

The Assembly met at 13:30.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRESENTING PETITIONS

Mr. Elhard: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise this afternoon to present a petition on behalf of the good people of Frontier, Saskatchewan in the extreme southwest part of my constituency. And the petition has as its main focus their concerns regarding the implications of the EMS (emergency medical services) report and recommendations contained within it. 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.

As in duty bound your petitioners will ever pray.

I so present.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I too stand today to present petitions on behalf of people in the Humboldt constituency who are concerned about the loss of their community-based ambulance services. And the petition 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 to affirm its intent to work to improve community-based ambulance services.

And the signators on this petition, Mr. Speaker, are from the communities of St. Benedict and Cudworth. I so present.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I stand today also with a petition from citizens who are concerned about the EMS report.

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.

The people that have signed this petition are all from Naicam.

Mr. Stewart: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I rise to present a petition signed by citizens concerned with proposed weight restrictions to Highway 43.

And the prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon.

Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to recognize the economic harm its plan to close Highway 43 to heavy traffic will do to south-central Saskatchewan and instead devote necessary funds to upgrade Highway 43 in order to preserve jobs and economic development in the area.

And the petition is signed by individuals from the community of Glenbain.

I so present.

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise again on behalf of people in Swift Current and across Saskatchewan concerned about the regional hospital in Swift Current.

And the prayer on the petition reads as follows, Mr. Speaker:

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

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

And, Mr. Speaker, today these petitions are signed by residents of Swift Current, Val Marie, Lumsden, Moose Jaw, Hodgeville, Morse, Kyle, and Shaunavon.

I so present.

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

I so present.

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I again rise with a petition from concerned citizens in southern Saskatchewan with reference to the cuts at 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 petitioners come from quite a wide area of southern Saskatchewan including Assiniboia, Mazonod, Killdeer, Limerick, Wood Mountain.

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.

These are petitions of citizens of the province petitioning the Assembly on the matters of:

The centralization of ambulance services;

A request for a new hospital in Swift Current;

Reversion of highways to gravel;

And the level of services at the Pioneer Lodge in Assiniboia.

PRESENTING REPORTS BY STANDING, SELECT AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES

Special Committee on Tobacco Control

Clerk Assistant (Committees): — Mr. Kowalsky, Chair of the committee, presents the final report of the Special Committee on Tobacco Control, which is hereby tabled.

Mr. Wartman: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is with great pleasure that I take this opportunity to present the final report of the Tobacco Control Committee. It was a tremendous experience to work on this committee, a committee that was composed of members both of government and opposition. The work that was done on this committee — I think the commitment of all the members who were involved was very high.

And I also want to say, as we're tabling this report, the response from the community, the community groups, was absolutely tremendous. From the health district boards; from the coalitions; from the SWAT (Students Working Against Tobacco); from the restaurateurs and hoteliers; from the hospitality organizations — tremendous commitment. We had some people, Mr. Speaker, as you well know who were with us almost through the entire course of the hearings; listening, making notes, trying to give their best response to the issues.

I think many of us were moved to a deeper understanding of the harmful effects of tobacco.

And I think, Mr. Speaker, the other thing that I found very impressive about working on this committee was that, though we have many differing opinions, that with one small exception, this was a unanimous report. And it took a lot of hard work, it took struggling, it took giving some things. But I was very impressed with the work of all committee members and with, if I may, the Speaker's chairmanship of this committee.

It was a good experience and it is my hope that, down the road, we will have very good legislation that will help us to deal with this devastating problem of tobacco use and the illness and the pain and suffering it causes.

So with those words, Mr. Speaker, I would like to move this . . . I move, seconded by the member from Moose Jaw Wakamow:

The final report of the Special Committee on Tobacco Control be now concurred in.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Eagles: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I would just like to take a few moments to explain why the committee members on this side of the Assembly included the reservation in this report.

While we all realize the effects of smoking and second-hand smoke, we believe the restaurant and bar owners have some very legitimate concerns. We had contact with many in the hospitality industry and they stated that this specific clause is a financial impossibility for them. In fact, it would force them to close their doors. Many also expressed that they are having an extremely difficult time keeping their doors open now with the increased energy and high . . . other high operating costs.

Those from smaller communities said that they have already lost their grain elevators and if this particular recommendation is acted upon, they would close their doors and the town would become a ghost town.

In the larger centres of Regina and Saskatoon, some also expressed grave concerns. Many stated that if the local people overwhelmingly supported a smoke-free establishment, they would make it that. But this would be because it makes good business sense to do so, not because it was dictated to them.

Certainly for those restaurants and bar owners who may be looking at renovations or updates, we encourage them to take the report's recommendation into consideration if it is feasible and affordable.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the members from Saltcoats and Weyburn-Big Muddy, I would like to thank the member from Prince Albert Carlton who chaired the committee; the members from Saskatoon Wakamow, Regina Qu'Appelle . . . or pardon me, Moose Jaw Wakamow, Regina Qu'Appelle, and Saskatoon Sutherland for their time and dedication to this committee; as well as a thank you to all the presenters.

Mr. Speaker, it would also be remiss of me if I did not thank the Clerks and the legislative staff for all their hard work and commitment to this very worthwhile project. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Motion agreed to.

NOTICES OF MOTIONS AND QUESTIONS

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I give notice that I shall on day no. 18 ask the government the

following question:

To the Minister of Social Services: what is the total amount of dollars that the Department of Social Services has put into the Head Start program to date?

Mr. Brkich: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I give notice that I shall on day no. 18 ask the government the following question:

To the Minister Responsible for Sask Water: how much municipal and school taxes does Sask. Valley Potato Corporation pay on their potato storage facilities to the RM of Rudy and to the town of Broderick; were there any grants in lieu of taxes paid and what is that amount?

Ms. Eagles: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I give notice that I shall on day no. 18 ask the government the following question:

To the Minister of Health: what is the complete methodology used in the gambling problem prevalent survey being conducted for the provincial government; how does this telephone survey differ from other telephone surveys conducted for the provincial government on a regular basis on a variety of issues by marketing research firms in terms of methodology, analysis and cost; what is the complete breakdown of cost to the provincial government relating to this survey?

Thank you.

Ms. Bakken: — Mr. Speaker, I give notice that I shall on day no. 18 ask the government the following question:

What was the Department of Health's definition of the following terms as they were applied and used within the health care system in 1993: acute care; long-term care; respite care; home care; health facility; hospital; urgent; and emergent?

And while I'm on my feet I have a second question, Mr. Speaker. I give notice that I shall on day no. 18 ask the government the following question:

What is the Department of Health's definition of the following terms as they are applied and used within the current health care system: acute care; long-term care; respite care; home care; health facility; hospital; urgent; and emergent?

I so present.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I give notice that I shall on day no. 18 ask the government the following question:

To the Minister of Agriculture: how many forms have been received under the Saskatchewan farmland property tax rebate program to date; and of those forms received how many have been processed and how much has been paid out?

(13:45)

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

The Speaker: — Members of the Legislative Assembly, I would first of all like to introduce eight special guests of the legislature. They are seated in the Speaker's gallery. They're eight legislative interns, young people from the Ontario legislative internship program. It's of special interest to us of course because this legislature is in the process of developing our own internship program.

The Ontario program hires recent university graduates to intern with members of the Ontario legislature. Each intern spends half of their internship working for a government member and half working for an opposition member.

They are here to experience political life in our province and are meeting with a number of members of the Legislative Assembly.

I ask them to rise one by one as I call their name. They are: Amy Dickieson, Ted Flett, Rebecca Gosevitz, Tyler Langlois, Michelle MacDonald, Daniel Malik, Nanda Purandare, and Rachel Sheer.

I ask all members to welcome them to the legislature.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too would like to welcome our eight visitors from Ontario. These political science graduates are here to observe and hopefully learn from the proceedings here in our legislature. But we think it's a good place to come because I think the opposition would agree that this is one of the most exciting legislatures in Canada.

And, Mr. Speaker, I will have the pleasure of meeting with our guests later this afternoon. And as Minister for Culture, Youth and Recreation, I am looking forward to getting their perspectives on the challenges they foresee for their generation.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the official opposition, I too would like to welcome the interns from Ontario to our legislature. We had the opportunity this morning to meet with them and they are indeed very astute in their questioning. They will make good politicians some day.

And we would like to welcome them here and hope that everyone would join us in doing so, and that they enjoy their visit to Saskatchewan.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen: — Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to the other members of the Assembly a visitor from the province of Manitoba, seated in your gallery, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, we have with us today Mr. Lloyd Schreyer. He's secretary to the compensation

committee of treasury board for the province of Manitoba.

This committee of cabinet in Manitoba is similar to our own cabinet committee on public sector compensation. And Mr. Schreyer holds a position similar to the one we call executive director of the personnel policy secretariat.

Mr. Schreyer is in Saskatchewan this week to observe the operations of Saskatchewan's human resources compensation development processes. I would ask all members to join me in extending a warm welcome to Mr. Schreyer and to wish him well in his visit here.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the House my constituency assistant, Shelley McCrea, who having only been with my office for 10 months, this afternoon will have her first opportunity to view the proceedings today in their entirety, and I trust that she will enjoy them.

Shelley has a business operations degree from DeVry in Calgary. Her and her husband Al McCrea farm in the Carrot River area. They have two sons, Brycen is three years and Cameron, 16 months, and I would ask everyone to join me in welcoming Shelley today.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the legislature, seven members of the nursing profession who are here today.

The first person — and I'd ask them to stand as I introduce them — is Carla Bolen, who is the president of the Registered Psychiatric Nurses Association of Saskatchewan and she's a member of the working group on magnet environments; Cindy Smith, who is a nursing manager at the Regina Health District and a member of the working group on casualization; Lisa Horning, who is involved with human resources at the Regina Health District and a member of the working group on casualization; Susan Smith-Brazill, acting director of policy and communications with the Saskatchewan Registered Nurses' Association; Pat Stewart, an employment relations officer for Saskatchewan Union of Nurses — she's attending today, as all elected SUN (Saskatchewan Union of Nurses) representatives are in their annual general meeting — and she is a member of the preceptorship working group; and Mary MacDonald who is from the College of Nursing, the University of Saskatchewan. She's is a member of the preceptorship working group. And they're all accompanied by Marlene Smadu from the Department of Health who is the principal nursing adviser.

Welcome to all of you.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Gantefoer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, through you to the members, I would like to join with the minister and in welcoming the various representatives of the

nursing profession, and to congratulate them on the important work they're doing on the projects as a result of the Nursing Council's initiatives.

Certainly your work is very much appreciated. Your profession is undergoing a great deal of stress, and we appreciate your commitment and dedication to it. Thanks, and welcome here.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Kasperski: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to my legislative colleagues, 28 grade 5 students seated in the west gallery. They're from Ruth M. Buck School, Mr. Speaker, and it's always a pleasure to have students from Ruth Buck. That school just celebrated its 25th anniversary this past fall and I was out there for some of the activities.

Mr. Speaker, they are accompanied by their teachers, Mrs. Friesen, Mrs. Lusick, and Mr. Weir; and parent volunteers Mrs. Rasmussen, Mrs. Larson, and Mrs. Hughs. And I'm looking forward to meeting with the group a little later this afternoon.

Please join me, Mr. Speaker, and colleagues, in welcoming these grade 5 students from my constituency.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Stewart: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I wish to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly, Mr. Lloyd Petersen of Hodgeville. Mr. Petersen is a councillor in the RM (rural municipality) of Glen Bain and a very successful farmer south of Hodgeville. Mr. Petersen is one of the councillors in that area that is very concerned with the economic damage that lowering weight restrictions on Highway 43 will cause in their area.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Adley: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the House, in addition to the representatives of the nursing profession that the Minister of Health has already introduced, representatives of people that are concerned about tobacco and wanted to be here while we tabled the Tobacco Committee report.

Some of the individuals are the Canadian Cancer Society, Saskatchewan Division; Health Canada; the Regina Health District; Regina Heart Healthy Partners; Saskatchewan Lung Association; and the Canadian Institute of Public Health Inspectors, Saskatchewan Branch; and in particular SWAT — Students Working Against Tobacco, and in particular Shane Peters and Elisha Kapell.

We've met a whole bunch of new friends in the last year while we toured the province. So would all members please welcome them here today.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Trew: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce through you to all members of the Legislative Assembly, someone that I've had the pleasure of introducing a

number of times over the years and needs no introduction. But that never stops us before and it won't stop me today from asking members to join me in welcoming John MacLeod who's with the Saskatchewan Building Trades Association. I ask all members to join me in giving John MacLeod a welcome.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Higgins: — Mr. Speaker, I would love to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly a former constituent but still a very good friend from Moose Jaw, Mr. Lorne Hill, sitting in your west gallery.

When Lorne left Moose Jaw — and I have to inform people, not to move west but to move into northern Saskatchewan to pursue opportunities there — he was sorely missed in Moose Jaw Wakamow. But it's very nice to see you here today and welcome.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Municipal Revenue Sharing Grants

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the Saskatchewan Party continues to receive letter after letter from cities, towns, villages, and RMs opposed to the government's plan to freeze municipal revenue sharing grants and drive property taxes up again.

In fact since the minister of Municipal Government sent his letter out yesterday to municipalities defending the NDP's (New Democratic Party) plan to grow the size of government instead of providing property tax relief to municipalities, the Saskatchewan Party has received another 50 letters of support. We certainly appreciate the free advertising, Mr. Speaker.

At the same time as the Minister of Municipal Affairs tells municipalities to keep doing more with less, the provincial government does just the opposite and continues to grow larger and more expensive.

Just a few examples, Mr. Speaker, of letters of support we're getting. From the town of Canora, and I quote:

Over the years, urban municipalities have borne more than their fair share of pain to help eliminate provincial deficits. It's time for some relief.

From the mayor of Yorkton, Mr. Speaker:

I, like several of my fellow City Mayors, was very disappointed to learn that we're not even recognized in last week's budget.

And from the RM of Lake Alma:

... it becomes more difficult to operate without increasing more tax to rural Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, it doesn't matter — large cities, small town, or rural municipality — all are asking for this government and this

minister to recognize that the last thing this province needs is the province-wide property tax increase courtesy of the NDP and Liberals.

I table these letters, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Members, during members' statements, I do believe that the public and certainly the visiting gallery would like to hear what you're saying. I would ask that members do cheering and they do continue with their heckling, but they distinguish that from braying and yelling.

Royal Bank Bullish on Saskatchewan

Mr. Addley: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. More good news for Saskatchewan regarding the budget, Mr. Speaker. We knew our budget was strong, Mr. Speaker, and now the Royal Bank and the Toronto Dominion Bank are proving us right.

The Royal Bank has forecast a 3 per cent economic growth rate this year and next, buoyed by the energy and livestock sectors. The TD's (Toronto Dominion) forecasted growth rate was similar at 2.5 per cent growth in 2001, and 3.1 per cent in 2002.

Saskatchewan's energy sector will fuel the GDP (gross domestic product) growth of two and a half per cent this year, outpacing the national average of only 2.2 per cent. As well, Mr. Speaker, only two provinces will outperform Saskatchewan's growth rate over the 2001-2002 period.

For many industries it's going to be a very hard year, Mr. Speaker, due to the effects from the US (United States) economic slowdown, but with our fiscally sound, accountable budget, this stress on these industries will be alleviated.

I'm proud of this budget, Mr. Speaker, and apparently so are the banks. Our government is on the path to a prosperous future, Mr. Speaker, but we will not be satisfied until we reach our destination.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Congratulations to Constable Jocelyn Schriemer

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to rise today to tell all members of the Legislative Assembly about an outstanding police officer in Saskatoon, Ms. Jocelyn Schriemer.

Mr. Speaker, Constable Schriemer has just received the Educator of Distinction Award from the Saskatoon Preschool Foundation. She currently works in core neighbourhood community schools as a school liaison officer.

Mr. Speaker, in 1999, working in partnership with Westmount Community Association, Constable Schriemer initiated, coordinated, and formed the absentee assessment team wraparound project — a collaborative, community-based, interagency project. The success of the collaborative approach

has attracted provincial attention and serves as a model for other communities and for the province.

