

The Assembly met at 13:30.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRESENTING PETITIONS

Mr. Elhard: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise to present a petition on behalf of producers in the southwest area of the province, particularly in the constituency of Cypress Hills. 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 take the necessary steps to ensure current Crown land lessees maintain their first option to renew those leases.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

And, Mr. Speaker, this petition has been signed by producers from Sceptre, Swift Current, Alsask, Tompkins, Cabri, and several other communities.

I so present.

Mr. Stewart: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to present a petition signed by citizens concerned with the dangerous and deplorable condition of Highway No. 42, particularly the section between the communities of Brownlee and Eyebrow. And the prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to make the necessary repairs to Highway No. 42 in the Arm River constituency in order to prevent injury or loss of life and to prevent the loss of economic opportunity in the area.

This petition is signed, Mr. Speaker, by individuals from the communities of Eyebrow, Central Butte, Riverhurst, Moose Jaw, and Kingman, Alberta.

I so present.

Ms. Eagles: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I have a petition today signed by people that are very, very frustrated with the condition of Highway 47 south of Estevan. And the prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to take immediate action and make necessary repairs to Highway 47 South in order to avoid serious injury and property damage.

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

And, Mr. Speaker, this is signed by folks from Estevan, Lampman, people whose children ride the bus, and even some from Estevan, or pardon me, from Regina, actually.

I so present. Thank you.

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also have a petition from citizens opposed to the Saskatchewan Crop Insurance 2003 premium increases to farmers. The prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to take the necessary steps to have Sask Crop Insurance reverse the 2003 premium increases and restore affordable crop insurance premiums to our struggling farmers.

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

Signed by the good citizens from Biggar.

I so present.

Mr. Allchurch: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I rise in the Assembly again to bring forth a petition signed by citizens of Saskatchewan that are very, very concerned that government's handling of the Crown land leases. And the prayer reads as follows, Mr. Speaker:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the provincial government to take the necessary steps to ensure current Crown land lessees maintain their first option to renew their leases.

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

The signatures on this petition, Mr. Speaker, are all from Spiritwood.

I so present.

READING AND RECEIVING PETITIONS

Deputy Clerk: — According to order the following petitions have been reviewed and are hereby read and received.

The petition concerning repairs to Highway No. 22; and

Addendums to previously tabled petitions being sessional papers nos. 5, 12, 13, and 18.

NOTICES OF MOTIONS AND QUESTIONS

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

To the Agriculture minister: how many Crown land leases are there currently in Saskatchewan; and further to that, how many total quarter sections of Crown lease land are there right now in Saskatchewan?

I so present.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Seated in the west gallery are two guests I want to introduce to the House this afternoon. Annie Alport is a grade 11 student at LeBoldus and she is running for the distinction of the award of Lester B. Pearson.

And with her today is Mr. Bert Yakichuk, who is the principal at LeBoldus. And I'm going to be meeting with them later after question period today, Mr. Speaker. And we're going to be talking about ag issues in the province and ag subsidies and how they affect the international marketplace.

So I want all members of the Assembly to join with me today in recognizing Annie Alport and Mr. Yakichuk. Welcome to the Assembly.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Hon. Mr. Wartman: — Mr. Speaker, on behalf of my colleague, the member for Regina South, I would like to introduce to you and to . . .

The Speaker: — Order. Order, please. Order, please. I believe the member wishes to do an introduction. I've already passed that part on the agenda. Does the member have leave for a further introduction?

Leave granted.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Hon. Mr. Wartman: — It is with great joy and thanksgiving that I now ask . . . have the opportunity to introduce these students from St. Matthew School — 22 students, grade 8 students from the school who are in the west gallery with their teacher, Mr. Lawrence Biegler.

And I would ask all members to join in welcoming them to this Assembly.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Opportunities for Youth

Mr. McCall: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As a government that is committed to building for the future, we are continuing our tradition of managing the province's finances in a responsible, prudent manner while at the same time meeting the needs of Saskatchewan people.

To this government, Mr. Speaker, meeting the needs of Saskatchewan people means a record \$1.2 billion allocated for education and skills training to build our future by enhancing education facilities and providing young people better opportunities to learn.

It means, Mr. Speaker, \$76 million in capital improvements for schools and post-secondary institutions. It means 80,000 post-secondary and training opportunities, including 30,000 spots for university students. It means 5,400 training

opportunities in the skilled trades and it means \$66 million made available for student loans, Mr. Speaker, with half that amount as bursaries and grants.

Mr. Speaker, our vision is to build a high-quality education and training system that will allow the young people in this province to seize their own futures and provide all people of this province unlimited opportunity to enrich their lives and contributed . . . contribute to the economic, cultural, and social growth of this province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Swift Current Couple Wins Volunteer Award

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise to salute the outstanding efforts of two individuals in my hometown of Swift Current. Bob and Rachelle L'Heureux are the recipients of the 2002 Darrell Weber Award for their support of the local Big Brother/Big Sisters Organization. The award is presented to individuals who have made an outstanding volunteer contribution to the promotion and well-being of the Big Brothers/Big Sisters program.

And that's exactly what Bob and Rachelle have done, Mr. Speaker. Twice now the L'Heureuxs have donated a portion of the proceeds from their annual L'Heureux Agencies fundraising golf tournament to the Big Brothers and Big Sisters.

And on top of that, Rachelle is a volunteer with the in-school mentoring program. Mr. Speaker.

I think we're all aware of the valuable role that the Big Brothers/Big Sisters play in each and every one of our communities and part of their success is because of the contribution of people like the L'Heureuxs.

Mr. Speaker, I would ask the entire Assembly to thank them for their ongoing commitment and contribution to Big Brothers/Big Sisters in the community of Swift Current.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Prince Albert's New Performing Arts Centre

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, I know that you're already aware but I am pleased to inform all of the members of the Assembly that a ceremony will be held in our hometown of Prince Albert tonight. Mr. Speaker, tonight there will be a ceremony to name the theatre in the E.A. Rawlinson Centre, Prince Albert's new performing arts centre, Mr. Speaker.

The centre has become a reality thanks to the efforts and the generosity of many people, including the Prince Albert Arts Board, the Diefenbaker Trust, the Prince Albert Kinsmen Club, Rawlco Communications. And I want to say, Mr. Speaker, how pleased I am that this government has contributed two and a half million dollars to this project and proud, though not surprised, that our hometown has raised over \$4 million to help the final construction.

Mr. Speaker, this new theatre has seating for 612 people and comes complete with a fly loft, state-of-the-art sound, and wonderful acoustics. After the naming ceremony this evening, Mr. Speaker, the theatre's premier performance will feature Chantal Kreviazuk . . . Kreviazuk. I didn't do that very well; I'll improve on that later.

Mr. Speaker, the E.A. Rawlinson Centre for the Performing Arts is a tribute to the vision of the people of Prince Albert, their love of the arts. And I'm sure every member of the Assembly will join us in congratulating Prince Albert on a great, great achievement.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Weyburn Inland Terminal

Ms. Bakken: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the Weyburn Inland Terminal, Canada's first farmer-owned inland terminal, has once again shown a solid performance. In the word of Claude Carles, president of the terminal, and I quote:

“Although it was a difficult year for grain operations, the efficiencies built into the terminal and the continuing strong support of our customers have allowed Weyburn Inland Terminal to stay profitable . . . Sound investments made over the years and no long-term debt are paying off today. Most of our shareholders are also our customers and we depend on their support.”

Mr. Speaker, the Weyburn Inland Terminal has led the way with innovative ideas to better serve their customers and maximize returns to their shareholders. The terminal, started in 1976, has also been at the forefront of change in the industry and continues to show leadership to improve the overall efficiency of Canada's grain handling system.

The terminal is one of the main contributors to Weyburn's economy, creating jobs and providing a very valuable service. The Weyburn Inland Terminal's philosophy, their goals, and the reason for their success are summed up in their mission statement: profitability through service, innovation, and integrity.

I'd like to congratulate the board, management, and staff for providing an excellence in service that is second to none and wish them continued success.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Aboriginal Employment Development Program Agreement

Mr. Forbes: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, in keeping with this government's commitment to developing an expanding economy from which no one is excluded, I'm happy to announce the signing of an agreement as part of the Aboriginal Employment Development Program, between the Saskatchewan Union of Nurses, the Saskatchewan Association of Health Organizations, and the Department of Government Relations and Aboriginal Affairs.

Mr. Speaker, through the Aboriginal Employment Development

Program, this government is working with Saskatchewan employers, unions, and our own departments to help break down barriers to employment for Aboriginal people.

Since the inception of this program, over 40 partnership agreements have been signed and over 1,450 Aboriginal people have been hired. Mr. Speaker, when this program was introduced, less than 1 per cent of workers in the health sector were Aboriginal. Today I'm pleased to say that the number has risen to four and a half per cent; and, Mr. Speaker, this recent agreement will go a long way to bringing that number to the 13 per cent it should be to reflect the percentage of Aboriginal people in the population.

Mr. Speaker, this is part of our vision and part of our plan for this province, to build a future that is wide open to everyone. Thank you very much.

Innovative Saskatchewan Farming Company

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our pioneers knew that in order to survive they had to be innovative. Farmers today continue to recognize that they have to be innovative in their farming practices to survive in competitive markets.

Jim, Tim, and Greg Sowa needed a packer for their farm but they weren't happy with the products that were available, so they designed and produced their own shank-mounted packers. This was not a new concept, but what was new was customizing it to fit their needs and then designing and creating other products to fit the demands of other farmers.

Since the inception of their business, Valley Systems of Wadena, in 1993, they have produced such products such as shank- and gang-mounted packers, tine-type mid-row banders, anhydrous ammonia application trailers, and header-divider wheels for harvest equipment. Their products are custom designed to meet specific needs that were not being met by equipment manufacturers.

This company has not only met the needs of the local producers, but they have secured an Australian distributor and Americans are also starting to look at their equipment. This company, which started from three innovative individuals recognizing a need for a product, has evolved into a company that is now being recognized internationally.

Mr. Speaker, I would ask this Assembly to join with me in congratulating Jim, Tim, and Greg Sowa on their innovation and wish them well in their future endeavours.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(13:45)

New Business in East Regina

Ms. Hamilton: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our future is wide open. Saskatchewan's economy is robust. And nowhere are both of these statements more evident than on the east side of Regina, which includes much of my constituency of Regina Wascana Plains.

Yesterday morning I was proud to be present at yet another significant business opening by a major Canadian company — London Drugs. London Drugs is a 100 per cent Canadian-owned company with 58 stores across Western Canada, employing more than 7,000 Canadians.

Now, Mr. Speaker, London Drugs has one more location, this one in east Regina. And there are 85 more jobs for Regina workers — more good news for our city and our province.

I mentioned that London Drugs is a Canadian company. Mr. Speaker, as it does in other communities, London Drugs and its officials will be involved in the life of our city. It works with hospital foundations, local charities, promotional events, medical foundations, and other non-profit organizations. The same involvement will come to Regina along with, I'm sure, excellent customer service.

Mr. Speaker, I was pleased to join President Wynne Powell, store manager John Vankoll, Mayor Fiacco, and many others at the ribbon-cutting ceremony. And I am delighted to welcome this new business to our community.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Estevan Bruins Sportsman's Dinner and Auction

Ms. Eagles: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, this past Saturday I and over 500 others had the pleasure of attending the 11th annual Estevan Bruins Sportsman's Dinner and Auction.

Everyone in attendance enjoyed great speakers — Ken Holland, who is general manager of the Detroit Red Wings and Scotty Bowman, retired coach. And an interesting note, Mr. Speaker, is Scotty Bowman is the only head coach in NHL (National Hockey League) history to win nine Stanley Cups and he is also the only coach to win cups with three different clubs.

Congratulations to Jade Chipley of the Estevan Archery Club who was chosen Female Athlete of the Year — 14-year-old Jade has already won two gold medals at the national level.

Congratulations are also in order for the Estevan Luscar Peewee AAA Haulers who as a team won Male Athletes of the Year. They were the provincial champions in 2002.

There were many different types of auctions taking place throughout the evening, Mr. Speaker. At the live auction NHL jerseys of very popular hockey players were sold for as much as \$3,600.

This was a very successful event that again proved the generosity of Estevan and surrounding communities. Hats off to Ron Areshenkoff, chairman of the dinner committee; to Andy Schroeder, president of the Estevan Bruins, and to everyone who made Saturday night the success it was.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ORAL QUESTIONS

Harassment Allegations Against Former Civil Servant

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Environment minister.

Last October six female employees of the Environment department complained that they had been intimidated, humiliated, and sexually harassed by their boss, Murdoch Carriere. The women all worked in the same Prince Albert office and ultimately reported to Mr. Carriere.

In December an independent investigation concluded that Murdoch Carriere was guilty of sexually harassing these six women. On February 12 the deputy minister informed the six women that he had also concluded that they had been harassed.

On the same day, February 12, the deputy minister wrote to all employees in Mr. Carriere's Prince Albert office. He praised Carriere's skill as a manager and announced that Carriere had been appointed to the position of senior adviser to the NDP (New Democratic Party) government in Regina.

Mr. Speaker, will the Environment minister confirm that he was fully briefed by his officials that Murdoch Carriere had been reassigned as a senior adviser to the NDP government?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to assure the member opposite that the policy was followed and both the minister responsible for the Environment and myself were informed on or about the same day, February 12, when the report was completed, but neither one of us were privy to the details of the report. We were told that there was a disciplinary action taking place, but none of the details of the investigation were available either to the Minister of the Environment or to myself, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Julé: — Mr. Speaker, the minister's comments are different than what she told the Assembly yesterday.

Mr. Speaker, Murdoch Carriere was the NDP's director of fire management in Prince Albert. Last year Mr. Carriere was responsible for managing 140 employees and a \$100 million budget. When Mr. Carriere was suspended with pay from his job last October as a result of allegations of sexual harassment, the deputy minister must have advised the Environment minister of the situation.

When the independent investigation confirmed Murdoch Carriere was guilty of sexually harassing six women, the deputy minister must have advised the minister of these serious developments. When the deputy minister reassigned Mr. Carriere as a senior adviser to the NDP government at \$85,000 per year, the minister must have been briefed.

Will the minister confirm today that he was briefed on the Murdoch Carriere sexual harassment affair and that he was briefed on Mr. Carriere's appointment as a senior adviser to the

government?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all I want to clarify one thing. Mr. Carriere, having been a 30-year employee of the government, worked under Liberal, NDP, and Tory governments. So I think everybody understands that this is a professional civil servant.

The next thing I would want to say is, where does the member opposite believe the line exists between political interference and the bureaucracy? In our view the professional civil service hires, fires, and disciplines people. We set the policy that guides those decisions but we do not directly interfere in those decisions.

My concern here, Mr. Speaker, is, is the policy working adequately? I read the report. I have determined no, it isn't. And I have taken action.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I have two very simple questions for the Environment minister. The Environment minister is responsible for his department and he should be accountable by answering questions today.

What did government officials tell the Minister of the Environment about why Murdoch Carriere was suspended with pay last October? And what did government officials tell the Environment minister about the results of the independent investigation that concluded Murdoch Carriere had sexually harassed six female employees?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm going to outline exactly what Mr. Belanger and myself were told . . . Oh sorry, I apologize — the minister for the Environment. We were told that there was a matter involving a senior employee, Mr. Carriere, on or about February 12. It would be like earlier that day, maybe the day before. And the fact of the matter is, is that we are given no details, only the fact that there was a disciplinary action and that this is the result.

However I will say that today I announced that we are not satisfied that in those very few cases where allegations are serious that we have a sufficient oversight process. So I have given the Public Service Commission one month in which to bring forward a suggestion for improvements to this process.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Julé: — Well thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it is evident by now that according to the minister responsible for the Public Service Commission, the Environment minister was definitely aware on February 12 that Murdoch Carriere was not being fired, even though he was guilty of sexually harassing six female employees.

