. Small wonder, Mr. Speaker, it's painful for members opposite. You don't hear them talking much about highways these days. They know that we're on that file.

Mr. Speaker, I hear members opposite saying, on the one hand, you should spend more. On the other hand, they're saying, you should do more tax cuts. Then we have the member for Carrot River Valley stand up and say, but you're really in deficit.

And then what do they say other days — but you should spend the Fiscal Stabilization Fund. That has been the mantra from many of the members opposite. You should spend the Fiscal Stabilization Fund in its total. They call it a \$500 million election slush fund. This is what members opposite call the

Fiscal Stabilization Fund that we're using this year, Mr. Speaker, using some of the money out of the Fiscal Stabilization Fund.

And I can tell you, we're using some of the Fiscal Stabilization Fund next year as well. We've been able to save up in the bonus years, the great years. We have a savings account that smoothes out the dips and the peaks in our Saskatchewan economy.

They would have nothing in that account. They would just have us riding a roller coaster every year. This group across the way, Mr. Speaker, show their callousness to working people. And how do they show it? This very day in question period, what were they asking the Minister of Municipal Affairs, my seatmate from . . . the member from Melville? They were saying, cut the \$30 million that we have in this budget. Cut the \$30 million that was going to be used to hire 570 full-time people. They're saying cut that, Mr. Speaker; don't provide those services.

Well how does this work? How does this work? Highways are an issue. We're hiring people to fix and to build new roads. They say fix the roads but don't hire anybody to do it. What a wonderful, wonderful Alice in fairyland world they live in. Fix the roads but don't spend any money; fix the roads but don't hire anybody to do it.

Mr. Speaker, we've hired people in health care — they're included in that 570 people.

We've hired people right throughout government services including, I'm delighted to say as minister responsible for the Department of Labour, we've got 10 positions there, and much needed positions. And it'll provide an extra boost for the good people in the Department of Labour as they deliver occupational health and safety and many other ready-to-work programs, and farm safety programs — all kinds of good services that the Department of Labour deliver.

And we've got good news in this budget. Ten of the positions there coming from that very \$30 million that they're saying, as early as two and a half hours ago . . . or as late as two and a half hours ago, they're saying don't spend the \$30 million. It's astounding.

Not much wonder it is so painful for members over there. They're saying, Mr. Speaker . . . in fact the member for Carrot River Valley said, if we don't support their amendment — their amendment respecting the \$30 million — they're saying the taxes will go up. Flies absolutely in the face of reality. Flies totally in the face of reality. Because by us sticking with our budget, we've got \$30 million worth of services that are being provided to all of the people of Saskatchewan.

We've got highways being fixed. People said let's fix highways.

People said, let's do some things with respect to education. Mr. Speaker, I'm delighted to tell you that we're doing things with respect to education. School operating grants are increasing \$40.8 million this year alone — \$40.8 million. It's the biggest increase the Department of Education has seen, I believe, ever. With some of this money too, Mr. Speaker, we're doubling the

number of community schools. We're expanding it to 42 new . . . we're going to establish 42 new community schools, including elementary and secondary schools, in both rural and in urban Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, these are things that connect schools and communities, gives young people a place to go after hours, gives the whole community a focal point. It's a wonderful, wonderful, forward-looking step, and I'm delighted to say that we provided the money in this budget for education.

Mr. Speaker, health — always, always a major concern of Saskatchewan people. I know it's a concern of mine. I suspect health care is a concern of literally all 1.025 million Saskatchewan residents.

We have, Mr. Speaker, for example in cancer care, the Saskatchewan Cancer Agency this year alone is getting a 22 per cent increase in its funding — 22 per cent. Astounding. This is a budget that is going to help a significant number of us. I pray that it never has to help you or me, or any of our family or friends; but the reality is, it may well. But a 22 per cent increase for people that really need the help. And that is going to be used so that we can provide the latest treatments and the therapies, and to enhance existing services. I think that's money really well spent. I know that's what my constituents have shared with me; they wanted money there.

We're going to be providing a second air ambulance plane. Well, Mr. Speaker, not much of a secret that that plane isn't so much for people in Regina. This is really a plus for rural Saskatchewan, a huge plus. So we've got the second air ambulance plane in this year's budget.

We've expanded programs to ensure that Saskatchewan children will have the best possible start in life, and we're helping them to develop into healthy and productive adults. There's a big boost in the health budget. We're going to be screening at-risk mothers, and really going after that particular file.