Constable Schriemer has devoted countless volunteer hours writing proposals to secure funding for this project. She is an advocate for children, and has spoken to a variety of foundations, service organizations, and school divisions to address the issues of children that are sexually exploited.

Mr. Speaker, Jocelyn is truly deserving of this distinguished honour. She is an educator, teaching others about families and children; she lives by the philosophy: it takes a community to raise a child.

Mr. Speaker, I ask that all members of the Assembly join me in congratulating Constable Schriemer on all of her hard work and her dedication to the children of our province.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(14:00)

Unity Team Wins Hockey Championship

Mr. Peters: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Unity Midget Laser hockey team has just won the Provincial A Championship. They, in their first round, played against Spiritwood; in Meadow Lake in the second series; the semifinals were against Shellbrook; and in the final series they defeated Watson.

I'd like to congratulate the coach, Stan Weber; the assistant coach, Kevin Cey; the manager, Larry Wagner. These young hockey players were from Unity, Macklin, Wilkie, Denzil, and Maidstone, and I'd like to congratulate them all. Thank you.

Provincial Environmental Initiatives

Mr. Prebble: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to have the opportunity today to highlight some important environmental initiatives in this provincial budget.

The one I'm most excited about is our decision to move forward on wind power. Our government will purchase a minimum of 10 gigawatt hours of wind power from Saskatchewan Power Corporation for each of the next 10 years. This will allow SaskPower to proceed with construction of 10 wind-generating turbines. A tender process is underway, Mr. Speaker, and we are rolling forward.

Mr. Speaker, there's an extra \$1 million for forest industry environmental sustainability. This takes the total budget for that item up to \$1.7 million. This will ensure proper monitoring and compliance with our new forestry Act, and will let us expand forest ecosystem classification work. It will also put the staff on the ground to work with all users of the forest on land use planning.

Our government has recently created a 1 kilometre special management zone around Dore and Smoothstone lakes area and it'll put the staff in place to manage that as well, Mr. Speaker.

There is \$1.2 million of new funding to improve monitoring and compliance with respect to safe drinking water, and \$2 million for an environmental cleanup campaign. That's a pretty nice environmental package, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Eston Hockey Team Wins Bantam Championship

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I rise to offer congratulation to the Eston Bantam Hurricanes on winning the SHA (Saskatchewan Hockey Association) Bantam B Girls Provincial Championship recently. They defeated rep teams from Swift Current, Regina, Saskatoon on their way to the championship.

The team is coached by Perry Robinson and managed by Larry Thome. I would ask all members to join with me with in congratulating the Eston Bantam Hurricane Girls Bantam B championship team.

International Special Librarians' Day

Ms. Jones: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, every session at this time we take 90 seconds to recognize the absolutely invaluable year-round work of a group of very special people. So special in fact that the word is incorporated into their title.

April 5 is International Special Librarians' Day, the 10th year this day has been celebrated as part of National Library Week.

Special librarians, I remind you, Mr. Speaker, are those who work in libraries providing services to specific professions — medical libraries, science libraries, in our case, the Legislative Library.

Their theme this year is "A world of information within your reach." And that is exactly what our friends at our Legislative Library provide us — accurate information almost immediately, Mr. Speaker. Although they are special librarians, they are in the best sense of the word, generalists. They can find information on any subject under the dome, and they do it cheerfully.

Yesterday I needed information on Hollywood — never mind why, Mr. Speaker. The week before on World War II, Saskatchewan MLAs (Member of the Legislative Assembly). Before that, on the 18th century British lexicographer, Samuel Johnson. And I got it.

Mr. Speaker, Marian Powell and her staff in the building here — Tim, Joelle, Michele, Jane, Leslie, Maria, and Kim — make our life easier, our work more productive, our time more efficient, and our information more accurate. They are also without exception a pleasant group to be around and I wish them the best on their day and throughout the year.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

New Spirit of Community Partnership Award

Ms. Higgins: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Several times this

session members on this side of the House have commented on the contributions our Crown corporations make to community life in Saskatchewan. Yesterday it was SaskPower, the day before, SGI (Saskatchewan Government Insurance), making life better by being good corporate citizens.

It's interesting I think, Mr. Speaker, that we seldom read about Sprint Canada making a gift to rural schools. And I don't remember ever hearing of Rogers AT&T sponsoring a group of school kids on a field trip. We do hear about them wanting our business as urban citizens, but nothing about them giving anything in return.

I am proud to report then that SaskEnergy and the United Way of Regina have recently been recognized by the Canadian Centre for Philanthropy for their combined efforts in the Share the Warmth sweater recycling campaign.

The award called the New Spirit of Community Partnership Award is given to celebrate, and I quote:

Corporate social responsibility alliances between Canadian businesses and charities that are making a difference in the community.

Since 1994, Mr. Speaker, over 300,000 sweaters and other items of warm clothing have been collected and distributed by SaskEnergy volunteers working with United Way.

President Clark, of SaskEnergy, said it is appropriate that this award be given on the International Year of the Volunteer.

I would like to congratulate SaskEnergy and their employees, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ORAL QUESTIONS

Population Decline in Saskatchewan

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Premier.

Mr. Speaker, more evidence that the NDP is driving people out of Saskatchewan. Disturbing new figures from StatsCanada show that Saskatchewan's population dropped by over 4,100 people last year. In fact, the year 2000 was the worst year for population loss in Saskatchewan since 1990. Mr. Speaker, that's a direct result of the NDP's failure to create a positive economic climate.

Mr. Speaker, my question for the Premier is straightforward. Why? Why is this happening? Everyday in the House we watch the NDP pat themselves on the back and spin tales of what a great job they're doing.

Mr. Speaker, if the NDP is doing such a great job, then why are more and more people leaving this province?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr.

Speaker, I want to say that we certainly recognize that in this province there are fluctuations in terms of migration — in-migration, out-migration. I want to say and I want to share with members opposite a little history of this province. Our population has increased in the past 10 years by more than 20,000 people. And I want to compare that, Mr. Speaker, to the depopulation in '87 to '91 of 30,000, Mr. Speaker.

Now, Mr. Speaker, what are we doing the member opposite asks. I'll tell him what we're doing. We're balancing our budgets; we're introducing personal tax reduction; we're introducing small-business tax relief — 25 per cent this year; we're introducing tax credits for individuals who invest in mineral exploration; and, Mr. Speaker, all the time we're spending more money on health and education. And that's good government, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hermanson: — Mr. Speaker, I would say to the minister that our population is not fluctuating, it's dropping at a steeper and steeper curve, Mr. Speaker. And you know what, Mr. Speaker? Do you know where Saskatchewan stacks up against other provinces? Saskatchewan is dead last. How humiliating.

Saskatchewan's population fell by over 4,100 people in the last year. That is the worst population loss of any province in Canada.

In fact 8 out of 10 provinces in Canada saw their population grow. Alberta grew by nearly 50,000 people. Manitoba grew by nearly 4,200 people. Meanwhile, Saskatchewan's population dropped by nearly 4,200 people. And that, Mr. Speaker, is thanks to this NDP government.

Mr. Speaker, why is this happening? Why is the NDP driving so many people out of our province?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In case the member opposite has forgot, Mr. Speaker, let me describe some of the employment statistics that have happened in this province.

But I want to begin again by reminding this member that in the last 10 years our population has increased by 20,000.

I want to say that he knows full well that the job loss in agriculture has been 10,400 jobs last year. But he also knows that we've increased non-ag employment by some 5,400 jobs. Now no one will deny that we've got an agricultural community that's in trouble and no one can deny that there are changes that are happening in rural Saskatchewan.

But I want to say, Mr. Speaker, this province is more than just about numbers. This province and this economy is about attitude and it's about job creation and it's about hard-working people. And it's about a strong economy with growth year over year over year. That's what this is about, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, yes, we have an agricultural economy, but so does Prince Edward Island. They've got a potato disaster. Even Prince Edward Island's population is growing, while ours goes down.

The bottom line is that the NDP is driving more and more people out of the province. Saskatchewan suffered a net interprovincial out-migration last year of over 8,400 people — 8,400 more people moved out of Saskatchewan than moved into our province. That's an entire small city in our province that simply packed up and left.

Mr. Speaker, we realize that not every person born in Saskatchewan is going to stay here. But if government is doing its job, there will be more people moving into Saskatchewan than there will be people moving out of Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hermanson: — It's very clear that the NDP government is failing — 8,400 more people moved out than moved in. That's a direct result of their economic policies.

My question, Mr. Speaker, if the NDP is doing such a great job of building this province as they would lead us to believe, why did 8,400 people leave the province of Saskatchewan?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Speaker, I want to say to the member opposite that a very big part of growing this province and growing this economy is about Saskatchewan pride. And I want to say that members of this side of the House have a lot of pride in our businesses. We have a lot of pride in the working people of this province who are creating more jobs year over year over year.

And I want to say, Mr. Speaker, that member consistently talks about young people leaving this province in spite of the fact that the numbers are right there in front of his face — 90 per cent of the people that graduate from SIAST (Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology) campuses in this province get jobs right here in our province.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Instead, Mr. Speaker, of spewing gloom and doom, why don't they get onside with the business community, with the working men and women of this province, and with the government of this province who see some very positive signs that our economy is growing? Our economy will grow in spite of the rhetoric that they spew every day, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, Mr. Speaker, I would say to the NDP, I'm proud of this province too and that's why those numbers are unacceptable to us.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hermanson: — Mr. Speaker, these are not just Statistics

Canada numbers; these are real people. These are our kids. These are our neighbours. And more and more of these real people are leaving Saskatchewan and they're taking their families, their hopes, and their dreams out of our province. And, Mr. Speaker, that is a real tragedy.

What's the NDP doing about it? Well, Mr. Speaker, absolutely nothing. These are also real taxpayers and their leaving means that our tax base is getting smaller and smaller. Yes, this is a recipe for disaster.

Mr. Speaker, the NDP has laid out a clear plan to grow the government. Where is their plan to grow the province of Saskatchewan?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Speaker, I want members of this House to know how happy I am to answer that question.

Mr. Speaker, this member stands in his place and talks about his compassion for families, both urban and rural, and just short days ago he refers to the 10,000 people who work in this government as skunks and deadwood.

Mr. Speaker, I'm not going to say — I wouldn't say it — but something smells and it ain't coming from this side of the House; it's from over there.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(14:15)

Ainsworth Lumber

Mr. Wiberg: — Mr. Speaker, Ainsworth Lumber is leaving Saskatchewan because it's just too difficult to do business with this NDP government. Now it turns out the problem isn't just NDP's anti-business attitude. According to Ainsworth Lumber, Mr. Speaker, the NDP led them to believe the cost of providing power to their new sawmill would be covered.

And, Mr. Speaker, in today's newspaper SaskPower spokesman Larry Christie says that's exactly what happened.

Mr. Speaker, will the Minister of Economic and Co-operative Development admit the NDP gave inaccurate information to Ainsworth Lumber by promising to Ainsworth that there would be no extra cost for a power line into the new sawmill before the 1999 election and then broke their promise by sending Ainsworth a bill for \$3 million after the election?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Speaker, I will say to the member from Saskatchewan Rivers that there has been no promise broken. When an infrastructure is being planned and there are upgrades that are required, would that member expect SaskPower to absorb the cost of building infrastructure? Of course he wouldn't, Mr. Speaker.

It's a matter of doing an analysis of what the cost of roads, what the cost of electricity is. You develop an amortization plan to

pay the cost of the infrastructure. And you negotiate an agreement whether it's Ainsworth or whether it's Weyerhaeuser or whether it's Toco or whether it's Big River sawmill. That's how it's done, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, that member is a little sour because of the dozens of jobs in his constituency that have been created as a result of this government and a proactive and a pro-business forestry policy. That's what he's sour about.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wiberg: — Mr. Speaker, as usual the minister doesn't appear to understand the question.

We're not asking whether the NDP misled Ainsworth before the election. We're not doing that. SaskPower's already admitted that's exactly what happened. Mr. Speaker, we're asking the minister why the NDP promised Ainsworth Lumber one thing before the election and then reneged on their promise after the election.

Now Ainsworth Lumber is pulling out of Saskatchewan. No new sawmill. No new \$200 million investment. No new jobs for Saskatchewan people.

Mr. Speaker, will the Minister of Economic Development admit the NDP's 1999 election promise of 25,000 new forestry jobs was as phoney as the broken NDP promise that is chasing Ainsworth Lumber right out of Saskatchewan?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — First of all, Mr. Speaker, I want to help that member with his memory. I think the figure was 10,000 jobs to be created in forestry over a period of time.

Mr. Speaker, having said that, I want to say it is unfortunate that Ainsworth has decided to withdraw from these ventures. And I think the province had a good working relationship with both Ainsworth and Peter Ballantyne.

But I want to remind the member — and the member knows that Ainsworth has sold off properties in British Columbia — and I want to tell that member that in February 2001 correspondence Ainsworth cited weak financial markets as a reason for withdrawing from the project in the Green Lake area.

In the same correspondence, Mr. Speaker, Ainsworth stated their desire to remain involved in Saskatchewan forest developments.

Mr. Speaker, this government is going to be creating those forestry jobs in spite of the fact that these people are trying to create a negative, a negative business climate and a negative attitude about this province, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Workers' Compensation Board

Mr. Weekes: — Mr. Speaker, on Tuesday the Minister of Labour said the Workers' Compensation Board was at arm's

length from the government.

Yet yesterday he admitted that he made one phone call to the board and the \$7,000 farewell party planned for the former chairperson of the board was suddenly cancelled. But the fact of the matter is that the WCB (Workers' Compensation Board) was planning to spend \$7,000 on this party.

Businesses who fund the WCB are wondering what is going on over there. They are firing top managers, spending thousands on a farewell party, the former chairperson left with a golden handshake, and the WCB is refusing to explain anything.

Mr. Speaker, to the minister, will he explain to Saskatchewan businesses and workers why the WCB is refusing to be accountable?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Trew: — Mr. Speaker, a luncheon that is . . . that closes offices at the Compensation Board solely for a farewell is wrong. I communicated that with the board not once, but twice yesterday, and that luncheon is not going to happen.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Weekes: — Mr. Speaker, CBC (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation) radio spoke to the WCB's communications director yesterday and she says the \$7,000 farewell party will still be going ahead, just not at this time. She says, and I quote:

It would attract attention that was inappropriate for the event, so we've chosen just to not hold it at this time.

She also said she doubts most business owners will have a problem with giving the Board's Chair a proper goodbye.

We disagree, Mr. Speaker. Businesses certainly do not think their premiums should go to pay for a party for the former chairperson. And this message directly contradicts the minister's statements yesterday, that holding this party during office hours was inappropriate.

Does the minister have any control over there at all? Mr. Speaker, why is the WCB not only ignoring their stakeholders but also the minister who is directly responsible?

Hon. Mr. Trew: — Mr. Speaker, perhaps the minister didn't hear the answer I just gave respecting the lunch. The answer for the member opposite, Mr. Speaker, is that the luncheon that closes the Workers' Compensation Board is inappropriate. I communicated that, not once but twice, with members of the Workers' Compensation Board. The dinner is cancelled.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Chronic Wasting Disease

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Minister of Environment.

Mr. Speaker, there is speculation today that a mule deer in the wild has tested positive for chronic wasting disease — a disease

that the domestic elk industry in this province has been dealing with. I understand one test on this animal in Saskatoon has been positive but other tests out-of-province are being conducted.

Mr. Speaker, has the minister received the results of these out-of-province tests? And what steps will his department take, and be taking, to control this disease in our wild cervid population if these tests are confirmed positive?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can confirm to the Assembly that just moments ago we received final confirmation from the labs examining this particular matter and we do in fact have a confirmed case of chronic wasting disease in the wild in Saskatchewan.

I'll be making a statement to the media at 3 o'clock today to provide additional details. And information on CWD (chronic wasting disease) and our action plan will also be provided to all members of the Assembly at 3 o'clock on this very important issue.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the media is quoting the former NDP minister of Environment, Lorne Scott, as saying that:

... any case of CWD in a wild animal would potentially be a "severe blow" to the province's big-game industry.