If the NDP government has a zero tolerance policy on sexual harassment and the Environment minister knew that his deputy minister had decided not to fire Murdoch Carriere, even though he was guilty of sexually harassing six female employees, why,

why didn't the Environment minister step in and fire Murdoch two months ago? Why did it take a front page newspaper story and embarrassing questions from the opposition before the NDP government finally did the right thing and fire Murdoch Carriere?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Well, Mr. Speaker, I can see that we're clearly returning to the old Tory days of the Devine government, because the fact of the matter then in those days politicians did interfere in who was hired and fired. Public servants had no protection from the whims of their political masters.

And I have to say, Mr. Speaker, given that this employee in question has worked through three different governments, suggests that . . .

The Speaker: — Order, please. Order. Order, please.

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Mr. Speaker, just on that point I'll say that we believe in a professional public service where people are judged on their merits. But further, there was serious discipline action taken. The respondent was suspended without pay. He went from a job of supervising 200 people with a budget of 37 million to a demotion with no supervisory responsibility, no budget, and under day-to-day supervision.

He never actually assumed that job because yesterday he was notified by phone that he is terminated.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Julé: — Mr. Speaker, I'm sure that the citizens of this province watching this on television today are really questioning what serious discipline means when this employer of this government goes to another position, maintains a job for \$85,000 a year, and six female victims are left without any recourse or any compensation.

Mr. Speaker, according to many of those women who were harassed by Murdoch Carriere, Mr. Carriere would often boast about his political connections to the NDP government. And according to the report of the independent investigator, Murdoch Carriere often talked about his friends in high places in this government.

Mr. Speaker, did the Environment minister ever discuss the allegations of sexual harassment or the investigations into the allegations, or anything related to the investigation and subsequent decision not to fire Mr. Carriere, with Murdoch Carriere or anyone else either in the government or outside the government, prior to yesterday?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Mr. Speaker, the Minister of the Environment would have been privy to the report the same time I was, which was about 3 o'clock yesterday. And that is not even 24 hours ago, Mr. Speaker.

The second comment I would make is that there are two purposes to the zero tolerance policy. One is that women are protected in their ability to continue earning an income by being

safe in their workplaces. The second one is the removal of any confirmed offender from the workplace. He was actually removed from the moment the investigation began and has never since returned to that workplace. So the two highest tests of that policy were met.

The question here is whether the discipline was sufficient for the purposes of zero tolerance. I read the report yesterday, not 24 hours ago, and I judged that it was not sufficient.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my next question is for the Premier.

Some of the women who complained about being sexually harassed reported an incident that occurred last summer when the Premier went to visit Mr. Carriere in the Prince Albert office. According to the independent investigator's report, Murdoch Carriere often called one of his female employees by a nickname that she found highly offensive. According to the independent investigator's report, Murdoch Carriere introduced this woman to the Premier by that nickname. Imagine, Mr. Speaker, a young woman who was excited about meeting the Premier of the province, and then is embarrassed by her boss, Murdoch Carriere, when he introduces her not by her full name with respect, but rather by a nickname that she feels highly offensive.

Mr. Speaker, I ask the Premier today, how did he feel about this incident, and was he aware that it was part of the Murdoch Carriere harassment investigation?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Speaker, I became aware of this circumstance yesterday afternoon when — late yesterday afternoon — when I first had an . . . If the Leader of the Opposition would care to be quiet in this House he could . . . he may hear an answer.

Mr. Speaker, I became aware of the comments in the investigator's report yesterday afternoon. I well remember the day when I and a number of our caucus toured the Forest Fire Centre in Prince Albert to meet many of the men and women who were so ably taking on the challenge of the forest fire situation in this province last summer. Mr. Carriere did in fact take us round and introduced us to, I would not know the exact number, but dozens and dozens of people in that circumstance.

(14:00)

Mr. Speaker, it is now, by the report, indicated to me that in one of those introductions Mr. Carriere referred to one of those employees as quote, "pet." Totally inappropriate and because of that kind of activity, the action that this government has taken today has been taken.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hermanson: — Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Premier. The person who committed sexual harassment has now been fired but only after it was raised by the media and by the opposition. The government's first reaction was to cover it up. Instinctively they chose to protect the man who was guilty of

sexually harassing six women, according to the government's own report.

Mr. Speaker, the initial decision — and this is important — the initial decision was not to fire him. Instead the NDP government condoned sexual harassment. They made him a special adviser at the taxpayers' expense of \$85,000. Mr. Speaker, the people who made that decision must also be held accountable and that includes the Minister of Environment.

Will the Premier finish the job and fire his Minister of Environment?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Speaker, Mr. Grant Schmidt in today's paper says in his view this group of men and women are not capable of governing the province of Saskatchewan. And they are making that exceptionally clear today, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, in relationships with public servants in this province, it is the principle of the government that I will lead that we will respect the public servants of this province. And we will respect the processes that are in place to protect those public servants at all levels, Mr. Speaker.

We would not take the point of view that's being expressed today: that in investigations of this nature, that the politicians should immediately move in and make the decisions. No, that's not the case, Mr. Speaker, that's not the case.

Now, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker, when in fact, when in fact this kind of issue reaches to the level of public exposure, when this in fact is brought to the attention of the minister for the very first time yesterday with the detail, she took the appropriate action as the minister responsible for the Public Service Commission, Mr. Speaker. And that is the kind of process this government will continue to follow.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hermanson: — Mr. Speaker, we've known that the NDP has been financially negligent for quite some time, and now we recognize that they're also morally negligent.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hermanson: — Mr. Speaker, the NDP likes to talk about its zero tolerance policy, but it seems like the Environment department had plenty, plenty of tolerance for sexual harassment.

One sociology professor at the U of R (University of Regina) says that the government's actions trivialized sexual harassment. She said the NDP government has taken the attitude that boys will be boys. Well that's not good enough and that's not acceptable. The Environment minister's decision to protect a sexual harasser is an affront to every woman in Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, how can the Premier say that he has a zero tolerance policy on sexual harassment when he allows a minister to protect a sexual harasser in his cabinet?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Speaker, this is offensive that the Leader of the Opposition would make that kind of accusation which is based on . . .

The Speaker: — Order, please. Order, please. The Premier may continue.

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — I repeat, when the Leader of the Opposition, based on no fact, will make that kind of accusation it is absolutely offensive. And it is offensive, I may say, to the due process that affects the public servants of Saskatchewan.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the great defender now stands in his place. Isn't this the great . . . Isn't this the leader who goes all over the province saying to working people, we're going to eliminate all those labour laws that protect people. That's what he says — that's what he says. Now he shakes his head.

Well I say then, Mr. Speaker, he's got the party that has resolutions to get rid of the Human Rights Commission. I say then let's . . . the jig is up. You please stand up, Mr. . . . Sorry, Mr. Speaker. The Leader of the Opposition should stand up in this House and tell us precisely which labour protections for working people that party proposes to eliminate — just which ones.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hermanson: — Well, Mr. Speaker, a few weeks ago the Premier had to stand up and confess that his government had been misleading the people of Saskatchewan. Seems it's becoming a habit — seems it's becoming a habit.

Mr. Speaker, once again the government has only done the right thing after it got caught. For six years, the NDP misled Saskatchewan people about SPUDCO (Saskatchewan Potato Utility Development Company); they finally told the truth after they got caught. The NDP allowed millions of dollars to be misspent by SIGA (Saskatchewan Indian Gaming Authority); they only dealt with it after they got caught.

Mr. Speaker, and now the NDP's initial decision was to protect the job of a sexual harasser; they only fired him after they got caught. Mr. Speaker, the actions of the NDP reveals that they decided that sexual harassment wasn't a problem. The real problem was taking the heat for it after they got caught.

My question to the Premier: if the NDP really had a zero tolerance policy toward sexual harassment, why didn't they fire this individual before they got caught?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Speaker, again I agree with Grant Schmidt, this group of men and women are not capable of governing, Mr. Speaker. Because what the Leader of the Opposition just said, what the Leader of the Opposition just said, is before any due process is done, any due process is complete, that the politicians should terminate people in government. Now that rhymes very nicely with their pledge to have the witch hunt in the public service — they've . . .

(inaudible) . . . that.

Mr. Speaker, I remind you and I remind the citizens of Saskatchewan it is this government, Mr. Speaker, that has put into place the policies of anti-harassment in this province. It is this government. And it is that party that promises, if they are elected, to rid the province of labour protections for working people.

Now I tell you who's caught. It's that Leader of the Opposition and that party. And today before the end of the day, they ought to stand out there in the rotunda and explain precisely to the people of Saskatchewan just which labour protections they are going to remove from the working people of Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Growth Projections

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan people continue to question the credibility of the NDP budget. Earlier this week, a number of professors told the Saskatchewan Institute of Public Policy that the budget is unsustainable. Gary Tompkins said, the budget is not balanced. There is actually a \$392 million deficit. And he said Enron executives in the United States went to jail for financial misrepresentations that weren't much worse.

Mr. Speaker, economics professors are comparing this NDP government to Enron executives. It doesn't get much worse than that. How can the NDP expect this budget to have any credibility with the public when it's being compared to Enron?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Melenchuk: — You know, Mr. Speaker, we tabled our budget on Friday morning and we talked about our projections in terms of growth. And these have been confirmed by all of the independent forecasters because the number that we arrive at, Mr. Speaker, for 2003 is \$32.5 billion, Mr. Speaker. And when I quote from . . .

The Speaker: — Order, please. Order please, members. Order, please. Order.

Hon. Mr. Melenchuk: — Mr. Speaker, when we looked at the projections from the Royal Bank for a gross domestic product, a real GDP in 2002 with 31.6, they are predicting for 2003, 32.6 — 31.6 to 32.6; Bank of Montreal, 31.5 to 32.4; Scotiabank, 31.6 to 32.4 billion real GDP.

And what is our prediction from Sask Finance — 30.5 to 32.5.

We're all getting to the same number. We're all forecasting growth in this province and they should be happy about that, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'm glad that the Finance minister is talking about growth projections because that's what the professors of the Saskatchewan Institute of Public Policy were actually talking

about, the NDP's growth projections.

John Allan, another economics professor says, the 6.8 per cent growth rate would be extremely large and that the province's deficit is likely to rise if the NDP does not live up to this growth rate.

That's exactly what I was asking the minister on Monday, Mr. Speaker. One would think the Department of Finance might do some projections to estimate what would be the impact of a more realistic growth rate like 3 per cent. But according to the Finance minister they haven't.

Mr. Speaker, what would be the impact of a 3 per cent growth rate? How much would that impact revenues? How much would that drive up the deficit?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Melnychuk: — You know, Mr. Speaker, you know, Mr. Speaker, the members opposite like to play fast and loose with the numbers, but the bottom line from all the forecasters is that the economy of Saskatchewan in 2003 is growing and it will be \$32.5 billion.

And, Mr. Speaker, we're predicting a normal crop. And guess what? It seems that everybody else now is predicting a normal crop because moisture levels in Saskatchewan are average or above average in most of the grain belt, so our predictions are predicated on a normal crop. And now people are saying, guess what, you're likely going to have a normal crop.

And they talk about fantasy this and fudge numbers that, but I'll tell you, Mr. Speaker, what isn't fantasy — \$2.5 billion for health care, \$1.2 billion for education, and 650 million in capital investment from our Crowns in this province, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Krawetz: — Mr. Speaker, I find it very hard to believe that the Department of Finance would not have a projection for different . . . for numbers of growth, Mr. Speaker. So either the minister is hiding it or if he doesn't have it, he should get it right away. Either way, he's not doing his job, Mr. Speaker.

The minister is betting his entire budget on an unrealistic growth rate according to many people, Mr. Speaker. And he has no back-up plan at all for when his government comes up short. Maybe if he spent a little less time suing people and releasing the budget pre-emptively, then he might get his job done.

Mr. Speaker, what is the impact of a 3 per cent growth rate? How big will the deficit be if the private sector forecasters are right and the government is wrong?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Melnychuk: — You know, Mr. Speaker, it's obvious that the members opposite haven't been listening to the answer.

All of the forecasters, whether it's the TD (Toronto Dominion) Bank, the Royal Bank, Bank of Montreal, CIBC, (Canadian

Imperial Bank of Commerce) Scotiabank, or our own officials in Sask Finance, we all come to the same number for real GDP in the province of Saskatchewan, which is in that \$32.5 billion range.

So we're expected to grow. We're expected to have a normal crop year. We're expected to have improved revenues, Mr. Speaker. And we are going to spend dollars in the province of Saskatchewan to support the priorities of the people of Saskatchewan.

And I won't be taking advice from the members opposite, especially that member from Canora-Pelly, who sat there unelected as the official leader of the opposition for two years, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(14:15)

The Speaker: — Order, please. Order, please.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

SaskTel Extends High-Speed Internet Coverage

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This morning, Mr. Speaker, SaskTel announced that it would invest another \$156 million this year to ensure that Saskatchewan customers continue to receive the information, business, education, and entertainment opportunities that they have come to expect.

SaskTel's network investment is money well spent. Not only will this SaskTel investment bring world-class telecommunication services to more businesses, schools, and homes across our province, it will also keep jobs right here in our province, Mr. Speaker.

Since 1987 SaskTel has invested more than \$2.3 billion — I repeat, billion dollars, Mr. Speaker — in Saskatchewan infrastructure. Not every communications company invests this much to improve their network. Not every communications company spends millions of dollars to extend high-speed Internet and digital cellular service to rural Saskatchewan or rural anywhere, for that matter, Mr. Speaker.

SaskTel's mandate is clear. It's to provide reliable, low cost, cutting-edge service throughout this wide open province of ours, Mr. Speaker. That's SaskTel's number one job and it's a job that SaskTel does very well.

There is no other telecommunications company in Canada that has made the commitment SaskTel has made to deploy high-speed Internet service in sparsely populated areas. By the end of this year, Mr. Speaker, SaskTel will expand its high-speed Internet coverage to an additional 112 communities around the province. This year, Mr. Speaker, more than 74 per cent of Saskatchewan residents in 237 communities will have access to SaskTel's high-speed Internet service.

Mr. Speaker, every dollar SaskTel invests in its network is a dollar invested in Saskatchewan people, Mr. Speaker. The government is proud of SaskTel. We congratulate SaskTel for

the work it has done in the past and for the work that it will continue to do into the future.

Mr. Speaker, I congratulate SaskTel as I know Saskatchewan people do as well. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — Well thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to be able to respond to the ministerial statement on behalf of the official opposition. I'd like to thank the minister for providing us with a copy of his remarks before the proceedings began this afternoon.

You know, Mr. Speaker, the opposition has long held the view — and made it very public, mind you, Mr. Speaker — that when our major Crown corporations stick to their knitting, when they focus on their market, when they focus on the task at hand here at home, they have been quite successful.

We've said this of SaskTel. We've congratulated SaskTel on the fact that, even in the face of competition from the private sector, they've been able to hang onto such a large share of the market. And it speaks to the success that our Crown corporations can enjoy when they stick to their knitting, Mr. Speaker — when they worry more about Alida, Saskatchewan as opposed to Atlanta, Georgia, Mr. Speaker; when they focus on Nipawin, Saskatchewan, instead of Newcastle, Australia, Mr. Speaker. That is the message that the minister's statement sends today.

I think the minister's finally starting to see the light when he makes comments like he made today that SaskTel and the province and the Government of Saskatchewan are all much better served when the major Crown corporations focus on the needs of taxpayers in Saskatchewan instead of . . .

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — When they focus on the concerns of their customers in Saskatchewan instead of potential customers in Nashville, Tennessee, Mr. Speaker. This is the point we have tried to make again and again in this Assembly — especially with respect to SaskTel and SaskTel's record. Because SaskTel's record in international investments under this government with their hand-picked CEO (chief executive officer) of SaskTel and the former partner of Mr. Romanow, under Mr. Ching's leadership, the international investment program of SaskTel has been an unmitigated disaster for the taxpayers of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, the list is long. Retx.com, this is the dot-com they invested in in Atlanta, Georgia, lost 7.5 million. They continue to pour millions more in. SecurTek continues to lose money, Mr. Speaker; Persona, a cable company, has lost on about \$9.5 million; tapped *into* in Nashville, 2.4 million; Navigata across the western region, 2.5; Clickabid, Mr. Speaker, SaskTel's attempt to compete with eBay, lost almost \$2 million; Soft Tracks, they lost 2.1; and IQ&A, a failed bid by SaskTel to sell people's personal health care information, lost about a million . . . beg your pardon, two point million in operating loss, Mr. Speaker.