Mr. Speaker, what a great budget, and I am so proud to be standing here in support of it. As I mentioned, taxes having gone down . . . let me just put that, taxes having gone down, into a bit of context particularly for the members opposite.

(16:15)

In 1992 Saskatchewan had the second highest rate of taxation. People were taxed second highest in the entire country of Canada. Today we're the fourth lowest taxed people in all of Canada. We have done this by, as has been pointed out repeatedly by members on the government side, we've done this by delivering eight successive balanced surplus budgets, Mr. Speaker — eight in a row. We've systematically reduced the debt. As a result of that, the interest payments on the debt, or the mortgage if I can describe it, the sorry-Tory mortgage, the payments on that sorry-Tory mortgage have been reduced. In fact it's remarkable, the Minister of Finance pointed out I think in his budget speech; if not, it was somewhere else.

To put it into context, frame this, Mr. Speaker, in 1994 we were spending, for every dollar we spent in education, we spent a

dollar on interest on that sorry-Tory debt — dollar for dollar, dollar for dollar, dollar for dollar. It was actually more . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . I thank the hon. member for Swift Current for sharing that — it was actually more that we spent on interest. Let's not make too fine a line — dollar for dollar.

Today in this budget, the Minister of Education was able to announce that we are spending virtually \$2 on education, virtually \$2 for every dollar that is spent on interest on that sorry-Tory debt, Mr. Speaker. So we've shifted and are able to double our commitment to education in Saskatchewan.

This is something we are very, very, very proud of and want to continue to make improvements in that line. But the only way you'll do it, Mr. Speaker, is if you don't go back, if you don't go back to having foxes in charge of the chicken coop, if I can describe it that way. We have to be vigilant. We have to be vigilant with public finances.

It's an obligation that we owe to our constituents on the government side, we owe it to the people of Saskatchewan, we owe it to our children and the future of Saskatchewan, the future citizens. We cannot, we cannot start becoming reckless, as members opposite would have us do.

Mr. Speaker, budget day — I noted from my chair while the minister was delivering his speech — when it got to agriculture, it was really interesting. All of a sudden, the opposition faces got real long and they got real sad. Now what was it about the agricultural portion that made their faces long? I think it was the 35 per cent increase in agricultural funding, and their disappointment that we were on that file. That our Minister of Agriculture, the Deputy Premier, is on that agricultural file big time; that we recognize the importance of farming in Saskatchewan.

And I want to say on that, Mr. Speaker, there's never, there truly is never enough that we can do. That's a hard reality. I wish it were different. I wish it for some very personal and family reasons, but I wish it for all of the people in rural Saskatchewan. I do sincerely wish there was more that we could do on all of those areas.

Mr. Speaker, what a great budget, what a great budget. We have introduced tax cuts for small business, having cut the rate from 8 to 6 per cent. Next year, January 1, the amount that is covered of income goes from \$200,000 to \$300,000. That's going to capture even more small businesses with even more good news. We're helping the very people that deliver the jobs in Saskatchewan. The job growth is largely in small business. Mr. Speaker, this budget addresses those very businesses and I'm just, just really pleased.

There's been changes to the personal tax form. The tax credits have been raised, and I'm sure other members have spoken about that, Mr. Speaker. So in the interest of time I'm not going to go there.

I want to close by just saying how very, very proud I am to be part of the government that has delivered its eighth successive balanced surplus budget that is driving interest costs down. And a government, Mr. Speaker, that is listening to the people of Saskatchewan, whether they live in Regina Coronation Park,

my constituency — anywhere else in Regina; whether they live in Melville, Saskatoon, Kindersley, Marengo — anywhere in this province, Mr. Speaker. We're listening and we're acting.

This budget listened and it reacts and it's acting in the best interests of all of the people of Saskatchewan. I am very, very proud to be supporting this budget, and of course in opposition to the amendment. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McMorris: — Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise in the House again today to reply to the budget speech that was delivered last Friday by the Minister of Finance. It was very interesting.

As I listened to him deliver the budget this year, Mr. Speaker, he had a couple of coin words that he used over and over and over again, which I'm going to touch on in a little bit. But it's also similar to what he had to say last year when he spoke on the budget. And I remember him calling it, before the budget, you just wait, this is going to be a historic budget. He used historic I don't know how many times. I don't have the speech in front of me and I wish I did. But he talked about how it was such a historic budget.