He also said, and I quote:

There would be virtually no chance of eradicating it if it's in the wild.

Mr. Speaker, we are concerned about these comments.

To the minister: what is SERM's (Saskatchewan Environment and Resource Management) official position on the effect this disease will have on the province's cervid population and the domestic game-farm industry?

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course it's a very serious matter. And SERM has taken a very proactive position on this particular challenge that we all face as a province.

What I want to point out is that SERM undertook a number of tests over a number of years and the exact heads, roughly over a thousand heads of some of the deer that the hunters collected over the years have been examined. We still have a number of heads that we also have to examine. And of the thousand-plus heads that have been examined so far, one came back positive.

And we want to make sure that we see the extent of the infection, if it is great — and we're certainly hoping that it's not — but in the event that there are other positive tests, we're going to be very proactive because this is a very serious matter. And we're asking all the people out there, from the Wildlife

Federation to hunters and to the SERM folks, to work very, very closely together to make sure we face this challenge together as a province. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Crown Investment Corporations' Investments

Mr. Hillson: — Yes, Mr. Speaker, since session began, I have been asking the government whether, as stated, the government has plans to invest \$500 million — \$100 million a year, that's half a billion dollars — in out-of-province investments through our Crown corporations.

Mr. Minister, the Minister of Crown Investments refuses to answer that question. Departmental officials say we don't have nearly half a billion invested out of the province at present. What the plans are, they will say nothing.

Last week, the budget revealed that the Crown debt is scheduled to rise by 300 million in what is described as the medium term. Where is that 300 million? What is it going for? Is it going to drive private businesses . . . compete with private businesses in this province and drive them out of the province or is it going to be invested around the globe? Why the 300 million in increased debt?

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well contrary to what the member said last week, that we had plans to invest \$500 million in foreign investments by the Crown corporations, there are no plans to do that whatsoever, Mr. Speaker.

Right now, as I reported . . . And the member says I didn't answer the question. Right now, as I reported publicly, we have invested \$20 million in total outside of Saskatchewan, that includes investments in Canada which others have described as foreign investments, but that's outside of Saskatchewan boundaries.

I've always said, Mr. Speaker, and our government holds this position, that the Crown Investments Corporation and our utilities need to remain strong and viable and in an environment that is deregulated. Clearly we will have to earn revenues outside of the province of Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hillson: — Mr. Speaker, last week we saw a clear repudiation by this government of the Romanow legacy. Premier Romanow tried to get this province out of debt after the Devine debacle. Now this government says Crown debt, the debt of this province, will rise by \$300 million.

The minister won't tell us why \$300 million in increased debt, that's all . . . (inaudible) . . . in the budget. No explanation. This is a repudiation of Premier Romanow's legacy who tried to get us out of debt, now they're going to get us back in. Where is the money going?

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. And I want to say to the member opposite and to the House, Mr. Speaker, that what this budget does is build on the legacy of Premier Romanow.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — That legacy, Mr. Speaker, was to leave this province in good financial shape. And that legacy enables us, in this budget, Mr. Speaker, to fix the roads. The people of Saskatchewan will want to know whether that member and the opposition are in favour of that. I think they're against it, Mr. Speaker.

And the budget will mean that we'll invest in education, Mr. Speaker. And the people of Saskatchewan want to know whether that opposition and that member are in favour of investing in education, Mr. Speaker.

And we say, Mr. Speaker, that people are in favour of fixing the roads; the people are in favour of investing in education. These people are not. And in the next election, Mr. Speaker, these people will find out that the people support this budget, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Conversion of Roads to Gravel

Mr. Hillson: — Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker. And I thank the hon. member for Cumberland for his concern for my health.

Mr. Speaker, many rural residents are apprehensive about government plans for parallel haul routes, and turning surface highways back into gravel. My own hometown of Briercrest is on Highway 339, which is one of the roads mentioned for conversion to gravel. The idea to turn pavement into gravel could appropriately be known as the Saskatchewan highways-in-transition program.

Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Highways has told us how many kilometres of thin membrane surface will be upgraded. Will she now tell us how many kilometres will be downgraded to gravel? How many kilometres will be turned into parallel haul routes? How many kilometres will be turned back to gravel?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, obviously the member wasn't paying attention to the budget that was delivered last Friday, where we announced record spending in Highways and Transportation. And in this year, Mr. Speaker, we are going to upgrade, resurface, and twin over 900 kilometres of highways in the province of Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(14:30)

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Mr. Speaker, we have a tremendous increase in our Highways spending budget, and in fact, Mr. Speaker, we're going to be fixing roads, rural roads, all across Saskatchewan this spring and summer, Mr. Speaker.

And what I find so absolutely absurd, Mr. Speaker, is that we are increasing the numbers of highways workers for the Department of Highways — which is supported, by the way, by mayors in this province — and what does the opposition do? They want us to cancel those 88 positions, and they don't support fixing the roads in this province.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Investor Confidence in Saskatchewan

Mr. Wiberg: — Mr. Speaker, the former premier, Roy Romanow, used a figure of 25,000 new forestry jobs when talking about expansion of the forest industry in Saskatchewan. A \$200 million investment has already been lost from Ainsworth Lumber. The private sector see this lost opportunity as a clear signal, Mr. Speaker, that private investment is not welcome in Saskatchewan. This NDP government clearly has no vision for Saskatchewan jobs.

Mr. Speaker, will the Premier clearly tell us what has gone wrong with investor confidence in this NDP-governed province?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Speaker, nothing has gone wrong with investor confidence with this province. And, Mr. Speaker, I want to explain to the member opposite why I say that.

This is the only province in Canada that's building sawmills and expanding. This is the only province where the industry has doubled since 1999. And I want to give him some examples: the Wapawekka sawmill recently completed; the Big River sawmill; the OSB (oriented strand board) Hudson Bay plant — the largest mill in Canada that just came on-line in November; the Prince Albert tree nursery has grown from two and a half million trees to 15 million trees annually — that's in his riding, Mr. Speaker; a \$1 million treatment plant for fence posts in Glaslyn was constructed in 1999; Zelensky La Ronge mill has doubled in size in the partnership and they're now into tree planting.

We're in the midst of \$800 million expansion, Mr. Speaker, and in spite of them, we're going to make it happen.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Funding for New Initiatives in Health Care

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I've very pleased to rise today to tell the members of the Legislative Assembly about an important new initiative that Saskatchewan Health is funding. It will help to retain nurses in our province and recruit new nurses to the profession. Mr. Speaker, I am referring to the work of the Provincial Nursing Council.

The council is an organization that was formed by the Health department a year ago. It consists of nursing students, nursing educators, employers, and representatives of our three nursing regulatory bodies, as well as the unions representing the nursing professions.

The council's work represents a unique collaboration among people who share a collective responsibility for educating, hiring, and retaining nurses. They believe health care

workplaces must offer supportive environments and rewarding career opportunities.

Mr. Speaker, three groups working under the auspices of the council have identified new initiatives that reflect this important philosophy. Today, Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased to announce a total of \$700,000 in funding for three new initiatives.

I'm announcing \$400,000 to fund a pilot project in the Moose Jaw-Thunder Creek Health District, working with the Saskatchewan Registered Nurses' Association to create what is called magnet work environments. Mr. Speaker, a magnet environment attracts and retains health providers through initiatives that create a healthy work environment. The working group will assess the workplace, and when that is completed will recommend priorities to be addressed and necessary actions to be taken.

Secondly, I am announcing \$150,000 in funding to the Regina Health District. It will undertake a pilot project to research the issues around the casual workforce in the health care system and develop strategies to meet the needs of health care providers in the workplace. We know, Mr. Speaker, that health care providers have differing employment needs. For instance, new graduates may want full-time positions, while nurses nearing the end of their careers may want less than full-time work.

Mr. Speaker, we need to better understand the factors affecting those health care providers who work casual hours. In this project, data such as sick time, hiring practices, and overtime costs will be analyzed. Mr. Speaker, once we have a better understanding of those factors, then together we can develop innovative solutions that will result in work environments that respect both the needs of nurses and their employers.

Thirdly, I'm also announcing \$150,000 to the Saskatoon Health District for a project that will assist senior nurses who mentor nursing students doing clinical assignments. This project will enable workshops to be prepared, provide backup coverage for staff who attend workshops, and workload relief for the mentoring nurse.

Mr. Speaker, attracting and keeping health care providers is a top priority of this government. Nurses have told us that they want supportive, high-quality work environments. Many have told us they would prefer more full-time, permanent employment. They have also told us that they want opportunities for career advancement and enhancement.

That is why, Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased to announce these three new Provincial Nursing Council projects today. As we all know, there's a worldwide shortage of nurses. It's not unique to Saskatchewan. However, Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to advise this Assembly that these products . . . projects are uniquely Saskatchewan solutions to a broader problem.

This government is proud to say that we're listening to what nurses are telling us. The Provincial Nursing Council members will work together with us to build these solutions from the ground up. The project proposals did not come from the top down. We will continue to work together to find more solutions to our common challenges.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, I've just returned from attending the Saskatchewan Union of Nurses convention. I was pleased to be asked to speak about the challenges we all face in managing change in the health care system and respond to many questions and comments about . . . from the membership about our health care system.

Mr. Speaker, last week we introduced new legislation that will expand the role for primary care nurses. Today is the second time in as many weeks that I've announced new policies and programs that are having positive outcomes for nurses and, by extension, our health care system.

Mr. Speaker, we must continually work toward recruiting and retaining health care workers. Today's initiatives are not the final solution but they are very good steps. They are significant incentives for nurses to choose Saskatchewan as a great place to work and live.

Mr. Speaker, in conclusion I want to publicly thank the working groups of the Provincial Nursing Council who have provided suggestions for proposals for the projects I am announcing today, and also those health care professionals who are in the Speaker's gallery today in support of this announcement.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Gantefoer: — I ask leave to respond to the ministerial statement.

Leave granted.

Mr. Gantefoer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker, over a year ago nurse professionals in this province, recognizing the lack of a provincial plan for the nursing profession, suggested to the Department of Health that they work together as a Nursing Council to identify around the table the issues that were priorities for nurse professionals across this province. And I'm very, very pleased that the Department of Health agreed that this was a worthwhile exercise, and today's announcement of three projects are a result of the work that has been done by these health professionals of identifying challenges and priorities for the nursing profession in this province.

Mr. Speaker, the project that was announced in Moose Jaw of looking at and creating magnet environments is indeed a very important issue that's facing the nursing profession today. Just, I believe, yesterday Saskatchewan Union of Nurses president, Rosalee Longmoore, was quoted as saying that one of the big disappointments they still have as nurse professionals in this province is not to do so much with the wages they receive but the workplace environment that they're forced to work in day after day.

And certainly this project, which I believe is a model that was first identified by members of the nursing profession from the United States, is indeed worth looking at and worth exploring. And I certainly do support the fact that this project is going forward.

The project announced for the city of Regina and the Regina

Health District about the whole issue surrounding the casual positions for nurses is an issue that's been identified by nurse professionals for a long time. Graduating nurses coming out of the system are frustrated and disappointed when the best they can receive is casual, part-time positions. And they spend their time worrying about how they're going to pay their expenses and student loans while they wait at the whim of a telephone call to see if they're going to have any shifts in any given week or not. And certainly it's high time that this issue be understood and identified.

The issue in Saskatoon, the project about dealing with the whole issue of the mentoring of graduate nurses from programs is also an important one, Mr. Speaker, because quite frankly, because we're so desperately short in many instances, nurse graduates are forced in a very short time to be right into the hustle and bustle of very busy environments, and we think that mentoring is a very important initiative.

Mr. Speaker, while we certainly are very supportive of the work of the Nurses Council and these three initiatives, I also want to say that the minister asked last week for some help and direction. And I would offer the fact that unless he starts dealing with the woeful shortage of funding for the College of Nursing at the University of Saskatchewan, unless he deals with the issues about the College of Medicine in a positive way — and it certainly was absolutely missing in this budget — we're going to have to rely on advice from nurse professionals and medical professionals and the official opposition to make sure this government keeps trying to do the right thing on our insistence.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for an opportunity to address this statement.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 10 — The Oil and Gas Conservation Amendment Act, 2001

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 10, The Oil and Gas Conservation Amendment Act, 2001 be now introduced and read a first time.

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

Bill No. 11 — The Freehold Oil and Gas Production Tax Amendment Act, 2001

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 11, The Freehold Oil and Gas Production Tax 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

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. McMorris: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I unfortunately didn't quite have enough time to finish what I had to say yesterday, so I'm glad to stand today. And I'm not sure whether I'll have enough time today but will try and squeeze it in, in the time that I have left, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I talked yesterday quite a bit about the provincial budget that was introduced last Friday, and I had some good things to say about that provincial budget. And I still agree with what I said.

There is some things that the provincial budget talked about that I would have no problem agreeing with. But the problem that I have with the provincial budget, and why I cannot support the provincial budget, is fundamentally I cannot support increasing government.

(14:45)

Mr. Speaker, we saw it today, through question period, some new statistics released through StatsCanada, Mr. Speaker. StatsCanada introduced some new statistics, and I'd named a couple of numbers yesterday. I didn't have the most current, which I have today. And the net out-migration of this province was 4,800 people last year. Forty-eight hundred . . . 8,400 people, I stand corrected, 8,400 people left the province last year — 8,400 fewer people in this province. And so what is our government's response, is to increase civil service. And I really question that, and just fundamentally it doesn't make sense.

You know, Mr. Speaker, it doesn't make sense to people on this side of the House who really, truly believe in less government and smaller government. But, Mr. Speaker, even more importantly, there's a couple of members on that side of the House that don't believe in bigger government either.

Mr. Speaker, in the last provincial election there were two parties that talked about reducing the size of government. One is on this side and two-thirds of the second party is on that side. Fortunately one of the members realized that he couldn't stand that and he moved back over to this side.

But, Mr. Speaker, the Liberal Party in the last provincial election talked about reducing. And if I could quote the Leader of the Liberal Party, during the election he said we need to reduce hacks and flacks by 300. And he used the number of roughly of about \$24 million that was going to save. Mr. Speaker, they say about twenty-four hundred million dollars by reducing those 300 hacks and flacks.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I just want to add up the difference. You know, if you take away the 300 that the Liberal Party talked about and you add the 570 that the NDP government coalition

are talking about, it's a difference of 870 people in the civil service that those two members on the other side are going to have to try and justify. And if they stand and support this budget, are going to have to justify when they get back to their constituencies and justify at the next Liberal convention.

That was a Liberal policy that said they were going to reduce it by 300; now they're supporting an increase by 570. The dollar value is roughly about \$70 million difference from what they promised, to what they're going to support. That is significant, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, in closing, we have put forward an amendment to the budget, an amendment to the budget that talks about helping out municipal governments, that talks about giving more money to the municipal governments. And we've found where you could take that out of the last budget. We found that by not hiring the amount of employees that this government is talking about, that money could have been converted and transferred over into municipal government, and help the municipal government, Mr. Speaker.

So it's going to be very interesting, because I have no problem supporting the amendment put forward by our deputy or our Finance critic, the member for Canora-Pelly. And it's an amendment that I really am going to find it very interesting if the two members opposite, the Liberal members that campaigned on the very, very thing that we're putting forward in this budget, if they support what we said, it doesn't affect, it doesn't defeat the government.

They still can have their cabinet minister positions, they can still have their CVA (Central Vehicle Agency) vehicles, they can have everything that they went there for. But not only that — is they'll have their scruples and principles of what they stood for in the last provincial election, Mr. Speaker.

So I will not be supporting the budget. Even though there is some good stuff, I fundamentally cannot support bigger government, as most every member on this side and a couple of members on that side. And so I won't be supporting the budget but I will be supporting the amendment, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It certainly is a pleasure for me to be able to join into the budget debate. And let me take this opportunity, Mr. Speaker, to congratulate you for taking over the role as the Speaker of this Assembly. Having been, I should say, your former seatmate last time, I was disappointed to lose you as a seatmate, but I congratulate nonetheless.