But when SaskTel focuses on Saskatchewan, good things happen. And so, Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the official opposition, I'm proud to be able to make the commitment today — through you to the taxpayers of Saskatchewan and this Assembly — that a Saskatchewan Party government will focus those Crowns on Saskatchewan, will grow the Saskatchewan economy, and will put a stop to the international madness that's going on in the Crowns.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

New Regional Hospital for Swift Current

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to follow my colleague talking about the Crown corporations. I'm not sure it's quite as much a pleasure to follow my colleague across the way when he talks about Crown corporations. I actually thought today we might hear some very positive things from the member for Swift Current, without a lot of the things that are going on. Basically what I want to say today, Mr. Speaker, is that I want to make an important announcement about health care.

This morning I had the great pleasure of travelling to Swift Current to make an important health care announcement from this government's 2003-04 budget. I was pleased to announce that our government is moving ahead with plans for the new regional hospital in Swift Current. Mr. Speaker, this is another example of our commitments from the Action Plan for Saskatchewan Health Care for a renewed health care system promoting greater access to quality health care in the province.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, this morning I announced that we are committing an initial sum of half a million dollars for planning and evaluation of the regional hospital project, building on the work that we've done with the Cypress Regional Health Authority to ensure this hospital is a provincial priority. This initial investment furthers the work begun many years ago by my previous colleagues in government, working with the then three health districts of the area — Swift Current, Rolling Hills, and Southwest.

And I especially want to mention Mr. John Penner, who spent his years working in this legislature to get the Crown corporations back into shape so that they could provide dividends so we could do this kind of work, the kind of work that would benefit his community.

The present board of the newly created Cypress Regional Health Authority has continued the valuable work of its predecessors with the many communities of this region. That includes the city of Swift Current, but it includes many of the towns around, many of the rural municipalities. And we want to make a special point of thanking all of those people, how they've come together to support this project.

Saskatchewan Health will also be there to help develop a functional program for the new hospital and to finalize the scope, cost, and design of the project.

Mr. Speaker, this new hospital is another step in the progress

we are making with implementing the recommendations in our Action Plan for Saskatchewan Health Care announced by the Premier and I in December 2001. This recommendation was to build a strong network of hospitals across the province, improving access to care for all residents of Saskatchewan.

This new hospital will meet all of the standards and deliver the health care services that the action plan requires in a regional hospital, Mr. Speaker. These include a broad range of patient care services including internal medicine, general surgery, obstetrics, gynecology, and intensive care.

Our provincial budget included a \$61 million investment over the next two years for new and upgraded health care facilities. Mr. Speaker, this significant investment in this year's health budget allows us to continue to approve and support a number of new health capital projects, such as this hospital, which are necessary to sustain our province's medicare system into the future.

This new Swift Current regional hospital will not only provide patients with the priority health care they need in this region, but will also provide an improved workplace for our valued health care providers of the Cypress Health Region.

Mr. Speaker, the officials at Saskatchewan Health and I look forward to working closely with the Cypress Regional Health Authority and their communities in that whole southwest corner of the province to develop the functional plan for the new hospital, to finalize the scope, cost, and design of the project. Construction is expected to begin in the 2004-05 fiscal year and we look for completion of the hospital within three and a half years.

Mr. Speaker, I would also like to recognize the involvement and dedication of the members of the Dr. Noble Irwin Foundation for their support on this project as well as the Action Swift Current community organization and the REDA (regional economic development authority) and the chamber of commerce.

Mr. Speaker, this government is proud of being the home of medicare. We are proud of our continued investment in health care in this province. And we will continue to do more to renew and sustain our system of publicly funded, publicly administered health care.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is truly a pleasure to be able to stand today in the legislature and comment on the ministerial statement that has just been given to the Assembly by the Minister of Health.

And I want to say at the outset, I want to thank the minister for providing his remarks to us in advance, and again just indicate what a pleasure it is to be able to just say a few words at this, at this time.

Today is truly a very positive day for the . . . not just the city of Swift Current, but really the entire region of southwest

Saskatchewan. The Action Plan for Health Care quite rightly identified Swift Current as a regional centre, serving an entire region obviously. And in order to do that, of course, Swift Current needs to be able to have the kind . . . needs to have a regional scale and quality facility. And that certainly is not the case currently with the facility that we have. And this announcement today is welcome news indeed.

Mr. Speaker, there are . . . This is really a day for various groups and individuals in our community to be celebrated and congratulated and thanked for their effort in this regard. And the minister has mentioned some of them here this afternoon.

I know of four individuals in particular who worked tirelessly to collect names on petitions to the point where we estimated we had over 6,000 names on petitions calling for a new hospital, signed by residents of not just the city of Swift Current but indeed of the entire region, of southwest Saskatchewan and across the province. So thank you again to Gerald and Deanna Thorson, Roy Burnay, and Doreen Kern for their tireless effort on the petition front.

As the minister had said, thanks to the Dr. Noble Irwin Healthcare Foundation, one of the . . . just an absolute excellent health care fundraiser that we now have in southwest Saskatchewan that's worked hard on the project. To the previous board members of the district, to the current ones and their staff, thanks needs to be given to them for their effort. To the municipalities, to the city of Swift Current who stepped out a little bit on this one, Mr. Speaker, frankly, when they said look we'll be there for the local share of this funding and we'll try to raise the money after to lower the exposure for residents in the city. And thank you to those many rural municipalities in the southwest who have backed the city of Swift Current and backed the effort for a new hospital. And indeed, Mr. Speaker, in all fairness, thank you to the Minister of Health and to the Government of Saskatchewan.

Now I will say this, Mr. Speaker. Today's announcement was about a 500 . . . The actual money in the announcement was about a \$500,000 evaluation process which is necessary and I think everybody understands that's part of the process. But I think what we need to do is just get that final assurance, final written assurance that the government is saying that its capital commitment is also in place, obviously if not in this fiscal then in the fiscal 2004-2005 because the minister has said that is the year that construction is expected to begin. That's good news. But, but right now the money that's solid, it looks like, is the half million for the planning — that's important — but we need solid to be the commitment of the capital share, the 16 million in capital funding from the health care department.

And I also want to make this other assurance, Mr. Speaker, that in between now and when construction begins, there may be an election in the province of Saskatchewan. We don't know that to be the case, but there might be an election before construction begins. And I just want to let the Assembly know, and let the people of southwest Saskatchewan and my hometown know, that this announcement was a positive one today. And if this government is unable to finish it, the next government will. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(14:30)

ORDERS OF THE DAY

WRITTEN QUESTIONS

Mr. Yates: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker, I'm extremely pleased to stand on behalf of the government today and answer written questions nos. 8 through 13.

The Speaker: — Responses to questions 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, and 13 have been submitted.

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. Melenchuk that the Assembly resolve itself into the Committee of Finance, and the proposed amendment thereto moved by Mr. Krawetz.

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Mr. Speaker, I want to talk a bit about the reason why I'm standing today in full and proud support of the budget that was presented by the Hon. Minister of Finance. Certainly I think we're going to be very proud of the budget throughout history and certainly over the next upcoming year.

Mr. Speaker, I was very, very impressed with the amount of support that the agricultural community is getting — over \$1 billion in five years. And we think that's money that's well invested to help the agricultural community, to help our farm families, and to help those that are struggling throughout the entire province.

And we in northern Saskatchewan appreciate the fact that when agriculture does well, we do well as well. So it's very important that northern, southern, eastern, and western Saskatchewan, that this budget really provides a good balance. And the budget recognizes all of Saskatchewan people interests and certainly recognize that all of Saskatchewan people have needs.

It's always nice, Mr. Speaker, to also point out, as the member . . . the Minister of Health announced a few minutes ago, that there's some good positive news with Swift Current in relation to some of their challenges when it comes to the whole notion of meeting some of the health care needs of Saskatchewan residents, whether they're in southwest Saskatchewan or whether in southeast or the far north, Mr. Speaker.

What I want to do today, if I can, is put a bit of attention on some of the comments made by the Leader of the Opposition, the member from Kindersley or the member from — I'm not sure where he's from, Mr. Speaker — but we . . . Rosetown.

And what I would point out, Mr. Speaker, is that when this budget came out, Mr. Speaker, the member of the opposition — who many people say he's the Leader of the Opposition — what does he do, Mr. Speaker?

He doesn't get up and talk about the great health care programs, he doesn't talk about agricultural support, Mr. Speaker. He doesn't talk about some of the great, grand plans we have in some of the larger centres, Mr. Speaker. He doesn't talk about any of the development we have in the oil and gas industry, Mr. Speaker.

What does he do, Mr. Speaker? That's supposed to be the leader of the great opposition there. What does he do, Mr. Speaker? He gets up and he accuses this government of buying votes in the North, Mr. Speaker. This budget buys votes in the North, Mr. Speaker.

And let me explain to that Leader of the Opposition, like why is he focusing his attack on northern Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker? I come from northern Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, in the hopes, in the hope that we can come to this Assembly and we can recognize the great work that the budget does, that the budget does for the rest of Saskatchewan.

We recognize the great work that the budget does to help the farm families and we respect that, Mr. Speaker. We recognize the work that some of the budget does when it talks about . . . in highway improvements throughout all of Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker. And we recognize that in northern Saskatchewan.

We respect that and we say, hooray for the rest of the province, we're very proud of what the budget does for you. It is good work and it's good help for you. And the people, especially in the agricultural sector, they need and they respect and they certainly need that kind of recognition. And this budget certainly helps them out, Mr. Speaker.

But instead of the Leader of the Opposition getting up and saying this is great for the economy, this is great for the agricultural people, what does he do, Mr. Speaker? He complains about the little bit of money we're spending in northern Saskatchewan. For what? For what, Mr. Speaker? For safe roads, Mr. Speaker. For decent health care facilities, Mr. Speaker. For water and sewer.

And I'd like to share a point here, Mr. Speaker. When you talk about Stony Rapids in the far North, Mr. Speaker, we are pointing out today that the people of Stony Rapids have been fighting for years to get water and sewer, decent water and sewer, Mr. Speaker, where they're able to cook with this water, or they're able to serve their children with this water, and to make sure the water is safe, Mr. Speaker. And this government is spending a significant amount of money on that water and sewer system in northern Saskatchewan and Stony Rapids. And they've been crying for this for years.

And what does the member of the . . . the Leader of the Opposition, the member from Rosetown-Biggan say? He says, oh you're buying votes, Mr. Speaker.

When you go to La Loche, Mr. Speaker, there's hundreds of families that are crammed into homes that need a lot of work. We build new housing in northern Saskatchewan. We help La Loche. What does the member from Rosetown say? The Leader of the Opposition, the Saskatchewan Party leader, he says, oh you're buying votes, you're buying votes.

Mr. Speaker, instead of talking about helping the people of Turnor Lake get water and sewer, get a decent road, and get their water and sewer upgrades, what does the Leader of the Opposition . . . The Leader of the Sask Party says this NDP government is buying votes, Mr. Speaker.

What happens when we build a hospital in La Ronge, we build a hospital in the far North, Mr. Speaker? What does the Leader of the Opposition say about this budget? You're buying votes.

Well, Mr. Speaker, on this side of the Assembly we believe in all of Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker. We believe that La Loche, we believe that Stony Rapids, we believe that Sandy Bay, we believe that La Ronge, we believe that Black Lake — all of the communities of the North are part of this province and that they deserve equal treatment.

And that's what they always talk about — equal treatment, Mr. Speaker. It's only equal if it suits them, Mr. Speaker. It's not equal if it doesn't suit the North, Mr. Speaker.

So I say to you today, I was total . . . in total support of the budget, Mr. Speaker, total support. But I was totally flabbergasted and quite frankly offended when the Leader of the Saskatchewan Party gets up and says, oh the NDP are buying votes in the North. Shame on him, Mr. Speaker, shame on him.

Because in northern Saskatchewan we have families that need decent housing like southern Saskatchewan does. In northern Saskatchewan we have families that want water and sewer projects, Mr. Speaker, like southern Saskatchewan does, Mr. Speaker. In northern Saskatchewan we want safe roads to travel on, Mr. Speaker, like southern Saskatchewan does, Mr. Speaker. And in northern Saskatchewan we want decent hospitals, we want decent schools like southern Saskatchewan does, Mr. Speaker.

And how in the world, Mr. Speaker, can that Leader of the Opposition, the Leader of the Saskatchewan Party get up and say, oh the NDP are buying votes? What kind of logic is that, Mr. Speaker?

Instead of getting up and celebrating with us that there's \$1 billion for the agricultural community, \$1 billion over five years, Mr. Speaker, that this budget talks about, Mr. Speaker. A brand new hospital for Swift Current, Mr. Speaker, and tons of roads being fixed throughout southern Saskatchewan. He doesn't mention not one bit of that, Mr. Speaker, but he gets up and he criticizes northern Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker.

And I say today, and I say today, if this . . . on this side of the House, if we put money into highways in northern Saskatchewan and if we put money into schools, Mr. Speaker, into hospitals, into families, into protecting the communities, and to position the communities to be benefactors of Saskatchewan, if that member charges and that Leader of the Opposition coming along and says, you're buying votes, well, Mr. Speaker, we're guilty as sin. We're guilty as sin in northern Saskatchewan, but we're going down there and we're helping out the North as we are helping out the South, Mr. Speaker.

We are balanced, we will respect all needs, and we will not pick on one region as the Leader of the Opposition did following the

budget, Mr. Speaker. And I say to him, shame. Shame, shame, shame because northern Saskatchewan has every right, Mr. Speaker, have every right to enjoy the social and economic justice that people of Saskatchewan want. Well we want that too in northern Saskatchewan and I say shame on them, shame on the Saskatchewan Party, and especially shame on that Leader of the Opposition, Mr. Speaker, that gets up and talks about the North, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — And I say again, and I say again, people of northern Saskatchewan are glad we're helping the farmers. People of northern Saskatchewan are glad that we're helping roads being built in southern Saskatchewan. People of northern Saskatchewan are glad that our economy in mining, in forestry, in tourism, that we're glad that people of the South are coming to enjoy those benefits too, Mr. Speaker. We're glad to share in the wealth of Saskatchewan.

But the message is, when we talk about share, we want our share as well, Mr. Speaker, and this government delivers. And what happens? As soon as we deliver, they get up and say, oh they're buying votes. they're buying votes. Mr. Speaker, shame on the Leader of the Opposition and shame on the Saskatchewan Party, and shame on their total disrespect and disregard for northern Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Often, Mr. Speaker, I say to people throughout the North that we have to make sure the agricultural community is doing good because their benefits and their progress economically has some good impact on us in northern Saskatchewan. They understand that.

And they're saying to me, you're our MLA (Member of the Legislative Assembly), you're there to go forward and fight for us. And we're going to fight for them. But we're also going to fight ignorance and some silly comments when it comes to members of the opposite party that call down northern Saskatchewan and refuse to recognize northern Saskatchewan's challenges. And I say again, shame on them.

And, Mr. Speaker, another matter as well, when they talk about the member from Saskatchewan Rivers. And he talks about, oh well, we shouldn't invest — government shouldn't invest — in northern Saskatchewan. This budget does. This budget does, Mr. Speaker. It invests in northern Saskatchewan because, as I mentioned, they have every right to share in the economic and social justice of this province called Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker.

And when we say they shouldn't invest, Mr. Speaker, what he's saying is that the mills in Green Lake, the mills in La Ronge, the opportunity in forestry development throughout the North — they're struggling right now but — hey you guys, we're not going to invest in you; our policy is that no, government shouldn't invest. So we're not going to invest in that OSB (oriented strand board) plant in Meadow Lake. That's gone. Your investment portfolio is something that we wouldn't look at if we're ever elected government.

So not only do you have the Leader of the Opposition criticizing us for spending money in the North, you have another member saying they're not going to invest in the North. And, Mr. Speaker, I remind people back home, I remind people back home, that several . . . about a year ago, when the Leader of the Opposition visited La Ronge and they asked about the future of Northern Affairs, and he said would it continue under their government, and he said likely not.