Well it was historic, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It was a historic budget because it . . . for trying to sell it on tax cuts; it was a tax increase; they expanded the PST. The budget went south on him last year. So it's very, very interesting when we stand in the House today and we listen to the Minister of Finance talk about his budget. His budget wasn't historic last year and he knows it. And it's really interesting how he never used that term again when he dealt with this budget, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The terms that he used in this budget, Mr. Deputy Speaker, was — and if I could do it — now that's progress. Or maybe it was: now that's progress. And he talked about progress. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I went through his budget address. And I read through it page per page. And do you know how many times he used that phrase — now that's progress — Mr. Deputy Speaker? How many times? Does anybody got a guess?

Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, he used "now that's progress" 15 times. And I read it in the speech, the budget address, that's how many times he used it. And I really find it interesting, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that he would have used that term over and over and over and over and over again.

And you know why he used that term over and over and over again, is because if you say it long enough, if you tell yourself enough times, now that's progress, you're going to believe. And it wasn't progress, but that's what they believe, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

But you know, I want to ask the Minister of Finance and really wish that he would have used that about 6,700 more times last year. If he could have used that 6,700 more times last year, he might of kept the 6,700 people that left this province, because of that government, back in this province.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McMorris: — Mr. Deputy Speaker, so if he could say it a few more times, maybe he could get those people believing that they should belong in this province and not leave the province. Because the only one that he convinced, now that's progress, are the members on that side of the House.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, there's another issue when it comes to population. Some of the numbers that have just recently been released, is that there's 500,000 people born in Saskatchewan living outside this province right now. Do you know what that would do to our tax base? If you kept that 500,000 people in this province paying taxes, then I would applaud you when you say now that's progress. Because, Mr. Deputy Speaker, this Minister of Finance had missed the mark on that many, many times.

Like in my reply to the Speech from the Throne — when I looked through the Speech from the Throne, which I thought was a flop and that's when we needed to flip the House — I looked at the Speech from the Throne and I tried to pick out some of the things that I thought were very positive. And there was the odd positive issue in the Speech from the Throne.

And I will say honestly, that when I go through this budget address there are some positive things in the budget address and I do want to touch on those. I do want to touch on those because he did hit the mark on a couple of issues.

But it's really interesting, Mr. Deputy Speaker, when we go through some of the things that this administration has done over the last two years, year and a half to two years, with the influence of the Liberals — because they have influenced this government so much, you know, it's really amazing — but if we look at some of the things that they've done in the last year and a half that I've had to applaud them on, it hasn't been Liberal influence that's created that. It's been this party. It's been the Saskatchewan Party right here that have influenced that government far more than the two Liberal members sitting on that side of the House.

If I remember, in the last provincial election we talked an awful lot about a provincial audit . . . or sorry, a health care audit when we wanted to look at the health care system. And instead of throwing a pile more money into it, we wanted to look at it and see what is wrong before we throw a whole bunch more money into it. It didn't make sense to keep throwing money into a bottomless pit when they couldn't explain where the money was going in the first place. So we called all election to do some sort of a health care audit.

Now I'm not sure that the Fyke Commission is going to hit exactly all the issues that we wanted, but at least they listened to what we had to say and implemented it. It's one of the better plans they've had in the last year and a half and it came from this side of the House. But I will compliment them on implementing it, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

We talked a lot about taxation and income tax and that type of thing in the last provincial election and they have started to try and get their mind around decreasing tax.

Now I've had letter after letter and phone call after phone call into my constituency office and showing me how, here's my

pay stub last year and now in this historic budget that's tax cut, tax cuts and here's my paycheque this year. And they had no more take-home pay this year than after the historic budget that that minister released.

Some of the people that phoned into my office said, boy I could use a lot less of those historic budgets and I'd be a lot better off, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

But they are. They've listened to us. They've listened to us and they're trying to get their heads around tax cut. Now he's yelling from his seat, the Minister of Finance is yelling from his seat that, oh they're not comparing apples to apples, but they're comparing January to January. It's similar months, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The other issue that comes up, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is the Rate Review Committee. We talked about a Rate Review Committee. We said that in the last provincial election, and I have to applaud the government because they introduced it, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And the Rate Review Committee has had a bit of work cut out for them in the last year and a half with some of the increases and they're going to have more work cut out for them as we look at a possible increase in SaskEnergy rates of 40 per cent.