I also want to congratulate, Mr. Speaker, the Deputy Speaker, the member from Regina Sherwood. And I also want to take the opportunity, Mr. Speaker, to congratulate the new members of this Assembly — first of all, of course, the member from Regina Elphinstone and then our Premier, now the new member from Saskatoon Riversdale.

But also if I could be permitted a little bit of latitude here, I want to briefly speak about the leadership process that I went

through and connect it back to the budget speech by saying that it actually, in many ways, renewed my sincere belief in the democratic process.

And I want to publicly, for anyone who would have had any doubt at all, reaffirm my support for our new Premier. The seven candidates that were involved, Mr. Speaker, were all wonderful candidates, but I certainly respect the decision made by the membership of our party in electing the new Premier, the member now from Saskatoon Riversdale.

And I do also want to take a moment to acknowledge our former premier, Premier Romanow, who played a critical role, as was described by many, in bringing our province back from the brink of bankruptcy. He deserves a tremendous amount of credit for that and I certainly want to acknowledge him for that.

I've missed the opportunity, Mr. Speaker, over the last several years to actually respond to either the Throne Speech or the budget speech. And I want to take the opportunity again to acknowledge the support that many of us receive from families and friends. And I would like to again thank the support that I've received, Mr. Speaker, from my family, including my parents, John and Dorothy Sonntag, but also from my wife Virginia and our son Mayson.

It was interesting, just over the lunch hour I had the opportunity to speak briefly to the member in hallway, from Cannington, and we just had a quick discussion about the toll that public life sometimes takes on members in public office, and the tremendous support that is required from family members.

So I want to acknowledge the support that I've received from my family. It's been wonderful.

Mr. Speaker, as well I can hardly believe that 10 years have gone by almost, since I was first elected in 1991 to this legislature, and it has been a thrill and an honour to have represented the constituency of Meadow Lake. And as I say, it's hard to believe that 10 years has gone by.

And I've had the opportunity to represent, Mr. Speaker, such wonderful communities like Pierceland; my home community of Goodsoil; St. Walburg; Paradise Hill; Makwa; Dorintosh. Six different First Nations, Mr. Speaker — Flying Dust; Waterhen First Nation; Joseph Bighead First Nation; Makwa-Sahgaihcan First Nation; the Ministikwan First Nation; and of course the Onion Lake First Nation located just north of Lloydminster. All of them great places to represent. And time has flown by so very quickly, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, as well I want to say that having been elected over those 10 years, it's been a thrill as well to be a part of a government that has delivered wonderful budgets, I think, over the years, and this one as well fits into that category.

You know, I did a quick little calculation over the last . . . a few minutes before I came into the Assembly today. In the last 20 years, Mr. Speaker, in the last 20 years — so that goes back to 1981; also I'll have to count the budget of '81 under former premier, Allan Blakeney — the score for our side of the House is nine balanced budgets. The score for their side of the House, Mr. Speaker, is nothing. So the score is nine to nothing for this

side of the House, Mr. Speaker.

I want to, if I could, Mr. Speaker, just talk about a few of the highlights of our provincial budget. First of all again, Mr. Speaker, people in this province will now pay \$317 million less in provincial income tax than they did before the tax reform was implemented by our government. And of all the provinces, Mr. Speaker, in the country, in this great country of Canada that charge provincial sales tax, Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan has the lowest provincial sales tax in all of Canada. I think that's something that goes unnoticed by a lot of people.

Mr. Speaker, this year we will spend \$2.2 billion on health care. That's a 39 per cent . . . that represents, I should say, 39 per cent of our total budget and an 11.6 per cent increase over last year.

We're investing, as well, \$1.1 billion in education, and included in this funding to . . . included, I should say, in this is funding to double the number of community schools, which affects many of the communities that I represent and extends the program to secondary and rural schools. School operating grants get an increase of 9.6 per cent, Mr. Speaker.

On the business side, the small-business corporate income tax rate will be reduced by 25 per cent, Mr. Speaker, from 8 per cent to 6 per cent. That's something that small businesses have long been calling on and I think certainly will do very well for them.

That amount and also, I should say, the amount that they can earn and still qualify for the small-business tax rate will be increased from 200,000 up to 300,000, again something that they've all called for.

And, Mr. Speaker, we've committed 95 million additional new dollars for income support in our agricultural portfolio, and much credit to the Minister of Agriculture for that. And, Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to supporting Saskatchewan's farmers.

We will make as well, Mr. Speaker, the largest single-year investment ever in Saskatchewan's history in highways — something that I'm particularly proud of, having just left that portfolio. That amount, Mr. Speaker, brings the total up this year to \$312 million. Included in this will be upgrading of our thin membrane surfaced roads, Mr. Speaker. This budget launches a historic three-year record amount of spending — \$950 million will be invested in our roads and highways. This will create hundreds of new jobs across our province, Mr. Speaker.

I want to respond briefly if I could, Mr. Speaker, to the issue that's been raised in this House in the last several days about the issue of bigger government. I say, Mr. Speaker, that the people that we've hired to provide, that we have hired . . . Mr. Speaker, the people that we've hired — let me try again — are qualified, highly qualified civil servants that will improve services and conditions, many of those in rural Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker.

And it strikes me, Mr. Speaker, this question . . . and I want to ask this question of the opposition. Why is it that in the private

sector, when the private sector hires more people, somehow that's a good thing. And I agree; it is a good thing. It means more jobs in the private sector. That's good.

And yet, Mr. Speaker, when government hires more people to deliver goods and services to the people of Saskatchewan, when they hire more people and the economy's doing better, somehow that's a bad thing. There's a logic that makes no sense there, Mr. Speaker, whatsoever. Absolutely none at all.

The fact is, Mr. Speaker, that Saskatchewan, contrary to what the opposition would have us believe, Saskatchewan provides the lowest cost of government on a per capita basis of any province in Canada — the lowest cost, Mr. Speaker, of any province in Canada. Again I think a fact that goes unnoticed by many people, and especially the opposition, Mr. Speaker.

I wanted to speak briefly if I could about a couple of the portfolios that I represent, Mr. Speaker, and reference it to the issue of the job numbers that I just talked about.

In Energy and Mines, Mr. Speaker, through countless meetings that I've had with the energy sector in the short time that I've had this portfolio, one of the things that the oil and gas and mines sector says to me is the department, first of all, provides wonderful service to them. We have some, in Energy and Mines, have probably some of the most highly qualified department people in fact in all of Canada. And that's affirmed by many of the oil companies from out of our province, Mr. Speaker.

My department, in Energy and Mines, actually will receive 26 new people. And it was applauded, Mr. Speaker, on budget day by many of the people that I've just described. And I want to tell you where some of those new people will be placed.

Seventeen of the full-time equivalents will go to supporting increased activity of the oil and gas industry here in Saskatchewan, with nine of those positions associated with the oil and gas well and facility orphan program, which is something that the oil sector has asked for.

Eight of those positions will go to additional petroleum geoscience research and underground mapping of potential oil and gas deposits. Again, wonderful things for the oil and gas and mining sectors.

Seven full-time equivalents will go to additional geoscience research in northern Saskatchewan, largely focused on mining, Mr. Speaker. Again, something that will generate more revenue for our province, Mr. Speaker. A good thing, in my estimation.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, two full-time equivalents will go to provide policy analysis as we gear up, Mr. Speaker — hear the words, gear up — to respond to climate change issues and implications for Saskatchewan people and communities in our economy.

All of these positions, Mr. Speaker, are in direct response to the oil, gas, and mining sectors who have requested that we provide more people within the departments. And I think also a sign towards geared-up activity.

And this proof, Mr. Speaker, is in a headline that I've just read here on March 29 from *The Leader-Post*. The headline is, Mr. Speaker, "Energy to fuel Sask. Economy." They say that:

Saskatchewan's energy sector will fuel GDP growth of 2.5 per cent this year, (and they've just been reporting, others have been reporting 3 per cent this year) outpacing the national average (Mr. Speaker) of 2.2 per cent, TD Economics reported in its provincial forecast Wednesday.

And that's exactly what we're doing by hiring 26 more people, Mr. Speaker — gearing up, Mr. Speaker. We're gearing up for activity, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(15:00)

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — If I could as well, I'd like to speak briefly about my role as the minister responsible for the Crown Investments Corporation because there have been some questions and criticisms of late of the Crown Investments Corporation, which I think are entirely inappropriate, Mr. Speaker. And I'd like to talk about the vital role that they play.

Mr. Speaker, our Crown corporations do a great job of providing safe, reliable utility services in all parts of Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, at rates, Mr. Speaker, at rates that are amongst the lowest, the lowest, in all of Canada.

We don't have power shortages and energy bills that double in less than a year like they do in Alberta, Mr. Speaker. We don't have rolling blackouts like they do in California. We don't have unaffordable car insurance rates for families with young drivers, as they do in many provinces, Mr. Speaker. We don't have our rural communities bypassed by information highways, as is happening just about everywhere else in the country. Because we own our utility companies in Saskatchewan, we can provide the lowest natural gas and vehicle insurance rates in all of Canada.

We can be sure that when we flip the light switches that the lights will go on. We have a way to ensure that people who live outside of our major cities will benefit from the latest improvements in information technology, Mr. Speaker.

It was announced in the Throne Speech that communities, schools, and other public institutions throughout Saskatchewan will get the benefits of high-speed internet service over the next three years. Without our telecommunications company, that would not be possible, Mr. Speaker. The big national and international companies that compete with SaskTel have no interest in providing these services outside of the larger communities, Mr. Speaker.

It would be a source of pride to all members of this Assembly that our homegrown telecommunications company can compete successfully with global giants while remaining true to the mandate of Crown corporations — to provide good quality service at affordable rates to everyone here in Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, we have achieved a lot over the last decade in paying off \$2 billion of Devine debt and restoring financial

health to our public enterprise sector in expanding service while keeping rates as low as possible and in improving the management and governance of the publicly owned utilities.

These improvements we have made in Crown governance over the last few years and have received national recognition, Mr. Speaker. The Conference Board of Canada says that the government practices of our Crown boards are amongst the best in Canada, public or private, Mr. Speaker.

The best in Canada. The Institute of Public Administration of Canada Governor General's Award for excellence in public service recently went to CIC's Crown services division in the recognition of the governance, strategic planning, and performance management system that we have developed in our Crown sector, Mr. Speaker. I think . . . something that we should all be very proud of.

We are receiving international recognition as well. A senior official of the World Bank was in Saskatchewan last July to study how SaskTel delivers services to rural Saskatchewan. Here's what he concluded in a letter he wrote after his visit, Mr. Speaker. He said, Mr. Speaker, and I quote:

I was looking for that silver bullet that would help me understand how SaskTel undertook rural telecoms so well. The only significant aspect that I could find that sets SaskTel apart from other telecommunication operators is the following: SaskTel staff, down to the last person I met, takes the social obligations and universal service requirements far more seriously than any other telecom company I have ever known.

Other companies often pay lip service to these points but SaskTel is the only company I have come across that really takes these points to heart and makes the social obligations a cornerstone of its business and a point of pride among the staff (Mr. Speaker).

Mr. Speaker, I hear someone from across the way and, you know, it brings an excellent point. Says why don't we have cell coverage. Well, Mr. Speaker, I love to answer that question, Mr. Speaker. Because I'll tell you what my response to that is: why are there no private utilities who offer cellular service? Why are they . . . if this is such a wonderful thing, why aren't they out in rural Saskatchewan providing that service right now, Mr. Speaker?

These members over here continually say to us, Mr. Speaker, that SaskTel needs to provide more services. And they are, Mr. Speaker.

But I ask the question, if that member wants to know why isn't there cell service in rural parts of Saskatchewan, my question is: why aren't private utilities who offer cellular service, why aren't they out there offering that service, Mr. Speaker? It's because SaskTel goes beyond the bottom line, Mr. Speaker. SaskTel delivers services that no other private utility would deliver in rural Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker.

The contribution, Mr. Speaker, that the Crown sector makes to the development of Saskatchewan's economy, can be summed up in a few numbers. It accounts for 17 per cent of our gross

domestic product. Crowns employ about 9,000 people in head offices and communities throughout our province. They purchase well over a billion dollars, Mr. Speaker, a billion dollars in goods and services from Saskatchewan suppliers each year, supporting about 5,000 businesses, Mr. Speaker. Crowns spend over \$400 million every year expanding and improving their services, creating thousands of construction jobs. Very few private sector utilities would be able to, I think, compete with those numbers, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, we look to the future with confidence that our Crown corporations will continue to serve Saskatchewan people well. SaskTel, as I've alluded to, has been in competition for long distance and other services for more than a decade and now is doing an extremely good job.

SaskEnergy, Mr. Speaker, is fully open to competition in commercial and residential markets. SaskPower will be opening its system to the transmission of wholesale power in a few months. SGI CANADA, Mr. Speaker, continues to thrive in a highly competitive general insurance industry and has moved successfully beyond the borders of Saskatchewan.

Our publicly owned utility companies give us the tools to control our destiny that other provinces do not have, Mr. Speaker. Canadians often find themselves at the mercy of the same global market forces that make it difficult for many people to build a better life throughout the world. Here in Saskatchewan, because we do it for ourselves, we can continue to provide safe, reliable, and affordable utility services to everyone, whether they live in the city or in rural Saskatchewan as I do, Mr. Speaker.

I'm getting close to the end here, Mr. Speaker, and I want to just focus, for just a minute if I could, on what I think is really the absolute highlight — I know we've got many highlights in the budget, but what I think is really the highlight of this budget — and that is really around the piece on education.

In this budget, as I've said, we're investing \$1.1 billion in education and skills training, the largest amount ever, Mr. Speaker, which will go to establishing 42 new community schools in both rural and urban Saskatchewan.

We will also provide, as I've talked about in SaskTel and using SaskTel as a vehicle, we'll also provide high-speed Internet access to schools across Saskatchewan. We will create, Mr. Speaker, a virtual Saskatchewan campus connecting young and adult learners in a world of opportunity.

We will offer improved interest relief and debt reduction for student loans and increased tax credits for post-secondary students. We will launch the new centennial scholarship program for post-secondary students. And we will train more health care providers, Mr. Speaker.

And, Mr. Speaker, we will increase the operating grants to schools by \$41 million. This represents a 10 per cent increase over last year's budget and it will bump the province's share for the total cost of education from 40 per cent up to 42 per cent, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, in closing, I want to say a budget is a document

that puts a vision into action . . . puts vision into action by backing it up with dollars, Mr. Speaker. My vision and our Premier's vision is for a prosperous Saskatchewan where all people will enjoy a good quality of life.

This is a good news budget, Mr. Speaker. It's about connecting to a future filled with prosperity, confidence, and innovation. This is the true spirit of Saskatchewan and we are going to make it happen, Mr. Speaker.

And in the words of our wonderful, wonderful Minister of Finance, Mr. Speaker, that is progress, Mr. Speaker. That is progress.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Mr. Speaker, I will close by saying that I will be voting against the amendment, Mr. Speaker. I'll be voting against the amendment and supporting the main motion on the budget, Mr. Speaker.

And thank you for the brief opportunity to speak to the budget today. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hillson: — Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise to be able to participate in this debate. Before I give my comments on the present budget, I'd like to spend a moment reviewing the first budget of the new province of Saskatchewan in 1905. I think it gives us some interesting information.

Mr. Speaker, at that time, total revenue was \$658,000. The major revenue source was transfers from the federal government of 562,000. Some things don't change.

Health and Social Services costs totalled \$425.74. Some things do change. The Health budget included \$40.75 for what was described as the care of incurables, and \$271 for supplies for quarantine.

The Hudson's Bay Company and the Northwest Mounted Police were given, respectively, \$40 and \$14.50 for the support of indigenes. Administration of justice cost 15,000 and this included 11,000 for what was described in the public accounts of the province as the care of the lunatics.

Legal costs also included a \$15 bill for legal fees from the law firm of a Mr. Noel. Education that year cost \$27,000. There were no grants to school districts. Electricity for Government House cost \$38.60. The premier was paid \$229 but he received an additional \$313 for travel expenses. And, Mr. Speaker, the budget was balanced.