So likely not that the people of the North are going to believe these guys, Mr. Speaker. And likely not that these guys are going to invest like this budget does in northern Saskatchewan. And likely not, they're not going to respect northern or Aboriginal people when it comes to them saying very clearly we want to be part of the economy, we don't want to simply be cheerleaders to that economy, we want to be an integral part of it, Mr. Speaker.

So I say to them, this budget says to you, the Leader of the Opposition and to the Saskatchewan Party, we're not taking your advice. We're not listening to your doom and gloom. We are not picking on any one section or any one people in this budget. We're balancing all the needs of Saskatchewan.

We're saying no to you; we're not taking your advice. Mr. Speaker, on this side this budget believes in northern Saskatchewan as it does in southern Saskatchewan. And, Mr. Speaker, this government will treat everybody fair, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Now I say to them and I say to the Leader of the Opposition, Mr. Speaker, this budget backs up families, safe and secure families. And I've travelled many northern Saskatchewan communities, Mr. Speaker, and we see some of the housing needs, when you have 10, 12 people crammed in a house, Mr. Speaker.

And they say they don't believe in that. They say, oh no, no. The North, you're buying votes. Don't build them houses. Don't give them a decent standard of life. Don't give them equal opportunity. Oh heaven no, don't give them investment dollars so they're able to economically build themselves. No, no, don't do that because if you do that, you're buying votes.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I say to them that this budget does not buy votes. This budget talks about fairness, equality, and respect, Mr. Speaker. It talks about safe, secure families. It talks about us planning well and dreaming big and working hard, Mr. Speaker. That's what this budget does, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — And I go on further, Mr. Speaker, about the investment. And that member from Saskatchewan Rivers comes from an area, Mr. Speaker, I believe around Big River where they're doing quite well with forestry.

But the moment we say in northern Saskatchewan, hey you guys in Big River, you're doing great, we're proud of you, but we in northern Saskatchewan would like to have the same standard of living, and he says oh no, no, no. We can't invest in

that. Government investment shouldn't go there. We shouldn't be doing that. We shouldn't be investing in these forestry opportunities and these oil and gas opportunities. Heavens no, because if we do that, then the northern Saskatchewan people will get rich and they'll become independent. We can't have that. We can't have that. That's what he's saying.

So I say to him, Mr. Speaker, and to his leader, we're not going to listen to you and your advice ever, Mr. Speaker. And on this side of the House we'll back up the North and we'll back up the entire province with this budget, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — And we will, Mr. Speaker, through one way or another, we will position northern people and the Aboriginal people to take full advantage of the resources of our land and we will make sure that they're trained, that we invest with them. We'll make sure that we give them quality of life. We'll look forward to the great opportunity with the young people. We'll look at sport development, Mr. Speaker.

We're going to have the future wide open with this budget about what we've planned for northern Saskatchewan.

And I say to those members opposite, all your doom and gloom and your feigned attempts and your crocodile tears about northern Saskatchewan or some of the Aboriginal people in some of the other areas in southern Saskatchewan that are hurting, people in the North and people in Saskatchewan are not fooled one bit, Mr. Speaker. Not one bit, not for one minute, Mr. Speaker.

And I say to them today, this budget backs up northern Saskatchewan; it does not buy votes. This budget backs up southern Saskatchewan; it does not buy votes. This budget backs up the agricultural community; it does not buy votes, Mr. Speaker.

(14:45)

This budget backs up all sectors of our province, our great province, and it does not buy votes, Mr. Speaker. And I say to the members opposite — your leader and your critic and all of your members, you stand there today . . .

The Speaker: — I'd just ask the member to make all of his remarks through the Speaker.

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And I say to them, you can take your ideals, Mr. Speaker . . . they can take their ideals, Mr. Speaker, and they can spout all they want of their innuendo and their doom and gloom, and they can say you're buying votes and all the negative criticism that they can come up with, Mr. Speaker, and we are going to fend them off.

And every time these guys get up, Mr. Speaker, and start criticizing the North, or criticizing the Aboriginal people, or criticizing the agriculture sector, or criticizing the cities, you know what we say on this side, Mr. Speaker? Shield on — just to repel that negative vibe, Mr. Speaker.

But in northern Saskatchewan we believe in this great province

and this great province believes in northern Saskatchewan as well. And this province . . . and I wish they'd get it through their PC (Progressive Conservative) heads, Mr. Speaker, to get it through their PC heads that this province is not a good province for any of us unless it's a good province for all of us, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Finally, Mr. Speaker, I say this to them. I say the North . . .

The Speaker: — Order, please. Order, please.

I would ask the members to take their conversation behind the bar so that the member from Athabasca can have his say in this legislature as he ought to.

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. And I say to them again, Mr. Speaker, that the northern Saskatchewan people, as in the South, that compassion is the base root of all humanity. Humanity is very important when we start talking about fairness and equality for all, Mr. Speaker.

And I say today that on this side compassion, humanity, and caring for each other, that this government dares to care, Mr. Speaker, about the North. It dares to care about Stony Rapids, it dares to care about Cumberland House, it dares to care about La Ronge, it dares to care about the northern people, about the resource initiatives, Mr. Speaker — it dares to care for every single individual in this province.

And what do these guys do, Mr. Speaker, they get up and say, we're not going to invest in the North, we're not going to invest in the North, and hey why don't they turn around and why don't they . . . from what I can gather, Mr. Speaker, that they're going to start exporting bulk water, selling the water of Saskatchewan. They're going to put a nuclear waste site in northern Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker. They're going to sell all our land and resources to foreign countries, Mr. Speaker. That's their version . . . that's their version of economic development. You sell our water, you put a nuclear power dump, and you sell all our land and resources to outside interests.

Well, Mr. Speaker, the North doesn't want you; they don't need you, Mr. Speaker. They want this budget, and they like this budget. And, Mr. Speaker, I'll finish with this is that northern Saskatchewan is going to stand up, they're going to stand up proud. They're going to say the budget was needed, more work is required, but we're going to stand together with this government and with this budget to propel the infidels at the gate, Mr. Speaker, that want to come along and they want to destroy the hopes and dreams that northern Saskatchewan has for their people, for their children, and their future.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hillson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it's one of the great ironies of the political history of our province that the Saskatchewan Party was born when our now Minister of Finance invited Bill Boyd to a meeting to discuss amalgamation

of the Tories and the Liberals to form a new right-wing party to be known as the Saskatchewan Party.

Although I was a Liberal MLA at that time, Mr. Speaker, I was not invited to that meeting. However, participants at that meeting said that discussions broke down when the then Liberal leader, the now Minister of Finance, insisted he be leader of the new party without a leadership convention.

Well, Mr. Speaker, as I look around this building, the NDP have done a good job of making sure that the founder of their party, the Hon. T.C. Douglas, is well-memorialized around this building. So my question of the Saskatchewan Party is: if they form the next government of this province, will they make sure that the founder of their party, the Minister of Finance, will also be properly honoured and remembered?

Well, Mr. Speaker, the Provincial Auditor in his last report said something I think that we should all listen to very carefully. He wrote in his report:

. . . making transfers from one fund to another, and back again, has no effect on the Government's overall . . . (fiscal) position . . . the only consequence of recording these transactions in the . . . (General Revenue Fund) financial statements is that the actual amount of the . . . surplus is changed to another amount chosen by the Government. This is worrisome because the Government . . . (chooses) the amount of the . . . (surplus's) deficit as one of its . . . indicators.

Those words, Mr. Speaker — that transferring funds from one fund to another and back again makes no difference to the government's financial position — is something that I think the Minister of Finance and this government have forgotten. I think that came through loud and clear when the Minister of Finance told us the budget is balanced but we are another half billion dollars in the glue. And you know, how does this work? This is what people are saying to me. How does this work that we have a balanced budget but we have half a billion dollars in increased debt? This sounds very much like I balanced my chequing account but there's new debt in . . . on my Visa credit card.

Well, well the . . .

The Speaker: — Order, please. Order, please, members.

Mr. Hillson: — Well, Mr. Speaker, the member for Moose Jaw North says, well we just go to the savings account. Well that would certainly make imminently good sense if that savings account existed. But when you go to a savings account that doesn't exist to balance the budget, then again things don't really hang together very well. And people are having trouble understanding the Minister of Finance when he says, I balanced the budget but our debt is increasing this year by half a billion dollars.

Well, Mr. Speaker, the government is telling us that they're able to do wonderful things with this budget thanks to the Crown investments. And just . . . we just heard a few minutes ago that Swift Current is going to get a CT scan, they're going to get a new regional hospital. And according to the Minister of Health this wouldn't have been possible if he hadn't lost all that money

in Nashville and Australia. And this seems to be an example of the same economics — if we hadn't lost the money in Nashville that we invested there, if we hadn't lost the money on information services, we wouldn't be able to build the new hospital.

Well, that is going to be hard for people to understand. We lost \$11 million on the Coachman Insurance Company purchase in Ontario. That was a purchase I opposed. I opposed that purchase. We were going to save jobs in Toronto was the rationale for making that purchase. Now we've lost \$11 million in Ontario. How has that benefited the people of Saskatchewan?

Well, Mr. Speaker, we did invest in FarmGro, an organic food-processing company in this province. Now that money has been lost. When it went into receivership, we had \$12 million losses after only two years. Why did FarmGro fail? It failed because administrative costs were too high, markets were not secured before the building of a \$12 million plant, markets were not secured, and FarmGro could not support its debt.

Well there are several other examples of failed investment. We have the example of Information Services that was going to automate our land titles system for \$18 million. It's now over 100 million and counting. Mr. Speaker, the new land titles system was going to produce a land titles system for under \$20 million that would be cheaper, faster, more accurate, easily accessible, and what was most important of all, it was going to be so state of the art that it would result in people around the world beating a door . . . a pathway to our door so that they could purchase this new state-of-the-art technology.

Well, Mr. Speaker, instead land titles fees have skyrocketed; Information Services officials have spent tens of thousands of dollars globe-trotting without a single sale of the technology to show for it; and the system continues to be problematic for lawyers, bankers, and real estate agents. Not one sale around the world.

Well, Mr. Speaker, SaskTel has lost \$30 million on its foreign investments. Here are some of the other investment losses we have had. Retx.com, internet information services in Atlanta, 7.5 million in losses. Newfoundland-based Persona Inc telecom, 9.5 million in losses. Tappedinto.com in Nashville, losses of 2.4 million. Navigata Inc., telecom company, losses of 2.5 million. Clickabid, losses of 4 million. That was an attempt to beat out eBay. Soft Track Enterprises Ltd., software company in British Columbia, 2.2 million. IQ&A Partnership, health information, 2.3 million. Channel Lake Petroleum Company, 6 million. Eighty million wasted in Australia and 20 million in Chile. And the list goes on.

And yet, Mr. Speaker, and yet the government will tell us that these international losses are how they are able to pay for the province's infrastructure today.

Mr. Speaker, the Crown corporations have a proud record of building infrastructure in this province and serving this province, but the international and foreign investments have not served this province. They have simply resulted in a lot of losses by people who claim to understand the global financial situation and they simply do not.

Well, Mr. Speaker, when the new Premier was sworn in two years ago, his first act with great fanfare was the Department of Rural Revitalization. To date no one knows what this department does or whether it even exists. The Department of Rural Revitalization has become the department to devitalize and demoralize our rural areas. This budget has been roundly rejected and criticized by farm groups and farm organizations of all stripes.

Mr. Speaker, the community-based organizations — those are the people who staff our group homes, SARCANS, sheltered workshops, and many other community-based organizations around the province — they were promised by the NDP in 1991 that they would have wage parity with the public sector. Well, the hon. member from Regina Centre says they're getting there. Let's check. What's the situation today?

The situation today is that they have salaries a third to a half below public sector wages. And I'm told by the people who run those organizations that attracting and retaining staff is a serious problem when the same job in the health district pays as much as 50 per cent more.

(15:00)

In terms of are we closing the gap, well today's budget gives a 3 per cent increase to those employees. Mr. Speaker, if the health district employees secure an increase of greater than 3 per cent — and history would lead us to conclude that they will; their increases in recent years have been well above 3 per cent — if the health district employees get a higher than 3 per cent increase, then the wage gap is not going to narrow, it in fact is going to widen and it's going to become increasingly difficult for group homes and other such organizations to attract and hold staff.

On another topic, Mr. Speaker, I would like to speak for a minute on the new Youth Criminal Justice Act that became law just yesterday on April 1. The new Act allows for publication of young offenders' names in appropriate circumstances. It provides for longer incarceration for violent offences and repeat property offences, and it provides for more crimes to be transferred to adult court where offenders will receive adult sentences. Most important, the new Act provides for community-based sentences. This means strict supervision of youth on bail or on probation.

Mr. Speaker, the new Act, the success of the new Act will depend largely as to whether or not we put the proper staff in place and sufficient resources and staff in place so that bail or probation will mean something and have real teeth.

What has tended to happen in the past is that probation orders have been made but there simply isn't enough staff to monitor these probation orders to make sure they are obeyed. Consequently the youth is back in court with a new offence in a few months time and there seems nothing else to do but to put him in custody. If we don't allocate the resources as a province to make sure that the youth will follow the terms of probation, then probation orders will become a joke for the youths and they will soon be back in court on a new offence.

But, Mr. Speaker, I want to say to those who think that the

solution to all of our youth crime problems is more and more incarceration, that they should be very careful, very careful in what they demand and what they ask for. We are now being told by the experts, by the people who work in the system, that gangs such as Indian Posse are actively recruiting in youth detention centres. To put a rebellious teenager into the youth centre is to put him at risk of being recruited by some of these violent urban gangs that are working very hard in the detention centres.

That is why we have to allocate more resources to community-based offences because otherwise when we put a rebellious youth who needs more structure in his life into a youth centre, we may in fact be making a bad situation much, much worse.

Mr. Speaker, Regina has had a program in place for two years now, I believe, with impressive results. They have seen their rate of car theft cut in half. When Chris Axworthy was minister of Justice, he was on the verge of instituting a similar program for North Battleford and it is my hope that his successor will introduce it into North Battleford as soon as possible. These are the programs we need to move into.

Mr. Speaker, in the health budget there is a recommendation or a promise of an additional \$180 million in new health spending. Our health expenditures are nearly double the next highest item on our budget. People I talk to are happy about the new health spending.

However, unfortunately they have become cynical and are questioning. Will the new health spending actually do something to reduce three-year waiting lists for hip replacement surgery? Will the new health spending actually mean that it no longer takes eight months to get an MRI (magnetic resonance imaging)? Will the new health spending mean that our MRIs operate more than 40 hours a week?

Well, Mr. Speaker, a number of promises have been made throughout the province in the government's health action plan, and specifically to North Battleford, which we are still waiting to see if those promises will be fulfilled. In 1996 North Battleford was promised a new \$25 million long-term care nursing home. We're still waiting. In the year 2000, we were promised a renal dialysis unit in North Battleford at Battlefords Union Hospital. We're still waiting.

Now the Minister of Finance visited North Battleford last Saturday and he hinted that we would now receive that renal dialysis unit that we were promised three years ago. I sincerely hope that is right and I will be very thankful and grateful if we do get it. But the fact is it was announced — not promised, but announced — three years ago. We're still waiting and we have renal dialysis now in communities like Yorkton, Swift Current, Tisdale — all communities smaller than the Battlefords. In fact, the member for Yorkton recently bragged that they have doubled the capacity of the Yorkton Unit.

So if we are finally getting the renal dialysis unit we were promised three years ago, that is some good news.

In the year 2001, the government committed to CT (computerized tomography) scans in the regional hospitals. Last

Friday the Minister of Finance said that there would be a CT scan installed in Swift Current where up until now they have had the part-time services of a mobile CT scan, and now they're going to have a permanent fixed one.

What happened to the commitment, Mr. Speaker, for CT scans in all of our regional hospitals? I hope that commitment will be kept but we're still waiting.

You know it has been common for this government to say they would like to do more but the federal government needs to contribute. Well now the federal government has done that. We have significant new federal dollars which is to go to diagnostic and high-tech equipment. Will it get through?