You know, at this point they yell . . . they comment from their seats on the opposite side and compare it to Alberta, compare it to Alberta. Well let's wait in six months, if that 40 per cent increase goes through, and then see how much they're squawking from their seats, Mr. Deputy Speaker. They think that we've got walls around us that are going to protect us and it's not the case, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

So those are some of the ideas that we have put forward that it influences provincial government. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, when we talk about, as I mentioned at the start, that the Liberals have had so much influence on the provincial government and we can name probably three of four of the bigger issues that they have tackled have come from this side of the House, not from the Liberal Party on that side of the House.

So for the Liberal members to think that they have no say if they're on this side of the House, they'd have a lot more say on how that government acted as opposed to being muffled and stifled like they are right now.

But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I do want to talk about some of the other highlights in the budget because there are some highlights in this budget. And as I said when I campaigned, if I thought something was good, I have no problem announcing it in this House. And so I'm going to run down a couple of things that I could find in this budget that really make a lot of sense.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we campaigned on and we still talk about increasing this province's business sector. Small business is a main engine to our economy. And I was very glad to see the Minister of Finance introduce the cut on the small-business tax by 2 per cent over two years, and I applaud him for that.

And, you know, it was very interesting when I hear some of the members opposite quoting from some of the different newspaper articles. As a matter of fact, it was the member from

Cumberland that was commenting on Marilyn Braun and the Canadian tax federation.

(16:30)

And I looked at the quote that he used in *Hansard*, word for word, and then I went into the paper and I looked at the quote that she gave, and they were two separate, totally different things. It was very interesting how he cut off the statement of the minister . . . of Marilyn Braun, the person from the Independent Business.

And what she said is, she said it was a good first step, but that's all it is. They need to take step two, step three, and step four. And there's no plan for that.

So I will give you credit in reducing the small-business tax by 2 per cent — from 8 per cent down to 6 per cent in the next two years. But if you ask small business what they would like to see, they would like to see a two- or a three- or a four-year plan to get it down to zero so this is a tax-free haven for small business. That's what they want. And that's what we have proposed.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McMorris: — Mr. Deputy Speaker, I will applaud the minister, as I said, because he kind of got it right, but not all the way. So for that we'll give him credit.

The second part in the budget that I do have to compliment and comment on in the budget was the professionals that can incorporate. It was something that we talked about in our election platform. It was an idea that we have talked about for two years now. And I applaud the Minister of Finance for allowing professionals to incorporate — lawyers, accountants — to have the opportunity to incorporate.

And I won't even go any further than that other than to say good job, Mr. Minister of Finance, because that is something that is needed in this province.

The third area that I want to comment on and compliment the Minister of Finance on and the government opposite, is they are putting more money into spending.

When I spoke on the reply to the Speech from the Throne I talked an awful lot about some of the highways in my province. And I related one collision that happened on Highway 35. That was after being in traffic safety for 20 years before I entered the life of politics, I could honestly say it was a road-related, it was a major contributing factor in that collision. Now thank heavens no one was killed.

But they are looking at repairing some of those roads. They are looking at putting more money into highways, and I applaud them for that.

After the budget speech I talked to a number of the people that that was going to affect. I talked to some of the road builders that I know of, a couple of them that I know quite well, and I talked to the Road Builders Association who were here and commented on the budget, and they were happy to see that

money.

But what they really wanted to make sure, and what was very interesting when I talked to them is, they were a little hesitant. They wanted to know if that money was going to go into pavement or is it going to go into more yellow trucks or is it going to go into more personnel? Because what we need to fix the highways is not more people behind desks, but more pavement in the potholes. That's how you fix the highways, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And so we need the people that are on the front lines.

And I talked to the minister . . . I talked to the chairman of the Road Builders Association and he was very, very hesitant because he knows that they have no problem wrapping up their businesses, wrapping up their employees, wrapping up their ability to fix highways if this government gets out of the road and doesn't try and stay in front and expand their bureaucracy and let the money go to pavement. And that is very, very important.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I will compliment the government on the fact that they have increased the funding in highways, but will be watching very, very closely to see if it goes to the highways and not to more bureaucracy. Unfortunately I think we already know part of that answer as we go through the budget a little bit further.

After talking to a number of the constituents in Indian Head-Milestone — whether it was out at Milestone at a hockey game or at a dinner theatre or whatever it might have been, at a farm auction — and I talked to them and I brought up, what did you feel of the budget? What did you think of the budget? And really, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and Speaker, they really didn't have a lot of positive to say about the budget, unfortunately. And I tried to compliment the government and I tried to say oh, no, no, no, you've read it wrong; I'm sure you've read it wrong.