Well what about 2001? Did the government get it right?

Let me say at the outset that there are a number of things in the budget of which I approve. The government, however, tells us that out of expenditures of over 6 billion, that we have a balanced budget. Of course the truth is that we are spending over 200 million more than current revenues and the budget is balanced by drawing on reserves.

Mr. Speaker, last year the Minister of Finance was arguing that one-time resource revenues should not be spent in such a way as to increase the base budget. He said that it would be wrong to increase base expenses. He argued that windfall revenues in the resource sector should go to paying off deficit or on one-time expenditures on infrastructure. That's what the Minister of Finance told us last fall. Well now he seems to have ignored his own advice, and it is my concern that he has added to the base budget by this budget.

Mr. Speaker, unless we can build our economy and broaden our tax base and increase the number of working tax-paying citizens, this budget is not sustainable. Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the dedicated individuals who serve our province in the public service. My experiences while I was in government increased my respect for them. Nonetheless we know that you do not build an economy by increasing the public sector.

The economy is built by increasing investment, increasing business, increasing oil exploration, agricultural diversification, and forestry. We know that Alberta projects \$40 billion in energy exploration during the next few years. Think what even a fraction of that would do for the economy of this province, Mr. Speaker.

Yet this government thinks that it is more important to increase the public sector than to partner and strengthen other groups and people to build this province. An example of this is the fact that in a budget, which is increasing expenditures on almost every department and priority, municipalities were left out. This government has oftentimes been accused of showing little respect for local government and this was borne out again last Friday. I am relieved that I am not the Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Speaker, when this province was faced with a horrendous deficit, cutbacks in services and programs were unavoidable. Municipal grants were one of the casualties, however, the provincial government at that time could legitimately say to the municipalities of this province that they were not being treated any different than anyone else. Everyone was required to share the pain and take cutbacks.

(15:15)

Today the provincial government is dramatically increasing spending — Health, an additional 12 per cent or \$330 million. Education, an additional 22 million. Highways, an extra 36 million. But local government remains frozen. Inevitably, this will lead to property tax increases.

The provincial government no doubt hopes that when Saskatchewan homeowners get their property tax notices this year, they will blame city hall rather than put the blame where it truly belongs. It is little wonder that the mayors of our cities, including the mayor of North Battleford, have joined together to denounce this budget, and have called for increased support of revenue sharing for municipalities. It is one of the few priorities in the entire provincial government that did not get increased funding this year.

I do, however, want to say that I appreciate that the government is finally committed to fixing the roads. The Liberal Party has

been committed to spending fuel tax revenues on the province's highways. This year we will come close to that figure. The fuel tax will bring in about \$326 million, I understand. And of that we will spend all but about 15 million on our highway and road system. This is a positive start in reinvesting in a highway system that has been sorely neglected the past decade.

Hopefully, this investment in our roads will stop the conversion from pavement to gravel, and end the bizarre talk of parallel heavy haul routes between thin membrane surface and gravel roads. Mr. Speaker this talk of turning our highways back into gravel is what, I think, will become popularly known by the acronym Saskatchewan highways in transition.

On the negative side of the budget, we have the Department of Rural Revitalization. Mr. Speaker, this new department is a classic example of NDP thinking that the problems of the world can be solved by a new government department. It was once said of Premier Blakeney that he never met a government program he didn't like, and we certainly see that philosophy coming through here.

We have a department that will rent some space in Regina and hire some people in Regina, but what it will do for rural Saskatchewan is far from clear. There is no budget for programming, and no indication as to what programming this department would do if it had a budget for programming, which it doesn't. The department has no expressed mandate or vision, except in the fuzziest of terms. It is a government department for the sake of having a government department. Why it exists and what it will do is something to be figured out later.

A positive of the budget is the large increase in the number of community schools. I consider the community schools program to be a positive one. The truancy rate in this province, and particularly in North Battleford, is unacceptably high. Young people not regularly attending school inevitably fall behind in their classes. As they become disengaged from school and other positive activities, they almost inevitably fall into negative activities such as youth crime.

Mr. Speaker, our province has the highest young offenders' rate of all the provinces. This rate will only be brought down if we do a better job of keeping young people in school and involving them in wholesome activities. The community school program is an attempt to do just that.

I have spoken at length, Mr. Speaker, about the question of our Crown corporations. I have asked repeatedly for the government to confirm what plans it has for out-of-province investment. Do they plan to invest 500 million over the next five years out-of-province? The minister says that investing out-of-province is a legitimate activity for our Crown corporations; he won't tell us how much he plans to invest out-of-province.

The minister won't tell the people of Saskatchewan — the shareholders of these corporations — what activities are planned. If the government really views the people of this province as the shareholders, why then can't they be let in on the plans of the companies they own?

Well, Mr. Speaker, the plot thickened on budget day when the

minister revealed that Crown debt is scheduled to rise by \$300 billion over what is described as the medium term. What is this 300 billion for? Is it going to be used for clean coal research and generation in Saskatchewan? Is it going to be used for wind power research? Is it going to be spent on the biotech industry that will be greatly enhanced by our synchrotron project? I doubt it.

Is the money, I ask, going to be invested by government in businesses that will attempt to run private business out of this province by competing with private . . . using tax dollars to compete with private business?

Or will the new, borrowed money be invested in Chile, Prince Edward Island, Uruguay, the Philippines, Australia, New Zealand, El Salvador, and yes, Mr. Speaker, even that province all good New Democrats love to hate — Alberta — where we are presently taking advantage of a deregulated power supply while we keep our own regulated, and refuse to allow in private companies to invest and work here, but we take advantage of the fact we can build out of province. So we're taking advantage . . . we're taking advantage of open tendering in Alberta, but we deny it for our province. That is contradictory, Mr. Speaker.

I have a problem with the NDP saying it is appropriate to use tax money to invest in schemes around the globe. Mr. Speaker, government has a different role in society than an investment broker, and I can imagine most taxpayers of this province would say, if they had the choice, that they will make their own investment decisions rather than leaving that up to the Minister of Crown Investments.

The proposal to incur a further \$300 million in debt is a clear repudiation of the Romanow legacy, Mr. Speaker. Premier Romanow wanted to get this province out of debt. Now this government, in addition to spending 200 more on current expenses over revenue, is planning to put the province a further 300 million in debt through the Crown corporations. Roy Romanow would not have done this, Mr. Speaker.

A few years ago the NDP wanted to invest in Guyana. Guyana is the western hemisphere's second-poorest country. Being poor and politically unstable was seen by the NDP to be its greatest asset as a place to invest. That was because Guyana was so unattractive as a place to invest that SaskPower intended to extract huge returns from that impoverished, little country.

An Hon. Member: — How did they make out?

Mr. Hillson: — They said they were going to get a 27 per cent return on investment from the hemisphere's second-poorest nation. The resulting furor caused the cancellation of the program, but most people involved in that purported investment still continued to believe that international investments of that sort are the way to build Saskatchewan. I do not, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I want to say that I'm pleased that the Saskatchewan Party appears to be moving away from its earlier position of selling off the Crowns. A fire sale of our Crown corporations would almost certainly mean that research and development would leave the province, along with the head offices, the regional offices, and the employees.

If we need to modernize the Crowns, and if we need to go outside of Saskatchewan for them to grow and expand, then perhaps the time has come, however, to look at other ownership models. Partnering with other established companies may be the way for us to have an international presence and preserve Saskatchewan jobs without putting Saskatchewan taxpayers at risk in high-flying global adventures.

Putting Saskatchewan residents in debt for the \$300 million is a clear repudiation of the Romanow legacy. Premier Romanow after years of sacrifice would never have agreed to put this province a further 300 million in debt to pursue investments in countries that would send most of the residents of this province scurrying to their atlases to find out where it is.

Mr. Speaker, if we need to invest massively to modernize forest fire suppression, then perhaps we should partner with private business to have a state-of-the-art mobile force that, as well as being used in Saskatchewan during our brief forest fire season, could be used in the southern US, South America, and elsewhere, outside of our forest fire season, and could become a year-round mobile fire suppression service.

If we need 86 new staff in fire suppression and expensive new equipment, why not partner and make use of these new professionals and equipment year round, and have a year-round service that could make money for this province?

Mr. Speaker, a budget which spends 200 million more on current expenses than revenue and projects 300 million increased debt, is not sustainable. Most provinces and the federal government are predicting declining revenues for the coming year in the wake of fears of a recession. The present trade dispute with the United States does not augur well for our forest industry.

That raises the question: is this an election budget? I believe it may be, Mr. Speaker. I believe the NDP will be doing intensive polling over the next few months, and if the results are positive, there may well be a snap election later this year.

In order to fight that election, the Liberal Party must be able to explain to voters how its vision of the province differs from that of other parties. Everyday that passes is a lost opportunity to draft a program and present an image that defines us and our vision for Saskatchewan. We must present to the people of this province an alternative, not an echo. If we cannot say how we differ from the government or where we disagree with NDP philosophy and approach, there will simply be no reason to vote for us.

In the recent NDP leadership campaign, when the candidates were first asked their views on the coalition, their universal response was in effect that the coalition was a disagreeable necessity to be tolerated only so long as necessary for NDP purposes. The coalition and the Liberals would be tolerated only so long as essential. I took no offence at that, Mr. Speaker, I expected nothing less.

I was amused that when I began to say that perhaps the Liberals should withdraw from the coalition, the leadership candidates immediately dramatically switched lines. Even Nettie Wiebe, who at first declared that she had never talked to a Liberal and

wasn't particularly interested in doing so, declared that Liberals are reasonable people and as reasonable people she was confident we would agree with her view of the world.

The Premier said last week that the coalition did well in the Elphinstone by-election. Well, Mr. Speaker, with people like the Premier cheering on the Liberal Party we certainly don't need any more detractors.

Before concluding, Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate the Prime Minister on the appointment of Roy Romanow to head up a one-person commission on health care. Mr. Speaker, it is nearly 40 years since the historic Hall Commission set the stage for publicly funded health care in this country. We need to take a look how we can modernize that system to ensure that Canadians will continue to have the benefit of this most important of all of our social programs.

(15:30)

At the same time, Mr. Speaker, we need to deal with escalating health care costs. While it has often been observed that without our health nothing else matters, nonetheless we cannot as legislators allow health expenditures to crowd out other important public priorities. The task obviously is to modernize and have a viable health care service to our people while sticking within a sustainable, financially sound budget. I wish our former premier well in undertaking this important, and I believe, historic, task.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I see much good in this budget. The reinvestment in our roads is long overdue. The investment in our children's education at least from K to 12 is forward-looking.

However, the continued lack of respect for municipal government is troubling. The unexplained large increase in Crown debt — \$300 million increase in Crown debt — is not acceptable. The member for Cumberland says where would I get the money from? I don't know. That's my question to them: where do they get the money from to put our Crown corporations \$300 million in debt?

Maybe we can turn it over to him, Mr. Speaker, and it will be his turn to speak. Maybe he can tell us where the \$300 million is going to come from. I don't know the answer to that question. That's why I'm troubled by this budget.

It bothers me, it bothers me that the Saskatchewan Party says the government should slash taxes rather than increase spending. But they refuse to tell us, they refuse to tell us just exactly what spending they would forego.

The future of our province lies in educating our young people, bringing the Aboriginal population into full and active participation in the economy, and by encouraging investment here in Saskatchewan.

The business of government does not lie in running casinos or in scoping out investments around the globe. The business of government is to encourage a healthy economic and social climate to make sure our municipalities have the resources to supply residents with a safe, clean water supply, and the other

amenities and infrastructure of a modern society.

I see some moves in that direction in this budget, and I see some moves away from it. I have enormous problems with both the budget and the amendment — both fall short of the mark. The NDP budget is not sustainable. The new Department of Rural Revitalization is a hollow and expensive shell.

The Saskatchewan Party amendment is typically mean-spirited towards public servants and fails to identify which employees and programs are surplus to our needs.

Therefore, I will take the only reasonable and responsible position, Mr. Speaker, and vote against both the amendment and the budget.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And may I say that it's a pleasure to rise in this House today to join the debate on the coalition government's budget and the amendment brought forward by the member from Canora-Pelly.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the budget brought forward today by the coalition government . . . or recently brought forward by the coalition government, is without a doubt a good budget for the people of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, it definitely and very clearly shows what can be done for this province if we only believe in Saskatchewan and Saskatchewan people and all our communities. This budget also shows, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that a coalition government can and does work.

It shows also the important influence that Liberals have had on the coalition, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Above all, it shows that all people in the province regardless of their politics or place of residence can work together to give Saskatchewan an even more prosperous and promising future.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the members opposite try and suggest that Liberals had no influence on this budget and on the coalition government as a whole. Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, nothing could be further from the truth. And I'm pleased to say that there are people throughout the province that do in fact recognize the influence that Liberals have had and the stability that this coalition government has given governance to this great province of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in the last election the Liberal Party promised to make highways a major priority. Thanks to the efforts of our leader, the Minister of Education, and the member from North Battleford, highways were a major priority in this coalition government. The budget before us launches a historic, a historic investment. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we've heard this said time and time again, but there's a definite need for repetition because this is great news for the people of Saskatchewan. And it should be told over and over and over, this good news.

The budget provides for a historic investment of \$950 million

over a period of three years. With this money the coalition government will upgrade 800 kilometres of Saskatchewan's thin membrane highway to pavement. It will also speed up twinning of the western portion of the Trans-Canada Highway by 2004. Finally, it will allow Saskatchewan to identify and improve major trade corridors.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, aside from creating many, many jobs that the members opposite do not want to see created in this province for whatever reason, this will be a long-lasting investment into the economic well-being of this great province and all of its communities, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

In 1999 the Liberal caucus promised to make education a spending priority, a very high priority, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We believed that the province should increase its share of K to 12 education spending. Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, last year Liberal influence within the coalition resulted in a rebate for farm landowners to help them better handle the cost of education during some very tough times on the farm, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We promised it in 1999 and it was delivered upon last year.

This year we are pleased to build on this by delivering the largest investment ever in education and post-secondary education, training and skills, 1.1 billion — \$1.1 billion, Mr. Deputy Speaker. This includes an increase of over \$40 million in school operating grants to attract and retain some of the best teachers.

In my constituency alone, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the foundation operating grant for school divisions has increased as follows: in the Melville Comprehensive, by 19.26 per cent. For Melville School District, 20.33 per cent. Scenic Valley, 18.48 per cent. St. Henry's, 12.69 per cent, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Now if that's not good news for those folks, I don't know what is. And I don't know how the members opposite can speak out against something that's so good for our students, for our communities.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Liberals promised and we've delivered with our coalition partners for the betterment of our youth and all Saskatchewan people. In addition to those efforts in education, we are pleased to join our coalition colleagues in connecting more schools to high-speed Internet access and to expand the number of community schools.

Those schools, Mr. Deputy Speaker, will help foster closer collaboration between schools and other human service providers, like Health and Social Services.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in the 1999 election Liberals also promised tax relief for Saskatchewan people. Last year we were able to deliver on that promise with our coalition colleagues. By January of this year we were able to eliminate the flat tax, the debt-reduction surtax, and the high-income surtax. As a result of our accomplishments last year, 55,000 low-income people will no longer pay provincial income tax in this province. That's good news, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Today, I am pleased to support this budget which is going one step further by reducing the corporate income tax rate for small

business, from 8 per cent to 6 per cent. That is a 25 per cent reduction, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and we're very proud to be able to bring this to our small businesses and the people of this great province of ours.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, Liberals promised to work for our farmers in the last election, and I am pleased that my coalition partners and we are working towards that goal. We promised to get a representative at the world trade talks, and we delivered. We promised to remove the fuel tax on farm fuels, and we delivered. We promised to get the Prime Minister to take more responsibility for the farm crisis; in this budget, we are offering \$95 million in farm income support, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And recently in this House, all MLAs joined together to call on the federal government for yet more help. A call which I'm sure we all hope will be heard in Ottawa.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in 1999 our caucus said that health care was a major priority. I am pleased, extremely pleased, as we should all be, that in this year's budget it provides increases in funding for health districts, a new air ambulance, and additional funding to recruit and retain skilled health care providers. Mr. Deputy Speaker, Liberals said health care was a priority, and we will continue to make it one within this coalition government.