Now the first time the federal government committed to new dollars for diagnostic equipment, most of that money disappeared into the ether. You will recall that in this province a lot of it was spent, not on high-tech and diagnostic equipment, but on beds, which is somewhat of an improvement over the NDP government of Manitoba which spent their high-tech money on lawnmowers.

So my question is, what are we doing to make sure that this new budgeted health care money actually brings us up to standard in terms of CT scans, MRIs, the diagnostic equipment that we recognize has been allowed to fall behind, not only in this province but right across Canadian health care generally?

Mr. Speaker, we are proud of our role as the province where medicare was born, and I stand with my friends across the way in saying we do not want two-tier health care. But the fact is if we continue to have eight-month waits for an MRI, and three-year waits for a hip replacement, and two-year waits for cataracts, that can only result in a two-tier health care system.

Well, Mr. Speaker, we had the Fyke Commission and it reported a few years ago on ambulance fees, that there was discrimination against rural people in this province on the basis of ambulance fees. And this is what Fyke said:

Ambulance fees should not be based on distance. Rural (residents) . . . are . . . disadvantaged by their distance from . . . specialized service. It is unfair that they should . . . pay higher rates when transport to service is required.

Well the Saskatchewan Emergency Medical Services Association has recommended a standard ambulance fee of \$200 across the board. Instead, Mr. Speaker, we have a patchwork across the province in which . . . some places interfacility transfers are free, other places they are not; where standard rates vary by hundreds of dollars; and of course, as Fyke points out, where rural people who have to go further for specialized services have to pay a high mileage rate. So it can run all the way for free for some people to take an ambulance to get specialized care to hundreds or thousands of dollars to other citizens. What is the government doing to address that?

Recently we received a report saying that one-third of our ambulance inventory vehicles do not meet standard. One-third of them should not be on the road, Mr. Speaker. What plans does the government have to end that problem?

What plans does the government have to make sure that the same salaries will be available for EMTs (emergency medical technician), no matter what health region they work in?

What plans are made to take those one-third of substandard ambulances off the road and bring them up to standard?

Well, Mr. Speaker, last year Ron Dufresne, the president of Saskatchewan Emergency Measures said that we have been trying numerous times to meet with the government to develop a mutually acceptable go-forward plan. But he went on to say it's falling on deaf ears. We want to build a plan but the provincial government won't play.

Mr. Speaker, it is time for the Minister of Health to sit down with the ambulance operators, the ambulance associations of this province, and end this discrimination of patients who are unfortunate enough to live in rural Saskatchewan. This is critical to and has to be the foundation of medical services to rural Saskatchewan in a day and age when the reality is that the government is closing the small rural hospitals. People must go further to access services and yet interfacility transfers in the city of Saskatoon are free; in the rural area they cost. This is discrimination, Mr. Speaker.

Well the Saskatchewan Union of Nurses says that the budget fails to address the nursing shortage. We need more trained nurses. The Minister of Health responds that, well there is no point in training more nurses because they will only leave the province. Mr. Speaker, let's look at the full ramifications of a statement like that for a moment.

If the Minister of Health is right that there is no point in training nurses because they would leave the province, then on that theory we may as well shut down all training programs, all post-secondary education in Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, the president of Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association describes the budget as an insult. And the Premier accuses the mayors of the province of being greedy money-grubbers, whose only concern is the welfare of urban residents. Well, Mr. Speaker, when civic and provincial elections roll around later this year, property tax payers will know who to blame if their property taxes skyrocket this year.

Well, Mr. Speaker, as we know, this budget is based on a prediction of a 6.8 per cent growth projection. I sincerely hope that is true. I sincerely hope that comes to pass. Unfortunately, I just can't find anyone who accepts that figure and who believes that it's realistic.

Unfortunately, the budget sets out no contingency plan if it is — as most experts agree when they look at the figures — if it is a deficit budget and if there is a shortfall in revenues.

The Minister of Finance and the Department of Finance have not considered any growth projections other than 6.8 per cent. So where does that leave us if instead of half a billion dollars increased debt, we are going to have substantially higher increase in debt?

Mr. Speaker, we need a budget that takes a bold, bold step into the future, that leads this province forward into growth and

development, that diversifies our province, that offers something more than slogans and shell games and figures that don't add up, and unfortunately this budget does not have that.

(15:15)

So I am forced, Mr. Speaker, to support the amendment to the motion and I will not be supporting the budget motion. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Forbes: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It's a privilege to stand today to speak this afternoon on the proposed budget for our province.

I believe this budget shows us careful planning and consideration. It is in fact balanced, not only in terms of revenue and expenditures but also it balances the vast number of interests that must be taken into account to meet our province's, our people's needs. It's a budget that dares to care.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, is it credible? Well Paul Martin speaking on CKOM/CJME radio on March 31 said all that needs to be said. I quote:

Is this estimate too rosy? Well, normally I would say yes but there's one nagging problem. Saskatchewan Finance Ministry has always gotten it right. In fact the department . . . (is) remarkably accurate in its economic growth forecasts.

He goes on to say, and I quote:

When the bean counting was done, it was our finance department that had nailed it.

Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, this afternoon I want to speak on four themes that make up our government plan that will build our future — building strong and vibrant communities, helping self-reliant families, opportunities for youth, and a prosperous and competitive economy.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I believe these are the critical pieces as they are the fabric of our province. If our province is to be successful, each thread must be strong and resilient.

Building strong and vibrant communities. This budget does support the vision of strong and vibrant communities through an investment of over \$115 million. Saskatchewan urban, rural, and northern municipalities will receive \$75 million in revenue sharing this year. That is an additional \$10 million this year, another \$10 million next year.

This funding will help municipalities meet their operating and capital needs and to limit property tax increases.

These increases are in addition to the \$10 million increase last year. With this additional funding over the next two years, municipalities will have received an additional \$60 million in revenue sharing between 2002 and 2005.

Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, what are some of the highlights of this \$115 million investment in Saskatchewan? They include: Meewasin Valley Authority in Saskatoon will receive a 10 per

cent increase in funding this year — and being from Saskatoon, I think this is a great thing; \$12.8 million in grants in lieu of taxes to local governments where Saskatchewan Property Management Corporation owns and manages property; \$2.38 million in subsidies for transit assistance for the disabled; and \$1 million — that's 17 new vehicles — for people with disabilities to the provincial fleet.

This budget, Mr. Deputy Speaker, also includes funding to hire 10 additional police officers to support integrated, targeted, community-based approaches to reducing crime. And this is very important for the people of Saskatoon Idylwyld. This brings to over 63 new police officers that are committed to community policing in our communities throughout this province.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I also want to talk about healthy and self-reliant families. Through our budget, *Building for the Future*, we demonstrate unwavering commitment to a publicly funded and publicly administered health system. We are boosting health care spending by 8 per cent to a record \$2.5 billion. And I was pleased to hear some of the announcements over the last few days and even today with the hospital announcement for Swift Current.

The overall health budget will increase by \$184 million to help create a high-quality, patient-focused health care system. Highlights here, Mr. Speaker, include a 6 per cent increase for regional health authority operations; \$61 million has been allocated for building and renovating health care facilities over the next two years; and \$74 million to support collective agreements that will help to recruit and retain health professionals.

And as well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we are implementing the 24-hour telephone health advice line province-wide. And we are training 80 new emergency medical personnel to EMT levels within a three-year target of 240.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we are also providing funding for 300 first-year students at the College of Nursing, including 40 in the new northern nurse training program and 60 first-year students at the College of Medicine; \$4 million will be for return-service training bursaries to retain and recruit health care providers; and \$1.2 million to municipalities on a 50/50 cost-share basis for the West Nile mosquito control programs.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we are deeply committed to support Saskatchewan families and I am particularly excited by the recent announcement regarding child care. Mr. Speaker, that means \$1.8 million for Child Care Saskatchewan which includes 500 new child care spaces this year with a commitment to achieve 1,200 new spaces over the next four years and 1 million — \$1 million — to increase child care subsidies, an average of \$20 per month per child, effective June 1.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I am also very delighted, very delighted to see new funding for the YWCA (Young Women's Christian Association) of Saskatoon emergency crisis shelter. This is truly deserving of our support and I know they worked very hard last year to put their case forward. And I'm truly delighted to hear that they have received that funding.

Now, Mr. Speaker, we talk about other people and interests who are supporting this budget. Well I want to talk about Mr. Ron Bort, provincial president of the Saskatchewan Voice Of People With Disabilities. He issued a statement this week entitled, "Good News Budget for People with Disabilities." He says, and I quote:

The government of Saskatchewan is to be commended for its commitment to advancing the full citizenship of people with disabilities in Saskatchewan.

He goes on to cite the following as examples of the good news for people living with disabilities, in our budget: \$1.85 million in new funding to enhance individualized employment supports for persons with disabilities to move from social assistance to employment; and \$715,000 to replace 12 paratransit vehicles in our province. Mr. Speaker, that's good news.

And we are also, Mr. Speaker, providing an additional \$1 million in social assistance program for funding for persons with disability.

Now, Mr. Speaker, this seems like . . .

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Forbes: — It is good news. Now, Mr. Speaker, I am also delighted by these announcements: the support for 440 additional families through Kids First program, a program to help families build independence and ensure their children get the best possible start in life. Funding for this program increased by 45 per cent this year to \$13 million.

And I'm excited about this one: 400 new affordable housing units will be constructed this year through the centenary affordable housing program.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Forbes: — Now there will be . . . 1,400 new units will be added over the next four years for an investment of approximately 40 million, including contributions from the federal and municipal governments. And I can't wait for announcements in the following short time for specific projects . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . I'm looking forward to these announcements.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I want to talk about opportunities for youth because I'm very happy about the emphasis this budget gives to needs of youth in our province. Mr. Speaker, Saskatoon Centre is the replacement for Saskatoon Idylwyld, and I believe it is perhaps one of the youngest ridings in our province of Saskatchewan. Not only do many students from SIAST (Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology) Kelsey Campus and the U of S (University of Saskatchewan) live in Centre, and young families, but Centre is also home to over 3,600 high school students, Mr. Speaker — 3,600 high school students. I don't know of any other riding that has that many high school students in it. So I'm watching carefully for opportunities for youth.

Well, Mr. Speaker, the budget 2003-04, *Building for the Future*, truly does provide opportunities for youth here in our province.

It provides educational workplace opportunities, leadership and healthy living opportunities as well. Mr. Speaker, this is truly building for the future.

Now, Mr. Speaker, this budget provides a 5.2 per cent increase for education and skills training. That's a total investment of almost \$1.2 billion this year. This reinforces the government's commitment to ensure that Saskatchewan people can access the educational opportunities they need to succeed here at home.

Mr. Speaker, it also provides \$5 million for CIF (Community Initiatives Fund) funding over the next four years to increase the physical activity levels of Saskatchewan youth — and this is very important — and another \$5.5 million over four years to increase participation and access to quality culture, recreation, sport, and leadership programs for Aboriginal people. An important part of quality life here in Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Forbes: — Now, Mr. Speaker, our post-secondary institutions will receive a 3.3 per cent operating grant increase to help them provide a wide variety of high-quality education and training opportunities for more than 80,000 students here in our province.

Now, Mr. Speaker, as well, almost 17,000 post-secondary students will get relief through approximately \$66 million in student loan assistance. Over half of this amount will be provided as bursaries and grants, ensuring that Saskatchewan student financial assistance program continues to be one of the most generous here in Canada.

Mr. Speaker, scholarship exemptions will be tripled from \$600 to \$1,800 and in-study earning exemptions will increase from \$600 to \$1,700. Scholarship exemptions will allow students to retain more of their income. And this is very important.

Provincial training allowance recipients will also benefit from a \$1.5 million increase for transportation and utility allowances.

And this year, Mr. Speaker, 700 students will have summer and part-time jobs through the Centennial Summer Student Employment Program. The government pays 75 per cent of this program, of their salaries, to a maximum of \$3,500. And, Mr. Speaker, I don't know if you've seen the posters, but I think they're wonderful; take this job and love it says it all.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Forbes: — Now, Mr. Speaker, an increase of \$510 million this year will help school divisions provide our young people with programs and services they need to succeed. This additional investment in our K to 12 (kindergarten to grade 12) educational systems will include funding for 100 per cent of the recently negotiated teacher salary increases.

And, Mr. Speaker, this is important in my riding of Saskatoon Idylwyld. Community schools expansion will continue with 10 new community schools and up to 15 new pre-kindergarten programs. This is important stuff, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, this year the government will invest \$76 million in

new schools, upgrades and enhancements to schools and post-secondary institutions across the province. This is good news. This is building for the future.

Now I want to talk a little bit about new technologies that are shaping the future of our education system, and almost \$12 million will be invested in on-line learning resources and high-speed Internet across . . . or access this year.

And public libraries will receive . . . (inaudible) . . . 3 per cent increase to provide learning and recreational opportunities for children, youth, and adults. And, Mr. Speaker, an additional \$250,000 increase in public library grants will also help to improve library services for Aboriginal people.

Now in terms of building a prosperous and a competitive economy, I think we're doing very well here, Mr. Speaker. Last week I rose in the House to congratulate the government on its Throne Speech that recognizes the importance of a strong economy. And we know, Mr. Speaker, our province is a great place to do business. The KPMG "Competitive Alternatives" site confirmed this in January 2002. Of the nine countries surveyed, Canada was the most competitive. And among all major cities in the North American Midwest, Saskatoon ranked second.

An Hon. Member: — That's our city.

Mr. Forbes: — That's right, that's our city. Our four largest cities — Saskatoon, Regina, Prince Albert, and Moose Jaw — all ranked better than the Canadian average.

Mr. Speaker, this budget, the 2003-04 budget, *Building for the Future*, continues the government's plan to build a prosperous and competitive economy through investments in business, research, and small business.

The energy sector is a major contributor to building our economy. Changes introduced last fall to oil and gas royalties and taxes ensure Saskatchewan remains competitive with other jurisdictions. This year the government will be providing \$3.3 million for the ethanol fuel tax rebate.

An investment in the mineral exploration is an investment in the future. To further enhance the mineral exploration, the government will continue to provide \$1.6 million for grants to encourage further exploration and geographical mapping of mineral deposits in this province. Response to last fall's mineral incentives have been very positive.

(15:30)

Mineral exploration expenditures were at \$23 million in 2001-2002, and they're expected to increase by approximately 30 per cent to \$30 million in 2002-2003.

Mr. Speaker, this government is committed to supporting research and development in this province. Saskatchewan will match federal research funding with \$8 million in its Innovation and Science Fund to provide support for Saskatchewan universities, colleges, and research institutes.

Over the last three years more than \$33 million has been

provided through this fund for 64 projects at the province's two universities. This research funding, in addition to more than \$26 million invested to date . . . and the \$173 million Canadian Light Source synchrotron is expected to be in operation in January 2004 and we're all looking forward to that.

Mr. Speaker, I spoke last week about tourism — so important in Saskatchewan and in Saskatoon. Spending in this province increased last year and expected to increase again this year. And to further encourage tourism, Tourism Saskatchewan funding will increase from \$6.9 million to over \$7.1 million this year.

And I want to say my own congratulations, Mr. Speaker, to the construction of a new Saskatchewan Forest Centre in Prince Albert which will begin this year. The province will be providing \$2.5 million towards a \$12.7 million facility which will showcase Saskatchewan's wood products and new technologies and ensure that the industry has access to the best market research and growth opportunities from across Canada and around the world.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I want to conclude my remarks with a bit of a story here. You know, I have a son in grade 12 at Bedford and sometimes I get in the car and I listen to whatever he has in his CD (compact disc) player. And so I was telling him this week how much I enjoy his music because it's very positive and it's upbeat, and I come into the House listening to his music and I feel positive. And my speech has been positive because I think that's what we need to do here.

So, Mr. Speaker, I want to quote Reel Big Fish here — the band Reel Big Fish — and they say:

We got a real good thing going and I don't want to see it end.

And if the naysayers, the cranks on the other side, get a hold of government, that will be it. I'll say it again. We got a real good thing going here, Mr. Speaker, and I don't want to see it end, and if they get a hold of it, it will crash to the floor.