We've been able to sit in the House for the last three or four days and listen to the members opposite espouse on how wonderful this budget is. And I said to them, I said, you know, well you've got to be wrong because when you listen to the 27 members or 30 members, counting the Liberals, or whatever the numbers are, they kept telling me oh no, it's got to be a great budget. I was telling them it had to be a good budget. And they said well really there is nothing there that we can really grab onto.

And one of the things that came up over and over and over again is that a lot of those people that I talked to run businesses. They run their farm, for example. And you know, a classic example of a person that is running his farm who sees his commodity prices drop, he sees his . . . so it affects his revenue stream, he sees his land base dropping, what does he do? Does he go hire a whole bunch more employees to manage that farm when he sees his revenue dropping and his land base dropping?

But you know it's interesting when you look at the government opposite, when they see their customer base, the population in this province dropping by 6,700 people last year, 500,000 people over the last number of years, when they see — and admittedly by this government opposite — that their revenue is dropping, they have said it a couple of times, their revenue is

dropping and is dropping significantly. So what does the government do, being the stars of business that they are on the opposite side? They increase their bureaucracy. They hire 570 more people to increase the bureaucracy on a business — if you look at it as a business — with population dropping and revenue dropping.

There isn't a business in this world or a business manager in this world, that would look at that and say that is a good business decision, Mr. Deputy Speaker . . . Mr. Speaker, sorry. But unfortunately, the people opposite do.

Mr. Speaker, I look at what they have done, and they've talked many, many times on how they need all these extra employees. And I won't deny that there are, in some instances, in some places, some hiring may have to be done, after looking at the department, after looking at the department and redistributing and reorganizing, because I'm not sure that all departments that we need another 570 employees.

You know and the minister of . . . it's been said from the other side, it's been said a number of times and I forget exactly how many — I didn't have it written down — how many more social workers they're going to be hiring . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . And 60 more social workers. But I want to read from a release dated December 17, 2000, December 17, 2000, from the Government of Saskatchewan. And what this news release says is:

Historic decline in welfare cases.

Historic decline. It goes on, where the Minister of Social Services goes on to say:

This decline in caseloads is unprecedented in the province.

It's unprecedented in the province. In other words, the issues and the problems in social services are declining so much that we have to hire another 60 social care workers. Doesn't that make sense? Now here it is in black and white. They made a historic gain in social services and in welfare cases, so what do they do? They hire more people, Mr. Deputy Speaker . . . Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, you know, you can go into . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order, order. The member will continue.

Mr. McMorris: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, we can go on in many, many different situations like that, whether it's highways, whether it's social services — as I said, a historic decline in welfare cases. But you know, Mr. Speaker, when you look at what they have done by hiring 570 new employees, well, let's just start with the first one, for example. Maybe we should just start with the first one, for example.

Who did they hire? Well, Mr. Speaker, their first employee out of these 570 . . . and I'm sure they're only going to get better because Lord knows there's enough defeated NDP candidates out there that they can fill all 570 seats. And you know, Mr.

Speaker, maybe in all their wisdom, maybe in all their wisdom, Mr. Speaker, the Liberal content will come out because there's an awful lot of defeated Liberal members out there too that they can hire, Mr. Speaker.

But, Mr. Speaker, I want to go through this article that was written on April 3, yesterday, talking about, "Gruending lands on government payroll." You know, and it says here he'll now earn \$5,209 a month as a speech writer for the Premier — \$5,000, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I would just like on the record for people of this province to know, I would like on the record for the people in this province to know where that person came from and his background, because I think it's only fair that we realize the quality of person that this government is hiring.

Let me give him a little bit of background on where this fellow is from. He ran in the 1997 election, and guess what happened to him by the people of Saskatoon. Did they want him? No, they didn't want him; he lost. Well you know he ran in a by-election in 1999 and he got elected for about a year, a year and a half, and then he ran in the last federal election but he ran in a different constituency, Mr. Speaker. He ran in the last federal election. Did the people of Saskatoon-Rosetown want him? No, they didn't want him either, Mr. Speaker. But this government does, this government wants him, Mr. Speaker.

I want to give you a little bit of his resumé. Prior to his election he had been serving as an aide to the NDP MP (Member of Parliament) Dick Proctor. Wow, he's got some good credentials there. But you know what's even more important, as the Allan Blakeney, the former premier of this province, as leading the transition team, let me tell you what this Dennis Gruending did. He was the author of a biography of the former premier of this province, Allan Blakeney. Now boy, that sure qualifies him, that qualifies him. He comes from pure red blood.