Today there was yet another example that coalition governments can work for both partners. Prior to the last election, my Liberal colleagues and I called on this government for a study into problem gambling in this province. Well I'm pleased to see that the coalition government will, in fact, be conducting such a study. It's proof, it's proof that we are working together to make this a better province and a great place to live.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the member from Saltcoats has repeatedly expressed his discontent about the budget because of funding for our municipalities. And his colleague, the member from Canora-Pelly, has even proposed an amendment to the budget to not hire new firefighters, health and social service providers, highway workers that were added this year to meet the priorities of Saskatchewan people.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I do not support the amendment of the members opposite, which would see these positions eliminated, as is the alternative the Saskatchewan Party is proposing.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the opposition's call to not hire these new health providers, highway workers, and firefighters in the communities across Saskatchewan to help reduce local taxes was described in our local paper as reckless, borderline irresponsible and unfair. And need I say more, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am extremely concerned, I'm extremely concerned that the opposition has not provided all of the information to municipalities when they asked them to support their motion to amend the budget. It's appalling, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

From what I understand, the opposition did not inform municipalities that in order to provide the additional \$30 million to municipalities, they want this coalition government to cancel 570 positions in the budget — 570 positions — which will

contribute to all those municipalities for firefighting, for health care, for education.

I am disappointed . . .

The Deputy Speaker: — Order, order. Order. Order. I understand that all hon. members are trying to engage in the debate at the same time. Unfortunately the floor belongs to the hon. member from Melville. I'd ask all hon. members to give the floor to Melville.

Hon. Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I do express sincere disappointment in the opposition for not giving those municipalities, the mayors and councils, all the information.

I have received letters as well expressing, expressing and suggesting, that it was borderline illegal the manner in which they misinformed those municipalities, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

(15:45)

I think the people of this province want these important services, and this coalition government supports what we have in the budget to make sure these people work for all the people in this province.

Mr. Speaker, despite what the opposition suggests, Municipal Affairs and Housing budget has in fact increased by 12 per cent or \$18 million. And with this increase we can continue to enable communities to provide local governance, public protection, housing, and library services, and in order to preserve Saskatchewan's heritage.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the municipal sector, like many publicly funded sectors, has been required to accept less in provincial revenue-sharing transfers in the last decade. The total amount of funding we provide today is less than what the province provided the sector in 1990. And thanks mainly to the shameful legacy left by the predecessors of the members opposite — the Devine Tories.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, contrary to what they are suggesting we are, in fact, making some progress in the right direction. The coalition government has increased its commitment to supporting Saskatchewan urban communities, rural areas, and the North with targeted programs.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, our support for revenue sharing has remained stable at \$55.1 million over the last few years. Our support for the transit for disabled program has also been steady at about \$2.2 million. Aside from the revenue sharing and transit for the disabled, our department has been moving in the right direction through such programs or such things as grants in lieu of taxes.

As you know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the provincial government, like the federal government, is exempt from paying property taxes to municipal governments. Four years ago, however, this province made a policy decision to make a financial contribution for local services where government- or SPMC- (Saskatchewan Property Management Corporation) owned buildings are located. This year marks the fourth year that this

program has been in place.

This year local governments, including municipalities, school boards, and libraries, will receive \$3.725 million increase bringing the annual total amount to \$13.1 million.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, two years ago other targeted funding was introduced by placing \$10 million in the provincial municipal infrastructure program. One year ago the coalition government introduced \$5 million for infrastructure through the Centenary Fund. This year we are pleased that the federal government is joining these efforts and providing \$12 million injection to our budget to support a tripartite program to help rebuild our municipal infrastructure.

This demonstrates, Mr. Deputy Speaker, a steady progress in a positive direction. There are no programs cut. The combined total at the low point to municipalities was \$68 million, and that was in 1998-99. It is \$97 million for this fiscal year, Mr. Deputy Speaker. If we were to add our support to SAMA, the Assessment Management Agency, and the four urban parks, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the total support to the municipal system would be in excess of \$104 million.

With increased support to the municipal sector through targeted programs, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we will continue to evaluate our ability to increase our support in future years relative to the fiscal capacity and other provincial priorities.

In the coming months, Mr. Deputy Speaker, our department will seek to engage the municipal sector in discussion about the goals and objectives and criteria that will serve the broad public interest in providing funding to municipalities. This will be a review of existing programs and existing funding levels with a view to making those programs better to serve the public interest.

I mentioned the Centenary Fund a few moments ago, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We established this fund last year to invest in capital projects and strengthen all of our communities into the 21st century. The fund includes a \$120 million allocation over a four-year period in six core areas which include heritage in part, social housing, and municipal infrastructure. We will allocate \$5 million per year in each of these areas, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

A couple of the projects that will be made possible through that kind of funding include \$2.5 million over the remaining three years of the fund to replace 15 paratransit vehicles annually in Saskatchewan communities. That's been told to me to be welcome news, Mr. Deputy Speaker. This is in addition to the \$2.2 million that the province has historically budgeted under the transit for disabled program for operating and capital replacement.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, as the Premier mentioned at the SARM (Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities) convention, \$1.7 million is being provided to help clean up abandoned fuel storage tanks under the environment portion of the Centenary Fund.

Finally, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the number of housing projects that we have previously announced are currently under way in Regina, Saskatoon, and Yorkton. Mr. Deputy Speaker, there

will soon be further announcement regarding allocations of funding available for heritage property, parks, municipal infrastructure, and, once again, social housing.

In addition to the incremental funding provided by the Centenary Fund, the province's funding for housing has remained stable this fiscal year at \$36 million. And the federal government will also continue to provide approximately \$62 million to support our existing housing portfolio — something that's extremely important to families throughout this province that need that kind of assistance.

These funds enable the Saskatchewan Housing Corporation to partner with municipalities and meet the needs of more than 60,000 low-income people throughout the province.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the coalition government is making other advances in our department. This year we are adding \$1.5 million for the provincial disaster assistance program. You may recall that in recognition of the problems experienced with flooding in Vanguard and natural disasters in other areas of the province, our coalition government tripled — tripled, Mr. Deputy Speaker — the maximum payments people can receive when uninsurable items are damaged by natural causes.

Prior to this fiscal year, the province did not budget for this program, but managed the expenses during the year as a special circumstance. By starting to budget for this disaster program, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the province is increasing the reliability of its budget plan and its ability to make timely payments to disaster victims.

This fiscal year there will also be an increase of \$1 million for the Saskatchewan Archives Board to address a serious backlog in its important role — in its important role — in preserving historical records for our future generations.

The Regina Public Library will receive a \$45,000 increase from the province in the second year of a three-year phase-in to support its efforts to help people by sharing resources with residents of other communities.

And funding for the Royal Saskatchewan Museum, the Western Development Museum, Wanuskewin Heritage Park, the Saskatchewan Science Centre, and the Saskatchewan Heritage Foundation will continue to remain stable.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, despite the historic investments this budget makes in highways, and the support that it provides for education, health, and connecting our youth in rural areas to the information age, the opposition members continue to trash talk Saskatchewan. This is a great shame, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The members opposite continue to suffer from Alberta envy and tell us how everything is so much better next door. Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the coalition government believes in Saskatchewan and the Saskatchewan people. And the members opposite, however, continue to trash talk this great province of ours.

Strangely still, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the members opposite want the people of Saskatchewan to believe that they can run this province. And they can get out there and convince everyone

else that Saskatchewan is a great place to live. Yet, Mr. Deputy Speaker, they are the people who trash talk Saskatchewan and they talk like they don't believe in this province and don't believe in Saskatchewan people.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the people of Saskatchewan are proud of this province. There are many people in this province who believe in its future, and contrary to what members opposite say, they are planning to stay here and continue to build Saskatchewan. Some, Mr. Speaker, are returning here and bringing their entrepreneurial skills to do great things in this province.

Before me, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I have the "Community Pride" edition of the Moose Jaw *Times-Herald*. In it are many good news stories, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that people like the government and are investing in this province because they do believe in Saskatchewan and in the future of Saskatchewan.

This whole . . . this entire paper is filled with businesses that are celebrating either just starting up business — having been five years, two years, three years, again five years, and it goes on, six, nine, ten years, twelve years, sixteen years. Mr. Deputy Speaker, it goes on and on — 19 years, 23 years. These are businesses that continue to believe in this great province, are happy to be here, are building their communities — 28 years, Mr. Deputy Speaker; 38 years, Mr. Deputy Speaker. They are still here in this province because they believe in this province and they speak highly of this province. They don't tell their customers and their friends that this is a bad province to live in because of a bad governance. They say this is a great province because of the great coalition government.

Forty-seven years, Mr. Deputy Speaker, 48 years, 64 years, Mr. Deputy Speaker, 91 years, 95 years, 96 years, Mr. Deputy Speaker — these are good news stories from great business people who invested in their province through their businesses, believe in their communities, and continue to contribute to this great province of ours, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, that same community has recently seen investments — investments, new investments by the province, the community, and the federal government. These have resulted in the construction of the spa, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Everyone's heard of the great spa in Moose Jaw.

This was followed, Mr. Deputy Speaker, by the development of the tunnels and the attraction of an out-of-province business like Bombardier to run their air base. Since then, Moose Jaw has adopted an attitude that they can accomplish anything right here in Saskatchewan. And I'm sure that my colleagues, the member from Moose Jaw Wakamow and Moose Jaw North, would agree.

I'd like to share a few of those good news items as well. While the members opposite say businesses are leaving and everything is gloom and doom, the "Community Pride", once again, Mr. Deputy Speaker, tells it all. It lists many of the businesses that I just mentioned that have been here for years and years and plan on remaining here.

Now aside from those businesses proudly advertising how long they've been here, let's just go to a story here about the tunnels.

Let's read something about these tunnels, "Underground Economy Thriving." And I quote from this newspaper, a former . . . Mr. Deputy Speaker, the folks over there aren't going to like to hear this, they're not going to like to hear this because they believe the people leave here and never want to come back because it's a bad place to live.

Well I want to quote:

A former Moose Jaw resident from Vancouver visiting the tunnels in the summer of 1999 put a new face on the whole project. Danny Guillaume, who grew up in the Marquis district, saw the potential for much greater development of tourism potential. A successful developer of a video store chain and a big box pet food retailer that sold for \$30 million, the 37-year-old envisioned a world-class tourism destination built around the tunnels.

(16:00)

Mr. Deputy Speaker, right here in Moose Jaw, in this great province of Saskatchewan.

Look at the good news stories: "More Senior's Homes Being Built in the City", Mr. Deputy Speaker. There are good news stories throughout the . . . wheat, the top crop for Moose Jaw area farmers. The chicken crop holds potential as the next *Cinderella* crop . . . chickpea crop . . . sorry not chicken crop, I got the member for Melfort all excited. It's the chickpea crop holds potential as the next *Cinderella* crop, especially on lighter soils in the South.

There are a lot of good news stories in this province, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Moose Jaw is a city on the grow, being one of the fastest growing cities of its size in Canada. Moose Jaw problems, other critics wish for . . . that's other people wish for.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Osika: — The mayor, Mr. Deputy Speaker, credits developments of the spa with changing attitudes in Moose Jaw and turning the economy around. That's what we need, a change in attitude. The change in attitude gave investors confidence to develop the tunnels and other tourism operations.

It used to be that young people said they had to get the heck out of the city, says Mayor Schwinghamer. That's changed. Now the young people are saying I can stay here or I want to come back.

Those are the good news stories, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that do exist in this province. Those are the stories of people in this province that believe . . . they believe in the coalition government, they believe in the stability of this government . . . governance, and they will continue to invest in their communities, because they believe in themselves, and this great province of ours.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to close by reminding the members what this budget represents as our province approaches its millennium celebrations in a few years. Mr. Deputy Speaker, Saskatchewan in the last 10 years has faced, and conquered, one of its greatest crises. My coalition colleagues and former

Premier, Roy Romanow, successfully overcame the deficit legacy of the predecessors of the members opposite.

While Liberals did not always agree with the former premier, he deserves credit for restoring this great province to a position where it could finally look forward to the future.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Osika: — In this budget, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and in this House, the members of this coalition government and the people of this province have yet another legacy of the members opposite to overcome. And that we will overcome. And that's the attitude.

The members opposite, and their Tory predecessors, left this province a legacy of scandal. And left people thinking that Saskatchewan is a place you leave from and not a place you go to to live and fulfill your dreams with a good quality of life. Each day, in the trash-talking we hear, we continue to hear the promotion of that legacy.

Mr. Speaker, this is a good province. This is a great province. We believe in this province. We believe it has a bright future and we will make sure we reverse the negative attitude and the legacy. We will reverse the negative attitude so that people will believe, as do the people that live and support our communities, as they do believe. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I'd like to take this opportunity to speak about the budget brought down by the Minister of Finance on March 30 and explain to the Minister of Finance how disappointed the people of Redberry Lake are concerning the direction of the budget and the direction of the NDP Liberal coalition government.

The people of Redberry Lake and the people of Saskatchewan were looking for tax relief, but what did they get? Zero tax relief. No cut to PST (provincial sales tax). No cut to the gas tax. No cut to property tax. No new cuts to income tax. No new tax relief for Saskatchewan farmers, Mr. Deputy Speaker. This, from a government that took in over \$500 million in windfall revenues. The government is sitting on a \$500 million slush fund, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the expanded PST that was announced in last year's budget is hurting businesses in Saskatchewan, hurting the economic performance of this province and, in particular, hurting the businesses and people on the west side of the province who unfortunately are losing sales and losing businesses and people to Alberta because of the costs of the expanded PST.

And even in the city of North Battleford, it's affecting the economy there drastically. You only have to talk to any accountant in North Battleford and they will tell you that the expanded PST has hurt them directly as a business, and hurt their customers.

Also property tax, no reduction in property tax; possibly an increase in property tax, which I'll discuss later. It's hurting the

businesses and farmers of Redberry Lake and Saskatchewan.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'd just like to quote from *The Leader-Post*, Regina, Thursday, April 5. The headline reads, "Not much help."

Sorry, Mr. Deputy Speaker, one more here. "Urban centres said shut out."

Mr. Speaker, Saturday, March 31:

Saskatoon Mayor Jim Maddin clutched a copy of Friday's budget address to his chest and said he was guarding it jealously.

"It's the only thing the province gave to me today," he joked.

He goes on to say:

"Municipalities are completely shut out of this budget, and it hurts."

Regina Mayor Pat Fiacco said, "There isn't one new dollar going to municipalities, not one . . . the urban centres have been absolutely blanked," (Mr. Deputy Speaker).

The president of the Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association (SUMA) criticized the province's reporting of federal money within the province's budget figures. "That's just flow-through money and I think it is somewhat misleading and, actually, almost deceiving," Mike Badham said.

It goes on to say, Mr. Deputy Speaker:

"People did share in the pain, and municipalities in particular," Badham said. "Now, there's the acknowledgement that things are getting better, but there's no acknowledgement of any further transfers to municipalities."

The mayor of Regina says there's a likelihood we could be looking at property tax increases unless the municipalities are able to do things differently, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

People of Saskatchewan were looking for a reduction in income tax in this budget and again they were disappointed, Mr. Deputy Speaker. No decreases in income tax were announced. And again, that makes the province and the businesses uncompetitive in this province in relationship to our trading neighbours both east, west, north, and south, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It's not just to Alberta that we're losing businesses, but we're also losing businesses and jobs to the United States.

What little tax relief the budget did give was far too much . . . far too little, Mr. Speaker. It was only a reduction in the small-business tax by 2 per cent, which only cost the Government of Saskatchewan \$8 million. And there's no long-term plan in order to phase out the small-business tax. The businesses of Saskatchewan were looking for this business tax to be phased out, and they were very disappointed that this has not happened, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

We do see higher energy rates starting to impact the bottom line of the NDP Crown. So what does the government do? The government raises SaskEnergy rates, raises SaskPower rates, and more rate hikes planned for later.