So, Mr. Speaker, this budget is balanced. It comes from a vision that includes all people of Saskatchewan — the northerners, the southerners, the farmers, the people who live in the cities. This budget is balanced.

It's built on the idea that we have people here in Saskatchewan that are dreaming big, planning well, and working hard. And therefore, Mr. Speaker, we are building a future here in Saskatchewan, and this budget gives us the tools.

I will be voting in favour of the budget and against the amendment. Thank you very much.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it's an honour to stand today to speak to the budget of 2003. And before I begin, I want to welcome the new members to the Assembly, the member from Saskatoon Eastview and the member from Battleford-Cut Knife.

Mr. Speaker, this is the third budget of . . . underneath the

leadership of our unelected Premier. And quite frankly it's the third budgeted deficit budgets and it's the third year that you can see mismanagement. We've seen never-ending investigations and court cases and we've seen a government that no longer believes that it has to be responsible or accountable to the citizens of this province.

The NDP government, Mr. Speaker, have repeatedly said that they have balanced budgets, but the Provincial Auditor knows differently, Mr. Speaker. And the members on this side of the House know differently, Mr. Speaker. And more importantly, the people of Saskatchewan know differently, Mr. Speaker.

The smoke and mirrors of the Fiscal Stabilization Fund is growing a little thin and the people of Saskatchewan now know that it is not a fund. It does not contain any money and it does not collect interest. It's a line of credit, Mr. Speaker. It is a liability and, simply put, it is a debt.

I would like to focus most of what I would like to say today on the agriculture and rural revitalization budget. And with that I would like to begin with page 17 of the budget, which is the schedule of debt.

And if we look beyond the astounding fact that the debt is forecast to be greater now, at \$2.2 billion, than it was in 1991 when it was 12.1 billion . . . I'm sorry, I'll correct that, Mr. Speaker. It'll be greater now at \$12.2 billion than it was in 1991 when it was 12.1 billion.

The Speaker: — Order, please.

Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And if we look deeper than the obvious question of how our unelected Premier can possibly have lost control so badly that he is accumulating a debt in our province of about \$1 million a day, we're faced with the question of where is the 500 million debt that the Minister of Agriculture and the Minister of Finance, both, have kept using as an excuse as to why the government are having . . . or its fiscal difficulties.

Where is the \$500 million debt that they blame on the agriculture producers of this province for their crop insurance claims? They blame the producers and they blame the drought. And they say that they've run us down \$500 million. Where is it, Mr. Speaker? When we look at the schedule of debt, in the column, the forecast of 2003, it lists crop insurance debt of \$110 million. And in the estimated 2004, it lists the crop insurance debt at a \$102 million. Where in that whole, entire page, Mr. Speaker, does it show a \$500 million debt due to crop insurance claims?

And if it's not \$500 million, Mr. Speaker, why are the NDP continually using that as an excuse as to why they're facing financial difficulties? Why are they continually telling the people of this province that that's the reason why they're short of money whenever they're asked if they could contribute to something?

I shall be looking forward to being able to question the minister on that particular question later in the session.

Mr. Speaker, the NDP commitment to agriculture and rural

revitalization is quite accurately summed up on their provincial summary card, which is this card, Mr. Speaker. And on this card, agriculture is not on there once, Mr. Speaker. That's their commitment to agriculture.

They do use a tactic that has been well used and well criticized — broadly criticized quite frankly — that the federal government uses, and it's the tactic of adding up a number of years of spending on agriculture and putting it all together and then bragging about that sum of money.

They state that they will spend \$1 billion over five years to support farmers. And as I said, the federal government, that's their tactic, that's how they always brag about how they support the farmers of the country. And now the province has resorted to that, adding five years together. And it is the deceitful way of making the dollars seem larger than they actually are, if you roll them together. It doesn't break it down in any way. It doesn't explain it or substantiate the number in any way, and it doesn't explain how much of that billion dollars is actually premiums and contributions made by the producers themselves. But it sounds good on that little cue card and it is, quite frankly, the only mention of agriculture or farmers on it.

The actual fact is — and it doesn't matter how this minister tries to spin it — they have slashed the agriculture budget this year by \$40 million. And it's close to the same amount that they slashed the agriculture budget last year. So that it's very interesting, Mr. Speaker, that after two years of a record drought in our province and after two years of the producers having to tighten their belts to refinance, to restructure their operations, and in many cases the producers have had to farm their equity, this is what the NDP government does.

It turns their back on the producers and in doing so they're also turning their backs on rural businesses. They're turning their backs on agriculture industrial workers. They're turning their backs on small manufacturers, rural communities, and they've turned their backs on rural Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, in 1992 the agriculture budget was \$1.183 billion; 517 million of that came directly from the provincial coffers. And do you know what it is this year, Mr. Speaker? It's 251 million and they're bragging about it. It's half of what it was 10 years ago and that is unacceptable, Mr. Speaker.

This is a slashed budget at a time when the farm families are facing exorbitant crop insurance premium hikes for the second year in a row — premium hikes with slashed coverage where they don't have spot loss hail; they will not have variable price options.

This is at a time when they're facing increased utility rates. This is at a time when they are . . . no longer have the opportunity to take advantage of the property tax rebate that the government implemented a couple of years ago — and then took away again — and that acknowledged that farmland is unfairly taxed for education. This is at a time when during a drought they cut the crop insurance actual fieldworkers, when assessing the crops in a timely manner was particularly critical.

This, Mr. Speaker, has been two years of significant cuts to the budget. Two years of cuts to programs and services to the

producers of the province when input costs are rising. And there is no doubt, Mr. Speaker, this is two years too late for this NDP government to ever hope of winning a constituency in rural Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, when you look at this year's budget and last year's budget as well, you have to wonder about our Agriculture minister. You know he's been very preoccupied lately by, you know, by being able to stand up and say what I do or do not know about agriculture.

He even got his staff to write a clever little member statement to be read by the NDP agriculture expert from Wascana Plains — Regina Wascana Plains. And, you know, one must wonder if the minister is feeling a little threatened that he has to resort to these tactics instead of answering any of his questions.

And, Mr. Speaker, one must really, really, wonder when they look at this budget about the effectiveness of this Agriculture minister in his own cabinet. He is the Minister of Agriculture and furthermore he's the Deputy Premier of the province. He should be, quite frankly, a powerful man. And yet it's his budget that keeps taking a beating every time they go and put a budget together, Mr. Speaker.

So it looks like he's just plain weak. He's a weak minister, he's a weak deputy prime . . . or premier, and he's under the leadership of a weak Premier. We've always suspected he's weak at the federal table, when he finally decides he's going to get to the federal table, Mr. Speaker. And now it's become more than apparent that he's equally weak at his own cabinet table.

He can prattle on and on about all the inadequacies that he believes I have, but he is the Minister of Agriculture and he has some explaining to do in rural Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, the department cuts have come in three main areas: there's been cuts in research and technology, policy and planning, farm stability and adaptations. Cuts in any of these areas are cause for concern, Mr. Speaker.

We are the leaders in this province of research and technology and I believe it's very, very important to our province. I believe we can expand even further in the future in these areas. And yet this is where our government has chosen to pull their support. I will be very interested to know why. I would be very interested to ask the minister why that's an area that he chose to make cuts.

The NDP have given a lot of lip service to value-added, increased food processing and yet their real intentions are demonstrated quite nicely when they pull the funding from the programs that will help agribusinesses grow in our province.

The most alarming and the most substantial cut in the agriculture budget is in the category of stability and adaptation. And I'm sure the minister will be more than happy to correct me if I'm wrong, but I'm sure that is where the funding for any federal-provincial safety nets fall. The budget cut from \$102.9 million to 78.2 million, Mr. Speaker. That entry raises the most questions of what they're going to be able to provide for any programs under the agriculture policy framework.

The agriculture policy framework, Mr. Speaker, has been shrouded now for some time with a lot of mystery, a lot of misinformation, and many, many, many unanswered questions. It has been the position of the Saskatchewan Party to sign the original agreement, Mr. Speaker. And that has been a very controversial position to take. There are some agriculture groups that were in agreement with that position and some that were against it. But in order to explain why we had taken that position, I think we need to answer the question of, what were we being asked to sign?

And I've read the agreement quite thoroughly and it is a fairly extensive and ambitious set of goals and principles by which to design a future program.

(15:45)

The minister told the producers that it was a blank cheque when in fact the only dollar commitment under the initial agreement for the risk management sector is the \$1.1 billion by the federal government. There is no designation as to how much money will be allocated to each of the provinces. That is to be decided later under negotiations with provinces. There is no commitment as to the cost-shared federal-provincial split. That too was to be negotiated at the table later with the provinces. The minister told the producers that once we signed we'd be locked in for five years, when in fact no risk management program goes into place until another agreement, the agreement of implementation, is signed.

And also, Mr. Speaker, it's interesting . . . And I'll read right from the agreement. In Part One, "General Components of the Framework Agreement," clause 11, "Withdrawal From Framework Agreement":

11.1 Subject to clause 11.2, any Party may withdraw from the Framework Agreement effective at the end of a fiscal year by giving notice in writing before the beginning of that fiscal year. All commitments undertaken by the Parties under the Framework Agreement will be honoured to the end of that fiscal year.

And yet our Agriculture minister has told everyone in the province that once we're signed, we're tied in for five years; we have no choice. But in . . . but maybe he hasn't read the entire agreement, Mr. Speaker.

So why does the Saskatchewan Party think that we should have signed the initial agreement, the agreement of intent, the agreement in principle? Well again, Mr. Speaker, I would like to use a few quotes.

On July 23, 2002, Mr. Vanclief, our federal Minister of Agriculture, said, and I quote:

Signing the APF doesn't cost you a penny, not a penny. (Not signing on to the APF but . . . sorry, Mr. Speaker.) But signing onto the APF gets you to the table so that you can have a discussion about the implementation in your province. It certainly has a financial implication for the province. We haven't even talked about provincial allocation of the APF money. I would think Saskatchewan would want to be there to talk about (the) allocation. I don't

think it wants the other seven provinces to do the carving up.

Mr. Speaker, on September 6, 2002, our own minister acknowledged that without signing he was not going to be at the table. He said, and I quote:

I'm probably 95% convinced I will now be signing the agreement. I'm being encouraged to sign it now so that we can be at the table full time.

However he chose not to.

September 12, 2002, Simon Kennedy, who happens to be the director general of the policy planning and the integration in Agriculture said, and I quote:

The whole issue of the allocation of funds is something that will be developed in the implementation negotiation. There is no formula yet, so we cannot tell Saskatchewan what its share will be.

October 9, Donald Boulanger said, who is a spokesperson for Mr. Vanclief:

Nothing has been decided on safety nets and risk management will be designed with the provinces. That's why it's important for (the) provinces to be at the table.

On October 24, Mr. Vanclief said:

When provinces sign on to the APF the bilateral implementing discussions (will) take place between the federal and provincial government. That's the process (Serby has) known from the start . . .

Mr. Speaker, that's why the Saskatchewan Party believes that we should be at the table for the designing stage.

The NDP government has always refused to sign onto the designing stage. We need not go back any farther than when Mr. Upshall was the minister of Agriculture and there was an agreement to be signed, and there was going to be a safety net program designed for all of Canada. Mr. Upshall chose not to be part of the designing process and he abstained from being at the table.

However when it came time for implementation then he did sign, and that's how we ended up with AIDA (Agricultural Income Disaster Assistance). We ended up with AIDA that was bureaucratically and eastern driven and designed.

Then we can look at the following program that came after AIDA. Again a different minister, Mr. Lingenfelter, was asked to be a part of the designing process. He chose not to sign; he did not participate until later in the game. Then when it came time to be implemented he did sign, and that's how we ended up with CFIP (Canadian Farm Income Program).

And here we are again, Mr. Speaker, down the same road without signing while it's being designed.

Do I think that there will be adequate funding for the

components of the APF (agricultural policy framework)? No. I have serious doubts that there won't be adequate funding. Do I think that we still need to lobby the federal government for trade injury compensation program? Yes, I do think we still need to do that.

Do I think the 60/40 federal/provincial funding split is fair to Saskatchewan? No, I don't. I don't think that is fair at all, Mr. Speaker. Do I agree with Ottawa's process for establishing these agreements? I don't agree with that either, Mr. Speaker.

I am not so naive to believe that being at the table will be the answer to all our prayers, but I have serious concerns that many of the components of the APF . . . But let's make the best of what the federal government has put on the table while still lobbying for the other issues that are fundamental to the sustainability of our agriculture in our province. Let's be a strong voice in Ottawa while these programs are being designed, instead of being one that's simply ignored back here in Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, we've missed the boat of the design, and now Ottawa's attempting to strong-arm the provinces into signing the implementation agreement. Some of the provinces — for example, Ontario, Quebec, and PEI (Prince Edward Island) — are lobbying for the federal government to extend the existing programs for one more year before implementation because they do not believe that this program is adequately funded or designed.

Mr. Hillstrom made a motion to the Standing Committee on Agriculture on March 20, and that motion stated:

That this committee formally requests that the Minister of Agriculture delay the implementation of the business risk management pillar of the agriculture policy framework for one year.

Our minister has implied that he doesn't think that should happen. He has implied that he thinks that we should sign the implementation right away. And I have to ask why? Why is he so reluctant to sign the agreement when he could be a part of the designing of the program? And why does he seem hasty in signing the agreement when we're stuck with the program?

Can this Minister of Agriculture tell us what advantage there is to using production margins instead of gross margins?

Mr. Vanclief talks that the new program will have deeper coverage, Mr. Speaker. Can the minister explain to the producers of this province how that is so?

The last proposal I've seen suggests that the producers will have to pay out 26 per cent upfront for the coverage that they will receive. Can the Minister of Agriculture explain how that is possibly affordable at any time to the producers of this province, let alone after two years of drought?

Can the minister tell us today how the new programs are linked to crop insurance, Mr. Speaker? Will a claim from one program offset a payment from the other? So basically the producers of the province may be faced, Mr. Speaker, with paying two premiums for the same coverage.

And if he cannot give us a straight answer on any of these questions, then why is he not actively and vocally joining the other provinces in lobbying for the federal government for a one-year extension of existing programs so that this new program can be designed properly?

They're calling it new NISA (Net Income Stabilization Account) but quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, it doesn't look anything like what NISA looked like. It appears to start with not enough. It has the potential to go to nothing. And then it's designed to keep the producers of the province at that level forever.

Will the minister commit to doing an independent analysis of the program using actual Saskatchewan farm family scenarios? Why won't he commit to that? And let's actually run some farm family scenarios through this program and see what the outcome will be and then we have a better idea of what it is that they want us to implement.

Or is the real reason, Mr. Speaker — and I have to wonder — is the real reason why this minister is staying so quiet because he knows this program's not going to work in Saskatchewan? He knows that very few of the producers in this province are going to qualify and that's why, Mr. Speaker, he budgeted a measly \$18 million for the APF in this year's budget, because he knows it's not going to cost the province a whole heck of a lot of money.

Mr. Speaker, the producers of this province basically only want three things from their Agriculture minister. They want a minister that will try to understand their issues. They want a minister that will do his best to address those issues. And they want a minister, Mr. Speaker, that will give them some straight answers. And quite frankly, they are not getting any of those from this Agriculture minister who has not given them any explanation or straight answers on what's happening in agriculture today.

Mr. Speaker, this budget abandons rural Saskatchewan and any vision that it might have had for rural revitalization.

It does have one increase, Mr. Speaker, and that increase, quite frankly, is in increasing the department staff by 20 more people.

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

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Atkinson: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, this is the first time that I've been given an opportunity to speak to our colleagues in the Legislative Assembly. As you know, not all of us get to speak on the Throne Speech and the budget speech, so I really appreciate my next 20 minutes.

The first thing I want to do is congratulate the new member from Battleford-Cut Knife on his election to this Assembly. I can already tell he's going to enjoy his time here. In the thrust and parry of debate, I've noticed that the member has a good sense of humour and humour will serve him well in the months to come.