He's not only worked for an MP, he's written a book on the former premier of this province, and that's the first person that this government wants to hire of the 570 employees.

Now, Mr. Speaker, if we get a little antsy when they start talking about hiring another 569 more, you can see why. Because, Mr. Speaker, we really question. And I guess maybe . . . I'd better go back to this because there was one more statement here I wanted to talk about.

An Hon. Member: — Make sure you get it all.

Mr. McMorris: — Might as well . . . Yes, get it all out. Mr. Speaker, the House Leader, the Government House Leader — and I won't quote his name even though I guess I could because it's a quote in the paper — but the Government House Leader had to say about this member, said: this government has a track record of solid, professional civil servants.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I think there's a lot of civil servants that would be worried to be compared to that person that they just hired two days ago, Mr. Speaker. I think there's a lot of civil servants that wouldn't want their name mentioned in the same sentence as the former author of the premier of this province, Allan Blakeney, his biography, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, there are a number of issues that people have talked to me about since the last provincial election — since the budget just spent a couple of days ago — and that was one of them. It was definitely the biggest story that they came out with is that they're going to hire another 570 workers when revenue's decreasing, when population is decreasing, and the only thing that's getting bigger in this province is your government. And that's what they're having a hard time dealing with.

But, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker, they also talked an awful lot about taxes to me. Mr. Speaker, I think everybody in this province — maybe excepting for the government side — I think most people feel in this province in order to grow this province we need to attract more people. We need to attract businesses. We need to attract a lot more people. We need to double the population in this province. Because you can only tax the people that we have so much, you know. And what's happening is they're taxing so much and we're losing more and more and more that instead of increasing the population, we're decreasing the population of our province.

And, Mr. Speaker, when I talk to people throughout the constituency of Indian Head-Milestone I find that a lot of them are telling me that . . . and it's interesting because I can see this comment coming especially from the west side of the province, you know from Cypress Hills and Swift Current and all the way up, Kindersley, that the PST is a real hindrance in growing this province.

Well, Mr. Speaker, the PST wasn't mentioned in this budget. And you know I hate to say it but I have to thank the Minister of Finance because the last time he mentioned the PST he expanded it and brought in another \$160 million. You know, so I guess we have to watch what we want. But, Mr. Speaker, the PST is a huge hindrance in this province. We need to start looking at lowering the PST to make us more competitive with our neighbours, Mr. Speaker.

(16:45)

The gas tax is another issue that has come up many, many times that people are really uncomfortable with, that they'd like to see a bit of a break in the gas tax. But there is no mention of that, Mr. Speaker.

But probably the biggest thing that came up over and over and over again, Mr. Speaker — and I talked about it in the Throne Speech, in my reply to the Throne Speech, and I know all members opposite would have listened carefully with that when I replied — and I was talking an awful lot about the property tax in this province. And I was talking about people in Fillmore and I was talking about people in Indian Head and I was talking about people in Milestone who are seeing . . . they're on fixed incomes staying very close to the same, and they're seeing their property taxes increase.

And municipalities are finding all over this province . . . and I'm sure we'll see a lot of them speaking out more and more. I think we had 40 or some letters come in within 24 hours denouncing the plan, and supporting the plan that we had of how about we forget the 570 employees and give the municipalities the money to manage properly?

But, Mr. Speaker, you know, it's urban community after urban community that is going to be hurt in the next couple of months because they're going to see their property tax increase.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I don't know if you had been paying attention to the mayor of Regina prior to the budget. And I don't know . . . Well I think I do know now whether the Minister of Finance was paying attention to the news and heard SUMA (Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association) prior to the budget, because he didn't.

All of those people lined up right off the bat before the budget and said we need to change this transition, this equalization payment from the provincial government. It has been declining over the last 10 to 15 years . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . And I heard one of the members opposite say, well, it stabilized the last two years. Well when it's that low, it's pretty easy to stabilize and it hasn't gone down any more.

So, Mr. Speaker, they're really worried that their equalization payments aren't large enough and they lined up — they lined up before the budget speech — and they said, we need more money.

Mr. Speaker, we've heard many, many times . . . And in fact I think almost every one of the members opposite have talked about for eight years they've run a balanced budget.

An Hon. Member: — No, it's seven years.