What did they do to protect the family from the effects of the high energy prices? They gave a measly \$25 back to the families of this province. The government's sitting on \$500 million in windfall in oil and gas revenues and the government only gives back \$25 for Saskatchewan families, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The Government of Saskatchewan gave a rebate but the rebate is gone and so is the tax cuts from last year's budget, Mr. Speaker. Net cut to personal taxes in 2001 from the 2000 budget documents was \$106.9 million.

The current rate hikes: SaskEnergy rate hike was 88.8 million; SaskPower rate hike, 14 million; and energy rebate was a merely \$10 million. A total rate hikes of \$92.8 million, which totally took away any tax relief that the government gave in last year's budget.

And this year we're looking at more. SaskEnergy rate hikes at least another \$88.8 million. And who knows how much more SaskPower rates? And further energy rebates were unfortunately zero. At least another \$88.8 million in rate increases without any tax relief whatsoever, Mr. Speaker.

The difference between the Saskatchewan Party and the NDP is clear, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The NDP believe tax dollars belong to them. The Saskatchewan Party believes tax dollars belong to the Saskatchewan taxpayer.

The Saskatchewan Party believes government should be doing everything it can to reduce the tax burden and to leave more money in the hands of the Saskatchewan taxpayers. The NDP believe they can spend your money better than you can.

They believe in making bigger government. Incredibly the NDP has added 570 new government employees. Yes, Mr. Deputy Speaker, another 570 new government bureaucrats at a time when employment in Saskatchewan is down. Last year figures: 13,000 jobs in one year lost. New Statistics Canada reports another 4,800 people net migration and 8,400 people leaving Saskatchewan, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and what does the NDP do? Nothing for the province of Saskatchewan whatsoever.

It's incredible, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but it seems that the only people that the government has pleased were the union leaders. Again it seems to be a pay-off to the union leaders like Barb Byers, who wanted more and bigger government so they'd have more union members, and in turn more union support for the NDP, all at taxpayers' expense, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

But there is one union that isn't quite happy with the government, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I'd like to quote from an article Friday, March 30. "Union blasts raise for community workers." Unfortunately, the government has forgot about community-based organizations in this budget.

The member from Cumberland speaks about respect for workers. Well I'd like to know what he thinks about respect for these workers in the community-based organizations.

I'd just like to read a bit from the article, Mr. Deputy Speaker:

Union officials who represent community-based workers had harsh words for the government after it announced Thursday that it will give a \$6-million wage increase to the province's community-based organizations (CBOs).

"This government is perpetuating the past reliance on these workers' silence and invisibility and on the silence and invisibility of the clients for whom they care" said . . . CUPE national representative. "They think they can get away with giving us crumbs."

The member also goes on to say that:

The \$6 million wage increase does not bring workers closer to their goal of wage equity, but if it had been the first year of a multi-year strategy, the workers would have been happy.

The three unions, which represent 3,000 of the 10,000 community-based workers employed in areas such as child care crisis intervention, group homes and women's shelters, haven't ruled out the possibility of strike action to back their demands (Mr. Deputy Speaker).

So that's what they think of the budget, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

What does the University of Saskatchewan think of the budget, Mr. Deputy Speaker? It says "Budget — a let-down at U of S. Students face tuition hike, MacKinnon warns."

I'd like to just quote from the article:

The provincial government's commitment clearly ends when it comes to universities, University of Saskatchewan president Peter MacKinnon said Friday.

Although university funding will rise by 3.5 per cent, that's not enough to cover inflationary higher salaries and (the) increased utility costs.

That means students will face higher tuition, MacKinnon said.

"This falls well short of the kind of investment we require," a discouraged MacKinnon said in an interview.

"Clearly I haven't been successful in conveying the message that investing in the future requires a major investment in the universities (Mr. Deputy Speaker).

He goes on to say, Mr. Deputy Speaker:

"What we heard today will have an effect on tuition . . . We will require more revenue from tuition and I would expect that will mean substantial increases in tuition."

(16:15)

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the government announces a rural vitalization office and unfortunately, Mr. Deputy Speaker, where do they put it? They put it in Regina. It would have been

a good sign to rural Saskatchewan if they had placed this office out in the rural areas where it's supposed to serve, but unfortunately it has been put in Regina again.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this government looks like a government that has been run behind closed doors by former premier, Allan Blakeney — more bureaucrats, more Crowns, more and bigger government departments.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the people of Redberry Lake have been working hard. The Redberry Lake Biosphere Committee has been holding public meetings, working on any advantage they can find in their area to promote economic growth and economic renewal. It's unfortunate but they run up against the same roadblocks year after year.

They need, in order to encourage investment in the Redberry Lake area, they need a proper infrastructure. The roads and highways are in a disastrous situation and desperately need to be upgraded. They need assurances that the hospital in Hafford will remain there as a viable hospital for the citizens of that area. They need simple things like a proper cellphone service. How are they to have tourism in the area without proper cellphone service, Mr. Deputy Speaker? And the list goes on and on.

And of course, farming is a very important part of Redberry Lake constituency and unfortunately the government has let them down in that area as well, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I'd like to quote from *The Leader-Post*, Regina, Thursday, April 5, "Not much help":

The Canadian Farm Income Program is turning into a horrible April Fool's joke for many Saskatchewan farmers.

First, the good news: \$200 million is available under the program for our farmers this year.

Now, the not-so-good news: Thousands of producers who suffered plummeting incomes in the 1990s won't get a dime. That's because only those farmers who did really badly and suffered a major income drop in 2000 — a single year — (will) qualify.

Now the punch line (Mr. Deputy Speaker): All of that \$200 million is unlikely to be used up because not enough farmers will qualify. But there sure aren't any giggles down on the farm in Saskatchewan.

University of Saskatchewan professor Ken Rosaasen summed it up . . . this week: "In my view, the program will pay farmers between very little and not very much."

He estimates there'll be an average cheque of about \$3,700.

Canada is unwilling to match the agricultural subsidies of Europe and the U.S., but . . . (unfortunately) Farmers are going broke and quitting the land in droves in Saskatchewan . . . (Mr. Deputy Speaker).

And again the provincial government has been promising a long-term safety net since 1995 when they tore up the GRIP

(gross revenue insurance program) program. And unfortunately the farmers of this province are very disappointed that they have not received any assurance of a long-term safety net.

Again the question is asked, what would a Saskatchewan Party government do? Well a Saskatchewan Party government would lower taxes, have a smaller government.

In the budget, the government is collecting over \$500 million in windfall and oil and gas revenues, despite the fact that the government now has over \$500 million sitting in its Fiscal Stabilization Fund. There was no, absolutely no increase to municipal revenue sharing.

Given increased operating costs such as the dramatic increases to SaskEnergy, SaskPower rates, most municipalities will have no choice but to increase property taxes as a result of the government's inaction in revenue sharing.

The Saskatchewan Party estimates that a \$300 million increase to urban and rural sharing would . . . revenue sharing would allow municipal governments to hold the line on property tax hikes. It is worth noting that three . . . \$30 million is about the figure the provincial government will spend this year on hiring 570 new government employees, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'd like to quote from some letters I have from communities in Redberry Lake concerning the Saskatchewan Party's amendment to the budget. The RM of Leask, 464, supports the proposed amendment to the 2001 budget to provide an additional \$30 million in revenue sharing for municipalities.

The village of Leask also supports the amendment to provide \$30 million in revenue-sharing funds for the municipalities.

The village of Marcelin, Mr. Deputy Speaker . . . I'd like to read it into the record — it's rather lengthy — about their concerns about the budget and the support of our amendment. It says:

Please be informed that the council for the village of Marcelin supports your call for an additional \$30 million in revenue-sharing grants.

And some of the reasons for the support are: in 1993, the revenue-sharing grant for the village was \$13,299; for the year 2000, it was \$6,765, for a total decrease of \$6,534, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The assessment in revenue decreases from 1998 to 2000 were as follows: assessment decreased by 26.35 per cent; tax revenue, 18.7 per cent; total municipal revenue decreased by 11.3 per cent. The assessment for the year 2001 is \$1,169,380, which is an additional 2,670 decrease over the last year, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Marcelin council were required to increase their mill rate by 2 mills, increase the minimum tax by \$150 per property, and increase the basic water and sewer rates by \$30 per year per house.

Expenditures in the village of Marcelin: utilities have increased

from \$16,333 in 1998 to an anticipated \$18,951 for the year 2001, for a total revenue of \$2,618 — 2.2 mills, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Net policing costs after grants from \$111 in 1999 to an anticipated cost of \$3,000 this year — 2.56 mills.

The PST tax imposed by the provincial government on repair services, equipment, maintenance, professional services, and used equipment also meant additional expenditures for the village. And also due to the budget restraints, our municipal employees did not receive an increase in their salaries since 1997, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The village is in need of a grass mower for this year. They will be required to deplete their capital trust fund of \$6,000 and finance the remaining \$4,500 from general operating revenue.

The council are finding it extremely difficult to properly maintain their sidewalks and streets. It appears that each year there's a further deterioration due to lack of funds for proper repair and maintenance.

It goes on to say these are just a few difficulties that the Marcelin council are experiencing due to the lack of provincial government funding, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The government should not be telling municipalities and the ratepayers to once tighten their belts while expanding the size of the provincial civil service.

I will be . . . I will not be supporting the budget but will support the Saskatchewan Party amendment urging the provincial government to cancel its plans to expand the civil service by 570 positions and instead use the money to provide \$30 million to municipal governments to allow them to hold the line on property taxes.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Well, Mr. Speaker, it's a pleasure today to provide a reply to the budget speech that was given by our Minister of Finance on March 30. I want to commend the Finance minister on his budget that sees a significant investment in education, highways and transportation, and in technology. It's a budget that gives people in our province the tools that they need in order to succeed.

I also want to wish . . . I also wish to congratulate our new Speaker upon his election. And also my congratulations to you, as the member for Regina Sherwood, as you assume your new duties as the Deputy Speaker.

I want to thank the previous Speaker of the House, the member for Melville, for his contribution to the legislative process in Saskatchewan.

I also want to congratulate two new members of the legislature — the member from Regina Elphinstone and the member from Saskatoon Riversdale. They had a tremendous opportunity to speak to citizens in both Saskatoon and Regina as they

campaigned for their seats in the legislature, and I know that both of these members will make excellent contributions to the legislature in Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, I also want to say thank you to my constituency assistant, Judy Gossen, who works in my MLA office in Saskatoon. Judy had a three-month medical leave from her duties as she underwent a very serious treatment for a medical condition, and she is now back in the office as of Monday, April 2. And I know that people who live in our constituency have sent many good wishes to her and she has made full recovery.

To the young people who filled in for Judy, Sheila Cameron and Janine Rafoss, I want to thank them for their work in the constituency over the past several weeks.

Before I get into the budget, I want to make a few comments about the constituency of Saskatoon Nutana. As you know, Mr. Speaker, whenever one talks about their own constituency, they risk launching a debate amongst various members of the legislature about their constituencies. But I want to say something about the people who live in Nutana. In many ways our constituency is the centre of Saskatoon. It's the very heart and soul of our great city.

The constituents in Saskatoon Nutana represent a real cross-section of the community of Saskatoon and of our society in general. Mr. Speaker, the constituents of Saskatoon Nutana are proud citizens of our province and they are proud citizens of our city. They're level-headed people. They know a good budget when they see it. And they do believe this is a good budget, Mr. Speaker, a very good budget.

People in my constituency are in agreement with most people all across the province that we delivered an excellent budget on behalf of the people of our province last Friday.

Mr. Speaker, they see this as a balanced budget. It's balanced in the accounting sense but, just as important, it's balanced in its approach.

They know that this budget provides for increased investments in our citizens and the services that they need. They know that we will see increased operating grants to the three school divisions in our city — the public, Catholic, and the francophone school division. And they know that our city and our community will see significant direct benefits as a result of the increased investment in funding and health care and education in our cultural and community sectors and all of the services that are provided to the people of our province.

Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to be here today to tell you more about our good news budget for the province of Saskatchewan. As the Minister of Finance indicated last Friday, under the leadership of our former premier, Roy Romanow, and through the many, many sacrifices borne by our citizens, we've been able together to restore our province's financial health and we've taken Saskatchewan back from the brink.

Mr. Speaker, we're now in a position to fulfill the vision of our new Premier, a vision for a Saskatchewan where all people enjoy prosperity and a good quality of life. Mr. Speaker,

contrary to the doom and gloom preached daily by the opposition, our government is moving in an exciting new direction.

As an educator as a profession, I'm especially happy that we're connecting our citizens to the future by making the biggest investment ever in education and training so that young people have the tools that they need in order to succeed right here at home in our province. Mr. Speaker, in this budget, we're investing \$1.1 billion in education and skills training — the largest amount ever spent in our province's history.

We're also going to use some of that new money to establish 42 new community schools in both rural and urban Saskatchewan, nearly doubling the number of community schools in our province.

We're going to provide new training initiatives and opportunities in the skilled trades through the Aboriginal apprenticeship program. And this is extremely important because we have a young Aboriginal population that wants to access post-secondary education and skills training, and that's what this initiative will do.

We're going to increase the number of early learning programs for at-risk children in high-needs communities.

And, Mr. Speaker, we're taking the action needed to provide students the opportunity to participate in our province, to communicate with each other and compete in a global economy.

(16:30)

Mr. Speaker, we're making good on our promise to shift the cost of education away from the local property tax base and bump up the province's share for the total cost of education from 40 per cent of cost of education to 42 per cent by increasing the property . . . or the operating grants to school divisions by \$41 million. That's a 10 per cent increase over last year's budget.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I know the opposition over there doesn't really know where they sit on the need for a high-speed Internet in our province, particularly in our rural communities when it comes to Saskatchewan businesses and Saskatchewan citizens. And I note the member from Kindersley says in the March 21, 2001 issue of *Hansard* and I quote:

The new Minister . . . (of) Rural Revitalization said, and we were talking about this this morning in caucus, some of the things that they've been putting forward. The moment that . . . it is almost laughable some of the things, Madam Minister, and, Mr. Speaker, that they have put forward in terms of this thing. They are saying that one of the problems in rural Saskatchewan is the fact that we don't have (a) high-speed Internet.

Well, Mr. Speaker, he was laughing about the need for a high-speed Internet in rural Saskatchewan.

And then, Mr. Speaker, we have the member from Arm River and what does he say regarding the high-speed Internet in

Hansard on March 29, 2001? He says and I quote:

Now another one is . . . high-speed Internet, Mr. Speaker. I had a business just . . . (the other) morning from Outlook saying that he could hire two additional staff if he had high-speed Internet in Outlook.

Well, Mr. Speaker, contrary to the confused and confusing statements coming from . . . as the member from . . . our Deputy Premier said, flip and flop — because they seem to be flipping and flopping all over the place on that side of the House — we know, we know that high-speed Internet is important to rural business and rural Saskatchewan.

And if the Sask Party happened to visit their own Web site, they would see that one of the resolutions that they passed at their convention, I believe last fall — actually a resolution from the constituency of Kindersley — the member from Kindersley who's opposed to high-speed Internet. What did that resolution say? They said that they wanted access to Internet in order to promote agricultural business in the province of Saskatchewan.

So we have a member who stands up in the House. He's opposed to his own party policy. He says his caucus laughs about their own party policy. And then we see the member from Arm River saying that a business in Outlook could hire a couple of other people if they had access to high-speed Internet in rural Saskatchewan.

Well, Mr. Speaker, this budget delivers high-speed Internet to rural communities in our province and that's good news for economic development in our province.

Mr. Speaker, we're also connecting Saskatchewan people to one another and to the world by investing in another information highway to create a growing and diversified economy. Mr. Speaker, in the April 3, 2001 *Leader-Post* under the headline "Internet upgrade called boost to province," Larry Symes the board Chair of the Saskatchewan Research Network speaks about our commitment to provide enhanced Internet service for Saskatchewan.