The second thing I want to do is congratulate our new member from Saskatoon Fairview on his election to the Legislative Assembly. The member has been a strong member of the trade union movement in this province, particularly the Canadian Union of Public Employees. He has represented his members well at the bargaining table and, as I understand, he got to know the member from Battleford-Cut Knife during negotiations for the town of Wilkie. So I'm sure that they will enjoy themselves as they come to know all of the various procedures of the Legislative Assembly.

The second thing I want to do is to thank the member for Cumberland for his sixteen and a half years of service to our legislature.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Atkinson: — The member from Cumberland and myself came into this House in December 1986 as brand new members, and the first thing that we had to do when we came into this House was to stand in this Assembly and oppose a unilateral rule change by the then Devine government. And, Mr. Speaker, I think there were 16 new members of the Assembly, and we were on that side of the House, and we all had to stand up without notes and talk about what a unilateral rule change would mean in terms of democracy.

Well over those sixteen and a half years the member has served his constituents with distinction, and he has brought great pride to the North because he was the first Aboriginal person to be appointed to executive government, or Executive Council, by any leader or any premier in the history of our province.

I do note that over the years, Mr. Speaker, the member has had to deal with some conditions that I don't find all that acceptable in terms of how there have been members that have treated him on a personal basis. And I find that regrettable, that when the member from the North, for Cumberland, and sometimes the member from Athabasca, have stood in this Assembly, I think that they have been treated somewhat differently than the rest of us. And I think that that needs to be acknowledged today.

And a good example of that would be when Mr. Berntson got into his criminal difficulties and when he was subpoenaing all of the various records of members of the legislature in terms of their constituency allowances, the only member that he named was the member from Cumberland, an Aboriginal member. He did not name the member from Saskatoon Nutana, or Wakamow, or Moose Jaw North, or Carlton. He only named one member and that really does say something about the tone that we have seen on some occasions in this House.

And I have listened with great interest on some of the remarks made by the members of the opposition when it comes to my colleague from Cumberland.

(16:00)

And I do think the one thing we need to remind ourselves of, that when we speak of each other, we need to be respectful in terms of how we speak of each other and we need to acknowledge that sometimes when we speak it may sound somewhat racist. And there have been occasions during this

session of the legislature where I have listened very carefully to what some members have said and I have been concerned about the tone and the nuance of those comments. And I think we need to be mindful of that.

And I hear the members over there chirping. And one of the things that I've learned is that sometimes when people yell like that, when they yell like that, you've hit a nerve, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the third thing I want to talk about, the third thing I want to talk about, is the war in Iraq. And I also listened to the members opposite and their comments on the war in Iraq.

And on the day that the Premier of the province talked about the need and the need to support the United Nations and the support for the Canadian government's decision, I noted with interest that the Leader of the Opposition was silent when the press asked him his opinion. He didn't really have an opinion on the war in Iraq.

But I have noted that his members opposite on many occasions during the Throne Speech came out full square against the Prime Minister's decision and in favour of the United States of America's decision to enter into the country of Iraq.

And the one thing I have also noted while listening carefully to the members opposite is that the one thing they need to understand is that we do have these things called international law. And under international law and treaties and covenants, no state can attack another state unless they have been attacked. That's point number one.

Point number two. To make a unilateral decision to attack another state when you have not been attacked, you need to have the confirmation of the United Nations. It's called international law.

And what I would say to the members opposite that . . . What I would say to the members opposite, that if they want to govern, if they want to govern, they need to think about this notion of law and following the law. And on this occasion they have not followed international treaties, international covenants, international laws in their non-support for the Prime Minister of Canada.

And I am proud to say that the New Democratic Party of Canada and the New Democratic Party of Saskatchewan supports the notion of the United Nations and therefore we support the Prime Minister's action not to take our troops into Iraq in support of the United Nations, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Atkinson: — Mr. Speaker, the fourth thing I want to do is I want to thank my constituents in Saskatoon Nutana for the support that they have shown over the last year. And I'm particularly pleased, Mr. Speaker, a magazine in our city called *Planet S* has just asked the readers of Saskatoon who is the best when it comes to the best bike shop, the best snowboard shop, the best restaurant, and the best city councillor, and so on and so forth, and I'm extremely delighted that many of the businesses in my constituency have been recognized as the best when it comes to providing services, retail services, and goods

and services to the people in our city.

And I want to congratulate all of the people and all of the businesses that have been recognized as the readers' choice in the city of Saskatoon when they have businesses in our constituency, they live in our constituency, and they work in our constituency, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Atkinson: — Now, Mr. Speaker, now I want to talk about the budget. And I listened with great interest on the day of the budget when the Minister of Finance indicated in his budget that the real economic growth rate that was going to occur in this fiscal year was 6.8 per cent. And I noticed that it was clear to me that the members opposite had had an embargoed copy of the budget and that they had their response orchestrated when they laughed with great glee when the minister used this number.

And so I thought in fairness to the Department of Finance, I should ask them to provide a little information in terms of when they have been right on their economic forecasts and when they have been wrong. And what I want to tell the members opposite . . . And I want to put these numbers into the record because they're important. Let me say this. In 1992 the actual economic growth rate, the real GDP, was minus 4.5.

An Hon. Member: — Not according to Doug Elliott.

Ms. Atkinson: — And in . . . These are Department of Finance numbers. In 1993 the budget forecast — if the members want to listen — the budget forecast that was put into the blue book was a 2.8 per cent increase. In actual fact the economic growth rate was 5.7.

In 1994, Finance projected our economic growth rate would be 2; actual fact, 3.7.

In 1995, they were dead on. Their budget forecast was 1.8; actual, 1.9.

1996, their budget forecast was 2.6; actual, 3.2.

1997, their economic budget forecast was 1.8; actual, 5.7.

In 1998, 2.7; actual, 3.7.

1999, they projected a budget forecast of 2; actual, point one.

2000, the projected budget forecast, 2.4; actual, 2.9.

In 2001, budget forecast, 2.2; actual, minus 1.3.

2002, actual, 1.4; budget forecast . . . or minus 1.4; budget forecast; 1.5.

My point is that in seven out of ten years the Department of Finance has been dead on or low in terms of real GDP, and three years they've been off anywhere from 1.9 per cent to 2.9.

Now what I will also want to do in terms of making the point, the forecast in 1993 was below the actual due to . . . and it was

due to an above-average crop production. The forecast in 1994 was below the actual because of strong growth in oil production. The forecast in 1997 was below the actual due to strong growth in employment and oil production. In the forecast in 1999, which was one year they were off dramatically by 1.9 per cent, the actual was due to a decline in oil production. And we expect oil production to be up this year because of changes in our royalty structure. In the forecast in 2001 and '02, the actual was off due to drought.

Now, Mr. Speaker, we know, we know from soil . . . soil conditions, soil conditions in this province that we expect to return to normal crop production. And if we do, Mr. Speaker, if we do, we anticipate a real GDP — and this is projected — of 6.8 per cent.

Now when you think about what this province has undergone in the last two years in terms of drought, it is absolutely dramatic that our economic growth rate has been as small as it has been, given the dramatic climate changes and what has happened on farm. And we know last summer, Mr. Speaker, we know last summer that the crop was essentially written off. So people weren't buying herbicides, chemicals, and so on because it was useless to do so, Mr. Speaker.

Now, Mr. Speaker, Nesbitt Burns, which is a financial house in this country, has indicated in their economic research that they believe — they believe — we're going to hit our targets.

And what I find most interesting, Mr. Speaker, is that they say provincial finances across the country are under pressure from rising health costs. And we have known this for some time, Mr. Speaker. Health costs began to rise in 1999 and since '99 you've seen some fairly dramatic increases in health spending, not only in this province but across the country.

Mr. Speaker, as well we know that there will be significant increases in spending for education.

But if you look, according to Nesbitt Burns, our overall spending will actually decline by 2.9 per cent with the exception in health and education. And they say that our total operating expenditures are planned to rise by \$186 million in real terms or 3.2 per cent.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I think the other important thing for the public to understand about this budget is that, in this budget year, the two lower personal tax brackets are dropping by a quarter of a percentage point, while the top tax bracket is falling by point five percentage points to 15 per cent. And on the business tax side, the capital tax exemption will be increased. As well the small-business rate will be reduced from 6 per cent to 5.5 per cent in 2004 and 5 per cent in 2005.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I listened carefully to what some of the members have said and it's a bit of a contradiction. We have the member from Watrous complaining about what happened in the agriculture budget. And no doubt other critics will get up, stand up in this session of the legislature and complain about what happened in their particular budget area that they're the critic for. And no doubt they won't be saying spend less. They will be saying spend more.

And the question about governing is, where do you spend the money and how do you spend the money. You have to look at what your estimated revenues are and what your estimated expenses are and then you have to put together a budget.

And there's a couple of things that we know in this province. We know that our citizens want access to health services and in order to have access to those health services, we have to deal with the health budget.

We know that our citizens want access to education for their children and their grandchildren. And we have to deal with education spending.

We know that we've made a three-year commitment of \$900 million a year for increased highway spending. And this budget fulfills that commitment, Mr. Speaker, and we're pleased about that.

I think the thing that pleases me the most about this budget is that from a health point of view, we're continuing to deal with water and sewer issues in northern Saskatchewan. And one of the things, the best things that we can do for the overall health status of our citizens is to have access to good quality water and have access to a sewage treatment system that makes sure that none of us gets sick as a result of a lack of sewage treatment. So we're pleased that we're going to have 41 new water-supply projects and 18 waste-water projects in order to improve the water and sewer infrastructure in the province of Saskatchewan.

The second thing that I'm pleased about is that we were able, even in a tight situation, to add 10 new police officers in order to provide ongoing public safety and security to our citizens. And that means that we're on our way to honouring our commitment to create 200 new police officer positions in the province.

Mr. Speaker, I think one of the things that I am most pleased about is the \$1 million that we're putting into social assistance allowances for disabled citizens who because of their disability are unable to work full-time, or in some cases, part-time or casually. And, Mr. Speaker, that was good news for those people.

(16:15)

The last thing that I want to talk about, Mr. Speaker, is I am so pleased, I am so pleased that for the first time since 1982 we increased the child care subsidy to parents who have children in child care centres. And I want to congratulate the minister for doing that and the Government of Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Atkinson: — Now, Mr. Speaker, it's \$20 a month on average or \$240 a year on average. And for low-income working parents or parents going to school, that \$20 a month means four jugs of milk and that's important.

Mr. Speaker, the other thing I'm pleased about is that we were able to add 500 new child care spaces to young families in our province so they can access good quality child care.

Mr. Speaker, it's important that if we want to recruit and retain our young people to the province that we have jobs for them, we have affordable housing, we have accessible education, and for those young parents with children, that we have good quality early learning spaces available so that their children are in good quality child care facilities while they work or go to school.

Well, Mr. Speaker, my colleagues are motioning that my time is up. I do want to say that I will be supporting the 2003-2004 provincial budget put forward by our colleagues and I am proud of that budget. I think the budget is credible and it's continuing to address the needs of the citizens of our province.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Brkich: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to rise in the legislature to make some comments on the 2003 budget. First off though I would like to offer my congratulations to the member from Battleford-Cut Knife and also to the member from Saskatoon Fairview upon their election to the Assembly. I hope that they find their time here a learning experience, as I have; an enjoyable experience, as I have the last four years.

And also before I get into it I would also like to express my support for the United States in their war against terrorism. I also . . . I hope a speedy end to this war, as everybody does, and I hope that it ends well.

This very well could be my last budget address under what they call the old Arm River constituency, so with that I would like to express an honour and a pleasure it has been to serve the constituents that I am going to be losing under my boundary changes. And also looking forward to, looking forward to the new members, the new constituents that I'm going to be meeting when the election time rolls around. And I am confident the large majority of these hardworking rural residents will ensure their future by electing a Saskatchewan Party government in the next provincial election.

Mr. Speaker, as my capacity as Sask Water critic, I've had some opportunity to study the benefits of growing irrigation in Saskatchewan and I would like to discuss that for a little bit.

There is no doubt that our province has a capability to greatly increase the number of irrigated acres. The resulting benefits would ultimately be to grow Saskatchewan economy in ways that the NDP simply cannot understand in Saskatchewan.

In Saskatchewan right now we currently irrigate between 250,000 and 320,000 acres out of a possible 2 to 5 to 3.7 million acres which could be irrigated. There's more than enough water in our province to support the development of these possible acres.

According to the 1969 master agreement on the . . . on water appropriation between the Prairie provinces, Alberta is required right now to send 50 per cent of the outward flow of water in their province on to Saskatchewan. In turn, Saskatchewan must send 50 per cent of their outward flow towards Manitoba.

However, even despite these drought conditions, Alberta has

been sending approximately 60 per cent or more of its flow on to Saskatchewan, and at the same time Saskatchewan is sending almost double its requirements on to the province of Manitoba. And that's been happening ever since the agreement was first put in place.

By using this excessive water, Saskatchewan would be able to expand irrigation to its full potential that would create a rural economic scenario that would surpass even Alberta in places — all without putting excess strain on the water system or by having to irrigate unsuitable land.

Irrigation in the Lake Diefenbaker area alone is capable of an expansion of 115,000 acres, while many other irrigation districts in the province are ready to expand should the opportunity arise.

The benefits of this expansion are vast and appealing, not only to the rural residents, but also to our urban centres as well. Irrigation increases crop yields, meaning that fewer acres will be needed to produce the same level of crop production we have now, whereby we can further diversify our dryland economy into other crops and also into forage production beneficial to the expansion of our livestock industry.

Currently right now less than 20 per cent of the land suitable for irrigation on a worldwide basis is currently in use, yet this acreage still contributes to over 30 per cent of the world food production. Imagine how many acres of vital rain forest could be saved from clear-cutting or slash-and-burn destruction if we could irrigate 100 per cent of the acres that could be irrigated out there of these potential acres.

Furthermore, it is estimated that 80 per cent of the additional food production by the year 2025 will come from irrigated acres. Clearly Saskatchewan could lead the way in irrigation development if indeed there was a government in this province with a vision to make that a reality.

Everyone has always said that Saskatchewan is an arid province, and this is a reality. Basically 2 out of 10 years there's always a . . . it's a proven fact that in 2 out of every 10 years that there isn't enough rainfall to sustain most of the crops grown in this province.

Now with irrigation we have the capability to overcome this devastating weather pattern of our agriculture economy. One thing many people have called for, and throughout this province, is continuing diversification. Irrigation would allow farmers to grow more profitable crops than we have the ability to grow today.

We would have the potential to dramatically increase current production in tree nurseries, the growth of timothy hay, and the expansion of a viable vegetable industry. This would include the proper development of a private sector potato industry — a potato industry free of government run and free of this NDP government.

Certainly we cannot expect to grow irrigation in this province while the NDP, basically this government, is busy losing money in \$28 million in SPUDCO and all the other fiascos that they've lost money investing outside this province when they should be

looking at investing inside.

Test studies have indicated that farm income nearly tripled after a switch from dryland to irrigation farming practices. Here in Canada, dryland agriculture has an average output of between 80 to \$100 an acre while at the same time timothy hay's an average of output of maybe \$600 per acre, while seed production — if the government isn't running it — could realize up to \$2,800 per acre.

Another thing is on irrigated pasture land you could increase the number of livestock by allowing livestock ranchers to grow their herd size without having to expand pasture land.

Currently Saskatchewan only produces 7 per cent of the vegetables that are consumed here, so each year our province must import approximately \$30 million worth of vegetables. Now just think how much economy, economic activity could be generated if Saskatchewan became self-sufficient in the growth of vegetables and putting \$30 million back in our provincial economy. This diversification allows our provincial consumers access to wider variety of products, locally grown and marketed.

Lake Diefenbaker also provides huge tourism possibilities through camping, fishing, hiking, boating, and the successful operation of numerous parks. None of this would have been possible without the building of Gardiner dam. There are so many benefits right now that we can attain from the South Saskatchewan River and Lake Diefenbaker.

One example of these benefits include the Wakaw-Humboldt regional water supply system which takes advantage of the abundance of fresh water from our major river systems. There is no doubt that we need to develop these freshwater supplies in order to ensure that many of our communities will no longer have to worry about the quality of their drinking water.