Mr. McMorris: — Seven years. This year isn't quite balanced. But they've run, and they've really patted themselves on the back, and they've stuck their chests out. They've done a lot of things but, Mr. Speaker, they didn't balance the budget. Every person in Saskatchewan is who balanced that budget for them. Every person in Saskatchewan that pays property tax is who balanced that budget for you. Not you people. Not you members opposite who think that they are . . .

The Speaker: — Just to remind the member to address his remarks through the Chair, please.

Mr. McMorris: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That's the first time you've had to tell me that. I haven't had an opportunity to expound on that before, so I will try and address my remarks through you, as is proper.

But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it's the Minister of Finance that has . . . that didn't listen to municipality after municipality, whether it was the mayor of Regina, whether it was the mayor of Indian Head, whether it was the mayor . . . I know the story just prior to the budget when they talked about how many communities are struggling with infrastructure problems and the only way they're going to address it is by increasing the property tax, unless — unless — this government addresses it in the next budget. And, you know, I think of all the stories that were carried before the budget speech, that was the one that got the most air time. And they're really hurting.

And, Mr. Speaker, unfortunately this headline says it all here. It says "Urban centres shut out." Shut out of the budget, Mr. Speaker. They didn't get any sort of increase in the equalization payment and they really feel that over and over and over again

this government has balanced the budget on the backs of municipalities, backs on the government . . . on the backs of the government that is closest to the people. For they have nowhere else to turn that decrease in revenue onto but the taxpayer, but the property taxpayer, because that's the only way they can generate revenue. And so that's what has happened.

And I think, as I've talked many, many times before in this House, of going to tax revolt meeting after tax revolt meeting. Well, Mr. Speaker, I think I'm going to have to get those tax revolt clothes back on because you're going to see them spring up again come this spring and fall when they see their property taxes increase thanks to this provincial government, Mr. Speaker — thanks to this provincial government.

Mr. Speaker, and you know it doesn't have to be that way. It didn't have to be that way in this province. This province has all the equipment it needs to progress. That's progress.

But unfortunately, you know, I don't know, I guess maybe I'll use an analogy of a car that's not running quite right. You know, you've got lots of motor under the hood but you just can't get it to go. You know, you step on the gas and the energy just isn't there. And from my experience in motor mechanics, which isn't much, Mr. Speaker, but I do know that perhaps the fuel filter is plugged.

And that's exactly what is happening in this province. That government is the fuel filter and it's plugged and it's stopping the motor from really driving this province, Mr. Speaker. We need to change the government because, as one member said from our side, there's a few loose nuts and that's what's causing the problem in this province.

Mr. Speaker, we need this province to grow. And I've said it before — the only way we grow this province is by increasing industry, is by increasing population. And you know, Mr. Speaker — although I was not around at the time — but this province was at a million people in 1920 or 30, 1930. We had a million people in this province. And what do we have now, Mr. Speaker? About a million people.

And when you look at the 60 or 70 years of government in this province, we have had for the most part a CCF (Co-operative Commonwealth Federation) or an NDP government. We've had a government that hasn't been very friendly to business.

You know they talk about us having Alberta envy and everything else. But you know I haven't been to Calgary for a couple years, unlike a few of the former cabinet members from that side. Actually how many? I think there's three cabinet members from that side — there's Doug Anguish, that's right; and Ned Shillington, yes; and Dwain Lingenfelter, the former deputy premier of this province. You know I guess what I should do is to talk to them and see what the Calgary situation is like.

Because the last time I was in Calgary and I would drive up and down some of the streets, and I would look way up and I would see all these head offices of Esso and the head offices of Husky and all these companies. Was Alberta their first choice? I don't think so. Saskatchewan could have been their first choice if it wasn't for an NDP government that has driven them out of this

province, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, this government has driven money, it has driven business out of this province because it wants to control everything. If it doesn't control it, if it doesn't control it, it kicks them out. And that's what it's done.

Mr. Speaker, there's absolutely no reason why our province is a have-not province.

Mr. Speaker, I've heard many, many times from the members opposite, I've heard many times from the members opposite of how doom and gloom we are. Well, Mr. Speaker, any government that's driven the province into a have-not situation doesn't have a lot to brag about.

We've got everything in this province to make it run properly. We've got the hardest working people in this province.

Actually we've got the hardest working people in Alberta. They're all from Saskatchewan, but we've got the hardest working people there. We've got the hardest working people — 500,000 of them — all over this country that should be in this province making it tick. And they're not here and they're not here for one reason only. It's not because we don't have enough natural resources, it's not because we don't have enough business minds — it's not because of any of that stuff. It's because of an NDP government over the last 40 years that has driven people out of this province, Mr. Speaker.