Mr. Symes says:

This is significant . . . (and) This will permit us to develop national centres of excellence (so that) We can compete with scientists (across) the globe.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I ask you: does this sound laughable to you? The member from Kindersley thinks so, but we don't think so, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to take a few minutes to talk about our government's commitment to health care. People in our province see health care as a top priority, and we do too, as their representatives on the government side. This year we'll spend \$2.2 billion on health — an increase of 11.6 per cent over last year's budget.

Mr. Speaker, it is our province that introduced medicare. And we will continue to provide a system that is sustainable, stable, and effective into the future. And in fact, Mr. Speaker, our health care system is the envy of North America. Its resources

are being stretched to the limit and it's undergoing radical change, but when has this not been the case?

It bends, Mr. Speaker, but it does not break. And those people who have direct experience with the system are pleased with the services that they receive.

Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan people recognize that we have to make changes to assure that we can sustain our health system into the future. And I might add, Mr. Speaker, they don't want a system that is privatized or offers private medicine in the way that we are seeing creeping privatization in Alberta, and certainly they don't want a US system, Mr. Speaker.

Last year at the request of the former premier of Saskatchewan, the Commission on Medicare was launched to identify pressing issues and recommend actions on change required for a stable and effective health system. The Fyke Commission report will soon be delivered to our new Premier and we will review the recommendations and we will obviously want to receive feedback, Mr. Speaker.

But we're going to continue to place Saskatchewan's health care interests on the national agenda.

Mr. Speaker, we're also connecting to the future by investing records amount of money in our roads and highways to support economic growth and development in our province. If people in this province are to prosper, we have to connect people to markets around the world. And to do that, Mr. Speaker, we need to have a strong physical infrastructure. In this budget, we will make the largest single investment in Saskatchewan's highway and transportation system ever seen in our province's history.

In 1997 we announced our decision to spend \$2.5 billion over the next 10 years on improving transportation in our province. And with this year's budget commitment, we're easily surpassing the spending level needed to meet that \$2.5 billion target. We're going to invest \$311.6 million in transportation. That's a 25 per cent increase over last year's budget.

And, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to talk about another commitment that we're exceeding in this year's budget, and I'm referring specifically to our twinning initiative on Saskatchewan's national highway system.

In 1997, our government promised to twin all of the No. 1, the Trans-Canada Highway, from the Alberta border to the Manitoba border, and to twin Highway No. 16, the Yellowhead Highway, from the Battlefords to the Alberta border. We're going to complete the twinning of the section between the Alberta border and Tompkins by 2004. Four years ahead of schedule, Mr. Speaker.

And this year, on this section of the Trans-Canada, we will pave and open a further 19 kilometres from the Alberta border to the east. And we will also begin upgrading and grading 21 kilometres that will take us to the junction of Highway 21 at Maple Creek.

We'll be opening 33.5 kilometres of new highway on the Trans-Canada between Indian Head and Wolseley. And we're going to open 16 kilometres of new highway on the

Yellowhead, from west of Maidstone to east of Lashburn.

Last year we budgeted \$13.3 million for twinning our national highway system, and this year we're almost doubling that amount of our spending by investing \$25.6 million in additional twinning.

Mr. Speaker, we're ahead of the schedule set in our 1997 provincial twinning commitment. And, Mr. Speaker, we pushed ahead our twinning plans without federal government participation. The federal government still refuses to accept their share of responsibility for the national transportation system.

Mr. Speaker, we're also going to improve those roads that make up our major trade corridors. We want to improve northern highways, and northern roads as well. And, Mr. Speaker, we're going to be fixing the highways damaged by increased grain hauling.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to clear the air once and for all on the fuel tax and equivalent road and highway spending.

Fact — this year's budget estimates fuel tax revenue of \$367 million. Fact — when you deduct fuel tax revenue from the trains, planes, farms, and First Nations fuel tax rebates, you have \$326 million collected on . . . (inaudible) . . . fuel tax.

Fact. Our government will invest \$334 million in Saskatchewan's roads and highways in this year's budget. Fact. Our investment in roads and highways in our province is greater than the . . . (inaudible) . . . road fuel tax collected. End of issue, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, we're going to be fixing the roads. And it will be a very good year for employment in the Department of Highways. And it will be an even better year for Saskatchewan people who will see real improvements to their roads and highway transportation system.

Mr. Speaker, we're going to upgrade primary and regional pavements, and we've substantially increased our surface preservation program this year to improve the condition of aging pavements and the level of surface on TMS (thin membrane surface) roads.

Mr. Speaker, I'm extremely happy to see that our government is enjoying very rewarding and co-operative relationships with the major transportation stakeholders. I'd like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the contributions as such important stakeholders as the Saskatchewan Road Builders and Heavy Construction Association, the Association of Consulting Engineers, and SARM, and SUMA (Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association). I'd also like to acknowledge the good work that's being done by our 11 area transportation planning committees throughout our province. All of these groups, Mr. Speaker, are working with us to improve transportation in our province.

Now, Mr. Speaker, clearly improving transportation is a priority for our government, and that's reflected in this year's budget increase. Mr. Speaker, our major or primary highway systems carry about 65 per cent of the traffic in our province. These

major highways are the arteries that support economic and social development. They are the highways that serve us interprovincially, and these are the highways that support economic development across our province.

These highways are absolutely critical to our ability to move commodities to market. And these highways are essential as we encourage tourism in our province. Mr. Speaker, this budget provides for the kind of system we'll require in the future.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to take a minute to talk about short-line railroads. Short lines obviously are going to help us with our TMS highways and are one of the solutions to TMS's is to keep rail service in many of our province.

In 1994, Saskatchewan had just one short-line rail company that was serving a 50-kilometre distance. Today we have seven short lines serving 1 point . . . or 1,250 kilometres of railway. Our department's short-line advisory unit has helped organizations and communities cope with branch-line abandonment.

Mr. Speaker, we were extremely pleased to hear CN (Canadian National) announce last week that they have put a moratorium on further branch-line abandonment in our province and in the prairie basin in order that all of the stakeholders can come together and determine how we're going to have an integrated road, rail, and grain-handling and marketing system.

Mr. Speaker, last fall our Premier made rural revitalization a centrepiece in his campaign for the leadership of our party to become Premier of our province. In one of his first moves as Premier, he created a new Rural Revitalization office and appointed a Minister Responsible for Rural Revitalization to work with rural communities to help create initiatives for economic growth.

Mr. Speaker, make no bones about it, revitalizing rural Saskatchewan will be a key focus for our government in the coming months and years. The office of Rural Revitalization will ensure that programs and services across government work to support rural citizens, to support rural communities, as they endeavour to promote economic development in our province. The office will develop initiatives that contribute to rural economic development. And this office will work to alleviate the kinds of obstacles that we sometimes see when it comes to rural opportunity.

Another important part of my new department's mandate will be to consult with rural communities, businesses, and individuals about economic development opportunities. The focus of the office is first and foremost to ensure that rural individuals and businesses have the support of our government to seize the various business opportunities that will be available. We're going to help to build a strong and competitive economic base outside of our large centres, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the members opposite in the Saskatchewan Party would try to have us believe that Saskatchewan is the most godforsaken place to live on earth. — that no one is working in our province, that our roads are crumbling, that our health care system is a disaster. The Saskatchewan Party would have us and the world believe that our children are leaving in droves, that

our taxes are too high, and that our farm economy and rural way of life is gone.

Well, Mr. Speaker, under the leadership of our new Premier, the member from Saskatoon Riversdale, our government is going to work with all citizens in our province to develop opportunities in all regions of our great province.

Mr. Speaker, I've learned as a minister of the Crown, that budgets are not about numbers but they're about people, they're about our citizens. Good budgets address people's priorities, and Mr. Speaker, this budget addresses the priorities of the citizens of our province.

(16:45)

Mr. Speaker, our Premier has a vision for our province. It's a vision where people are prosperous and where they enjoy a good quality of life. Mr. Speaker, our Premier has a vision for this province that builds on the spirit of the citizens of our province. He believes that our province is filled with prosperity.

We can be a confident province and an innovative province and that's why you see, throughout the budget, the notion of connecting to the future. Mr. Speaker, this is the true spirit of Saskatchewan.

This is a Premier and a government that is moving ahead into the future. We have confidence in this province. We have confidence in the citizens of this province. We are optimistic about the opportunities available for our young people, our citizens, and we are going to build on our many strengths, Mr. Speaker.

I'm going to be supporting the budget when we vote on it tomorrow and I can assure the members opposite I will not be supporting their amendment where they basically say to the public service in this province that the work that you do is not valuable. And, Mr. Speaker, the work that people in the public service provide to our citizens is valuable.

The work that the people do in the Department of Highways to maintain our highway system in this province is valuable. It makes our roads safe for our vehicle traffic, for our ambulances and for our school buses. That is good public work.

And, Mr. Speaker, the public service deserves to be treated with respect and any government that does not understand that, any political party that does not understand the importance of the public service in terms of getting the work done in this province in the public sector is doomed for failure, Mr. Speaker.

Their motion will fail tomorrow. It will fail tomorrow. And, Mr. Speaker, their motion has been sent far and wide across this province to the 60,000 people that provide public services in municipal government, in schools, in hospitals, in Crown corporations and in the civil service. They and their families will know what kind of contempt these members opposite show to the public service.

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

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased to stand and talk on the budget. We've heard an awful lot of . . . from both sides of the House about what the budget has done or has not done, but I want to, I want to come again back to you with some of the comments that we have already heard, but some that are in the paper from Saturday, March 31, *The Leader-Post*: "Budget has spending back in style again." There's an interesting point in this particular article, Mr. Speaker. And it says, quote:

While I applaud Calvert's concern for the downtrodden and disadvantaged, I offer this caveat: Just as government does not exist to merely make ends meet, it must also remember from where the means to those ends come.

And I think that's a very, very important message in this, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, also another point that I'd like to address is from the Saturday paper also: "Business leaders call for longer-term tax plans." And I think we all look at that.

And in the article — and I'll paraphrase a bit — and it says, we've got to be competitive on our taxes. And it talks about there's 500 million in new spending from three years ago, and with that half a billion dollars they could have eliminated the small-business tax, cut school taxes in half, and sped up, deepened, and broadened the personal income tax cuts they announced last year.

Mr. Speaker, we hear an awful lot of rhetoric about the budget. But here's one I think that's very near and dear to the members opposite when it hits the urban centres: "Urban centres said shut out." And I quote:

"Municipalities are completely shut out of this budget, and it hurts," Regina Mayor Pat Fiacco said. "There isn't one new dollar going to municipalities, not one . . . the urban centres have been absolutely blanked."

And in the same article, Mr. Speaker, I want to read another part of it. In this particular same article it says:

The president of Regina's Amalgamated Transit Union is worried the lack of increases to the revenue-sharing grants will lead to reduced services, such as bus routes and para-transit services.

"We hear they're going to increase funding for the disabled by 20 per cent for education, but there's not enough rides to get them there," John McMormack said. "They may have forgotten who put them into power here . . . now they're going after the rural vote and we're going to be paying for it."

Well, Mr. Speaker, if this budget is going after the rural vote, I think there's something really wrong.

Mr. Speaker, on[**CORRECT**] *The Leader-Post* on Tuesday, April 3, here's another article that, I think, should be very near and dear to all of us. And it says: "Oil industry came up dry in

the latest Sask. budget.”

In this article, Mr. Speaker, we look at what the oil industry is basically saying. And I quote:

“We don’t see much advantage at all for the \$1.2 . . . (million) we’ve put into the economy,” said Mike Monea, president of Flatland Exploration Ltd. of Regina, following Friday’s budget.

“The only thing that’s good for Saskatchewan oil companies is that the taxes here are so high we don’t have a lot of competition.”

So competition . . . there’s so much taxes they don’t have competition. That’s the only positive thing they have to say about the budget, Mr. Speaker.

And, Mr. Speaker, I’d like to do just a little quote here. And I think it’s something, I think it’s something for the members opposite. And this is . . . it says: imaginative insight, statesmanlike foresight, sagacity in planning. And I’m wondering, I wonder, Mr. Deputy Speaker, if anybody on that side knows, knows what that really means. Because I have heard, I have heard for the last few days about a vision — a vision for Saskatchewan. We hear from members opposite, we have a vision on this side of the House, over there.

Well, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Deputy Speaker, what I just quoted you was the definition of vision. Now I say to you, was any of that in this budget? And I think the answer is absolutely no.

Also, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it’s very, very interesting, it’s very interesting when we talk about taxes. And I’m going to read about taxes from the member from Regina South. Mr. Speaker, in *Hansard* on March 26, the member from Regina South, he says:

Saskatchewan today draws the single lowest — the single lowest — proportion of its revenue from income taxes of any province in Canada.

And goes on to repeat it, goes on to repeat it:

I want to repeat this . . . the lowest — write this down, members opposite — lowest percentage of its budgetary income from income tax of any province.

Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I consider that a sorry state of affairs if you consider that you’re proud of the fact that you’re not collecting any income tax. That means to me you don’t have people working and that people are going out of the province to work. I would be happy if every person in this province could pay income tax, and the member opposite is not happy with it. He’s proud of the fact that we have the lowest source of revenue from it.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Mr. Speaker, it just does not make sense — and that is not progress.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Mr. Deputy Speaker, I spoke with a . . .

The Deputy Speaker: — Order, order. I understand that the hour of adjournment is approaching and members may be getting a little restless, but I’d just ask . . . the hon. member for Wood River has the floor and I’d just ask that we all quieten down to hear him.

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Mr. Deputy Speaker, I’d like to digress. I would like to digress if I may for a couple of minutes. And the jeering and the heckling, which I don’t mind, but it brings to mind a story, a factual course of events that happened to me when I was in Winnipeg.

I was in Winnipeg listening to an individual speak, and as he was speaking, people opposite like the people opposite here, but people in the crowd were heckling the speaker. And the speaker stopped right in mid-tracks and said; please don’t heckle while I’m speaking. He said, quote, he said:

I only have 15 minutes to make an idiot of myself and you have the rest of your life.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, when I talk to my constituents, one of the things that very much concerns them is taxes. And now with this budget and the increase of taxes that is evident, they are going to go up in the rural areas.

Mr. Speaker, one individual I talked to with reassessment, RM No. 77, taxes going up 100 per cent. Mr. Speaker, that is a problem that we have.

There was going to be, there was going to be a very rare occurrence. Not unlike myself, I retired back to Saskatchewan. An individual was coming back to Saskatchewan, retiring where I now live. After the Friday budget he phoned and said, nix, I am not coming back with taxes going up like they are.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I’d now like to talk a little bit about this revenue sharing that the municipalities are being faced with. People have suffered long enough. They have tightened their belts, and now the government is loosening their belt again, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to the tune of 570 more people.

Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would like to explain a little bit about my knowledge of a system such as this. Having been involved with a government organization for some time, it was looked at as an inverted Coke bottle type of a system. Now that is what we’re dealing with here — a very, very large number of people at the top; a very large number of people in the middle, as middle managers; very, very few workers.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would like to read you something that very much subscribes to that theory. Here we have news release by the Government of Saskatchewan. And here they’re talking about 54 new positions in child welfare. We all applaud the positions in child welfare, we all applaud it — funded by the feds but we all applaud it.

But here is something in this, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that I believe everybody has to know. And it’s right in their own press release. There are 9 supervisory positions — keep in mind for those that have trouble adding 54 people — 9 supervisory

positions, 25 administrative positions, and 20 caseworkers.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, does that not fit into my inverted Coke bottle philosophy? That is what this government is doing. That's why our bureaucracy is so large, it's expanding, expanding, and yet our front line people are down at the lowest numbers. And all we have to do is look around at the other agencies and we can see where that's happened.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'd also like to go on and talk a little bit more about the inverted Coke bottle theory. We look at hearing where we are, in a letter from the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, we are proposing to cut — cut — jobs.

Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we are not cutting, we are . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . I'll run it out of time, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'd like to vote for adjournment.

The Deputy Speaker: — Order. Order.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Debate adjourned.

The Assembly adjourned at 17:00.