And you know when you look at other provinces and how they've expanded and how they've progressed, it's just a real shame. And you know we're not doom and gloom on this province at all. The members on this side have no problem being positive about this province. We have everything . . . We have all the trouble in the world being positive about that government. The government is what we're doom and gloom about. The province is what we're excited about.

And, Mr. Speaker, I mentioned about it in the Throne Speech. But you know, Mr. Speaker, there is one party, one party after the last provincial election that garnered the most votes; and people in this province of Saskatchewan wanted one party to run this province, and the most people voted for that party. And it wasn't the party in government. It wasn't at all the party in government. And it certainly wasn't the party, the Liberal Party that are saying that they're controlling the government. They're driving the strings of government, Mr. Speaker.

The majority of the people in this province voted for one party and it was the Saskatchewan Party because they knew we had a plan for the future. And, Mr. Speaker, I listen to the members opposite and they keep saying you have no plan, you have no plan.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I already talked about it at the start of my reply to the budget speech, on the plan that some of the members opposite have implemented. We've talked about doing a health care audit. We've hounded and hounded and hounded and pushed this government to try and cut taxes. We talk about trying to reduce government and allow business to take over.

But you know, Mr. Speaker, the classic example of SaskTel getting more into business people's face. You know, I have a number of people that were running security companies in this province and what did SaskTel do? Got into SecurTek, and it took a number of private business jobs out.

Now if SaskTel got into a new business that nobody else had been into and nobody thought of and it increased this province — but when it jumps into areas where people are already in business, do we need that? You get private industry having to compete against the purse strings of this government.

Mr. Speaker, we now hear that SaskTel is getting into cable net . . . cable television. And, Mr. Speaker, we've got a number of companies in cable television right now. Whether it's Access Cable in Regina, whether it's Shaw in Saskatoon, there's a number of cable companies in the province. I can think of two, Access and Shaw. And, Mr. Speaker, if you talk to the people in those companies, they don't need to compete against SaskTel to deliver their service.

And you know, I think when I talk to a number of people around the province, I've never heard one of them say, boy, oh boy, we're really lacking cable companies in this province; I sure wish the government would get into it. Not once did I hear that, Mr. Speaker, in all the travelling I've done.

So you know it really deflates the mentality of people in this province when you hear government continually getting into the face of business.

And Mr. Speaker, when we talk about being a have-not province, it's a have-not province because of an NDP government. It's not a have-not province because we don't have the ideas and the philosophies and the hard work and the dedication to this province, Mr. Speaker. We have people moving out of this province because they can't stand the tax burden.

In fact, you know, I'd be very interested to talk to those three former cabinet ministers of this NDP government, why they moved to Alberta. Who were . . . there was Doug Anguish, Ned Shillington, and Dwain Lingenfelter moved out of this province.

Mr. Speaker . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . And yes, I was certainly glad to hear that the former premier of the province is now working at the University of Saskatchewan and the University of Regina. I think he'll be a real asset to them, although I see that now he's going on to doing a full review of the Canada Health Act and what's going to be taking place there.

But you know it's just . . . you know when we look at it — and I hear of anecdotal evidence all the time of people moving out, people moving out — and you know, when you look at Statistics Canada, the numbers prove out that people are moving out of this province because they can't stand the tax burden that this government is putting them under.

Mr. Speaker, I just wish for once that they would look at it in a different light and say, you know, let's really do some tax cutting; let's really try and attract business. Let's really be

business friendly. Let's see if we can't turn this province around. And they haven't. They've had a number of years; they've had 50 years to put it in the mess that it's in.

And now maybe, Mr. Speaker, I would ask them if they could just look at it and say, try and turn it around a little bit. But people in the last provincial election believe that we are the only party that could turn it around, and that's why we ended up with the most votes in the last provincial election, Mr. Speaker.

So Mr. Speaker, you know when we look at employment, you know, we've lost 13,000 jobs in this province. What's 13,000 jobs? There are more and more people out, it's tax base. And so when you lose a tax base you really have a hard time cutting taxes, you know, so what we've got to do is look at how we can attract business. We've talked about a number of ways on this side by dropping the business sales tax down to zero. We've talked about more aggressive income tax cuts, we've talked about a number of issues that I think would grow this province, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: — It now being 5 o'clock, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 1:30 pm.

The Assembly adjourned at 17:00.