Saskatchewan is more than capable of not only contributing more to our economy and our health care by carefully using our water resources, but able to do this without affecting water levels in our lakes or the river flow at all downstream.

One of the major concerns that must be addressed is the issue of use it or lose it. Right now Alberta does not use its full share of their old water . . . (inaudible) . . . At the same time neither does Saskatchewan.

However as we all know, Alberta is growing and one day will maybe need more water. Certainly if they are going to use up their full share of water, we should be utilizing our full share as well.

Currently right now we are losing as much water from evaporation as is being used for irrigation — that's 3 per cent. Three per cent of the water that is stored in Lake Diefenbaker is just used for irrigation and that's basically what goes off in evaporation per year. Right now we are sending over 90 per cent of the flow into this lake downstream without using the benefits of this water for the surrounding area and the province as a whole.

Saskatchewan must take advantage of this abundant resource as

soon as possible before it's too late and we lose it. Saskatchewan's present water development is at the stage where Alberta and the western United States were back in 1903. Lake Diefenbaker . . . And the hard part is done because we have the Gardiner dam and Lake Diefenbaker; we just need a government now that's capable of developing this enormous water resource.

Even though the members opposite seem content to disrespect House procedure by releasing many details of this budget well in advance of March 28, I'm content to respect the legislative process and speak on behalf of the constituents in Arm River.

More importantly my constituents would like me to get to the bottom of the things in this budget so as to separate the facts from fiction. What we're seeing today in this budget is a mixture of both a repeat performance of the smoke-and-mirrors approach that this NDP government continues in their ongoing effort to mislead the good citizens of Saskatchewan.

The NDP certainly has proven without a doubt that they are able to mislead the people of Saskatchewan, especially when you look at all the recent fiascos that have gone on there. Considering that it took months of pressure from our opposition to get the Finance minister to admit that the 2002 budget was a deficit budget, it comes as no surprise to us that the NDP would hail this budget as the answer to our province economic condition.

With the idea of a spring election maybe a possibility — but I don't think so the way this government is going on; I think it'll be possibly the following spring — the NDP has already proven that misleading the Saskatchewan electorate on important money issues such as SPUDCO, we'll start there, and all the other investments that have been going on in this province, it's now a common practice for this coalition government.

We already know that the so-called Fiscal Stabilization Fund has no money in it, yet we were told to believe that there is still \$100 million left in this fund. You have the ongoing SIGA scandals, further proof that this government has lost control of its finances.

And before we look at the various aspects of this budget, I want to talk about the NDP's claim of what . . . what the NDP claim is to blame for the increasing of our provincial debt. They are now blaming the \$28 million lost on SPUDCO, they're now blaming their multi-million dollar losses on investments outside of Saskatchewan and Canada, they're now blaming the fact that thousands of people are leaving Saskatchewan in search of a future — not blaming themselves for the continued mismanagement of our province. No, Mr. Speaker. They're once again blaming our province's most important industry which is agriculture.

They're blaming the farmers for the weather they faced in 2002 and that's why they're having a deficit budget. They're blaming it on the farmers.

We were told that the Saskatchewan crop insurance program now has a \$500 million deficit due to the claim put in by farmers who've experienced drought, grasshoppers, frost, and late harvest rains. And now, as a result of this deficit, farmers

are now being informed that the 2003 crop insurance premiums will be raised by 52 per cent this spring.

Many of my farmer constituents are still wondering how Saskatchewan Crop Insurance allowed this deficit to occur in the first place. For great numbers of farmers, this was the first claim that they'd made since the drought of 1988; and for others, it was the first claim that they'd made in over 20 years of being in this program. So it's not surprising the farmers are questioning why Saskatchewan Crop Insurance was not financially ready for 2002 but also for 2001 as well.

Indeed, two straight years of drought, Saskatchewan crop officials had no plan to deal with the high number of claims and yet it's the fault of farmers, not this government. That's what this present government is saying.

The NDP is also blaming rising natural gas costs as another contributor towards increasing our debt. Indeed they're saying that due to rising natural gas prices, SaskEnergy now is in a \$40 million deficit position. Moreover the government indicates that it will be raising energy rates to compensate for their mismanagement.

(16:30)

Amazingly the NDP is also saying that the Crown corporations are returning dividends of millions into the provincial coffers so the obvious question is, why are the people of Saskatchewan being penalized by higher energy rates when supposedly the other Crowns are doing fine? The answer is clearly that the dividends in many cases are drawn from the Crowns who must borrow money in order to pay dividends in the first place — just another campaign of basically misleading people and driving up the debt of this province.

We have been informed that the agriculture spending will decrease by \$40 million this year. And again the remaining agriculture budget will not go directly to farmers who need it so desperately this spring. No, this money is going into a new national farm program which is not looking any better than any of the other failed farm programs that we have endured over these last few years.

Indeed it looks like the NISA program, which is working for farmers, will now be gutted and turned into something resembling AIDA or CFIP, which have not worked for farmers to date. Clearly this new program will not provide timely assistance for farmers who have struggled through two years of drought and high input costs.

Farmers are also asking why our Agriculture minister waited so long to sign with spring seeding just around the corner. Nobody is happy the way the federal Agriculture minister put pressure on our province to sign on a new farm program, but what the farmers are disappointed in is that our provincial Agriculture minister waited till he was boxed into a corner. By then it was clearly a take-it-or-leave-it scenario and Ottawa knew it.

Any good negotiator would tell you that you should avoid being cornered into any business agreement but our Agriculture minister simply let the winter pass without any significant negotiating being done on behalf of provincial farm families.

A few people also talking about . . . I want to talk a little bit about health care. A few people believe that more administration in our health care system does little more than create jobs. This is little solace for the people waiting months and sometimes years for tests and surgeries. Waiting lists continue to grow and they have been under this past government for a number of years and they are going to continue to grow.

What is so desperately needed is a much more efficient and better way to deliver health care to the people of Saskatchewan. Throwing more and more resources at the present system of health care is not a complete answer for a better health care system.

But all this goes back to the basic philosophy of the NDP and the way it has governed Saskatchewan. The NDP philosophy is to encourage the growth of money-losing Crown . . . encourage the growth of money-losing Crown corporations but drive out private businesses with their own tax dollars and keep them out. The NDP philosophy is to ignore agriculture and forests and the exodus from our rural communities and in most cases taking families out of the province in search of a better future.

People have been leaving this province in record numbers. In the last 16 consecutive quarters, we've had a population loss. While then the NDP claim that there are not enough people left to maintain full service health care and other government services. So then what do they do? They centralize everything in the major cities of our provinces, the cities being the only possible place they have chance of being elected in the first place. But with this next election, I think that's going to be proven wrong.

This philosophy is not only doomed to failure but sadly makes it clear that the NDP has no plan to grow the province of Saskatchewan. No plans but to sit back and watch our province slip slowly but surely into more and deeper economic depression.

Well I want to tell the members opposite that the citizens of Saskatchewan will not tolerate their philosophy any more. It's time for a new government and I'm very confident that it will be a Saskatchewan Party government, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, it's very clear about the NDP budget plans for municipal governments. When we look at the funds this year that are going to municipal governments, there's very little for mayors and reeves to get excited about. Certainly I'm not opposed to providing the councils with the funds they need. What bothers me is that this government deprives councils of money which they need to improve and maintain their infrastructure. There will only be \$10 million in additional money for urban and rural governments. Money that they . . . they should have more money, that they need to improve water quality out there.

What we have right now, Mr. Speaker, we have a non-elected Premier with no vision, who shuffles cabinet ministers like a deck of cards trying to find some luck in each draw but always coming up empty. This Premier is gambling with the future of Saskatchewan. And like any gambler, he keeps gambling until there's nothing left to put on the table. And this is what the

NDP government has come to now. They have no idea how to get out of the bind they're in. The only way they know how is to draw more hard-earned money from Saskatchewan people, and then they roll the dice again and blindly hope that this time they can win it all back.

And all the while this NDP government says everything is rolling along smoothly. They want to claim that their GDP is so much better than the other provinces, even other countries, when in fact this is just not the case. All this government can do is deny the truth while predicting the provincial economic growth will be an astounding 6.8. This is twice what the experts are predicting in the best-case scenario. Indeed the prediction is between 2.7 to 3.4 as the most accurate level of economic growth for the next fiscal year.

So I would ask the Finance minister exactly how he determined that Saskatchewan would have economic growth that is double to what any other country, let alone any other province, is expecting this year?

The Finance minister even claims that average crop . . . that an average crop is a major determining factor in his economic growth. Certainly he's basing his prediction on the idea that the present commodity prices remain intact until fall. But we've already seen indicators from the Canadian Wheat Board that the price of wheat is falling, and of course we all know that the price of specialty crops are extremely vulnerable to outside market pressure and weather-related issues, and as well in the last month they've all taken a dip.

Every farmer, including myself, realizes how risky it is to plan for good prices and good yields on the continuing basis. Indeed our Agriculture minister certainly believes that the turnaround in agriculture is not only going to happen but has already happened. Just look at the new budget figures for agriculture. They already cut it by \$40 million.

And what about the ranchers in our province, Mr. Speaker? I do not see any significant initiatives on behalf of our cattle producers who would like to expand the industry, yet they are constantly being told by this government to diversify their operations. In my constituency today, there are a dedicated group of individuals trying to establish a new cattle feedlot near the community of Craik. The Riel Trail cattle feeders incorporated group has been working hard to generate enough investment to get this thing going. Would it not be easier for these entrepreneurs if there was some assistance in the form of a tax relief and also in the streamlining of government relations?

Of course this would fly in the face of NDP doctrine which believes that they need to own part of any new business initiative, or failing that, to tax private business heavily and force them to cope with multiple layers of bureaucracy in order to even get a business started.

Mr. Speaker, when this government was elected it promised to deliver 200 new law enforcement officers to Saskatchewan. Now it seems clear that not only will they not deliver on this promise, but they are content and now it's only 10 new police officers will be hired this year. Only 10 new police officers, despite the fact that rural governments were assessed on a per capita basis for policing costs based on the old census figures

instead of the new ones. So they have this money in hand, and before they actually change the rates, they charge the municipal governments for policing costs.

Also, with that coming up I cannot support this budget, and I will support the amendment brought forth by the opposition. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Prebble: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased to enter into this budget debate and rise in support of the provincial budget that our Minister of Finance has brought down. A budget, Mr. Speaker, that is marked by no new tax increases, no health care premiums as we see in Alberta and British Columbia, Mr. Speaker. The only universal, provincial child tax credit in Canada — which I'm very proud of, Mr. Speaker — and a seniors' tax credit that is going up again this year from \$750 last year to \$1,000 in 2003, Mr. Speaker. The elimination of the flat tax which of course the Devine government, the predecessors of the Saskatchewan Party, brought into this province. We've done away with it now, Mr. Speaker.

So, Mr. Speaker, this is a people's budget. And you can see it, not just in terms of our tax measures like the ones that I've just mentioned, but also in terms of the priorities that we've made for spending in health and education.

And I recall, Mr. Speaker, in the 1999 election when the Saskatchewan Party campaigned on the idea of freezing education and freezing health care, Mr. Speaker. And then I think about what our government has done over this past four years, and in this budget, which has been to invest in people by investing in health and education, Mr. Speaker. What a contrast between ourselves and the official opposition.

And, Mr. Speaker, in this budget I see an increase to our commitment to medicare and to health care spending in general of over 7 per cent, Mr. Speaker. To be precise, \$184 million more invested in health care with a total commitment to spending on public health in the province of Saskatchewan of \$2.5 billion, Mr. Speaker. And I'm very pleased to say, Mr. Speaker, that that includes an increase of 6 per cent in health care spending to support our regional health authorities and all the programs and services they deliver.

It also includes a budget increase for support for primary health care, Mr. Speaker. And it includes a commitment to expand funding for diabetes education and care and drug coverage in the province of Saskatchewan, about which I'm very pleased, Mr. Speaker. Just one more example of how this government continues to expand and build on our commitment to medicare for the people of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, this budget also invests in public education at both the post-secondary and the K to 12 level. We see a 3 per cent increase in operating grants for our universities. We see a 4.5 per cent increase in operating grants for K to 12 education in the province. And we see a very significant commitment to new capital spending on public education facilities.

And in my riding, Mr. Speaker, the investment that we're

making in the College Building, the restoration of the College Building on the University of Saskatchewan campus and on the Research Annex, will be very much welcomed by people in Saskatoon Greystone riding, Mr. Speaker.

This budget invests in young people. And I just want to give one example of this, and this is new spending that we're committing to physical fitness opportunities in this province, and for ensuring that Aboriginal youth are able to fully participate, Mr. Speaker, in both cultural and recreational activities in the province of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, the New Democratic Party and our government, the NDP government, has a long commitment to social investment in our province. In addition to our investment in health and education, we're also making some significant investments that I'm very excited about through the new Department of Community Resources and Employment which used to be the Department of Social Services, Mr. Speaker. And I want to just highlight four or five key budget measures in this area that I'm particularly pleased with.

One of course, Mr. Speaker, is that we continue to support the Saskatchewan employment supplement, an important income supplement for working families with children. And, Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to say that this year at least 7,900 families will benefit from that income supplement, Mr. Speaker. That's a measure that you can see in very, very few parts of North America. This is quite a unique program in a North American and Canadian context, Mr. Speaker.

I also want to point out, Mr. Speaker, that we are also demonstrating our commitment to children by our investment in child care, and specifically 500 new child care spaces this year. And also, Mr. Speaker, one measure that I'm very pleased with and that is a \$20-a-month increase per child for each child in subsidized day care in the province of Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker. And that is a very positive measure indeed.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Prebble: — In total, Mr. Speaker, our provincial government has taken the additional \$800,000 from Ottawa that has been committed for child care — which we very much appreciate — and we've added to it an additional provincial investment of \$2.2 million, Mr. Speaker. And that's what's making the expansion that I just talked about possible.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Prebble: — Well, Mr. Speaker, I wonder what members of the opposition would do with their freeze in social spending on child care in this province, Mr. Speaker? And I dare say we'd have seen no increase in the child care budget if we had the Saskatchewan Party behind the wheels of government in this province, Mr. Speaker.

(16:45)

I want to make reference to the investment that we are making in terms of support for those with disabilities in this province, Mr. Speaker, because we see in this budget an additional \$6 million across various departments in government to support

those with disabilities in our province. And in fact many organizations that represent the disabled in this province have commended the government for this budget initiative, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Prebble: — And I'm pleased to say that that includes \$1.85 million to assist those with disabilities to more effectively enter the workplace and overcome barriers to workplace employment. And it includes an addition \$1 million for those on social assistance who have disabilities so that their annual allowance will go up by \$120, Mr. Speaker — \$10 a month. And I'm very pleased to see that initiative as well, for which I want to thank the minister of Social Services.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Prebble: — Now, Mr. Speaker, I want to say a word about what this budget addresses in terms of the environment, and I also want to make a few suggestions about future environmental initiatives that our government should consider.

But let me say first, Mr. Speaker, that this budget — the year 2002, and now the new budget for 2003 and the early part of 2004 — really marks a major step forward in terms of environmental protection and a green agenda for the province of Saskatchewan. And you can see this in so many areas, Mr. Speaker.

I look at the \$1 million of additional money for instance that's going into properly inventorying our forest resource, Mr. Speaker, so that we can practise sustainable forestry management in northern Saskatchewan.

I look at the \$1.6 million that we're investing in environmental cleanup across the province, Mr. Speaker. And in addition to that, another \$600,000 of extra money that's earmarked for the cleanup of uranium mine tailings at the Gunnar and Lorado uranium mine sites in northern Saskatchewan.

I look at our investment in ethanol development, Mr. Speaker, which as you know is very major and involves of course a partnership with private sector companies, but that will put Saskatchewan at the forefront of ethanol development in Canada.

I look at our investment in the Office of Energy Conservation, newly established with a budget this year of \$490,000, Mr. Speaker. An office that will provide valuable resources and advice to the people of Saskatchewan on how they can upgrade the energy efficiency of their businesses and homes.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Prebble: — Mr. Speaker, I look at the support that's in this budget for municipal government to help them to move forward with green projects, Mr. Speaker, with staff resources to help them in applying for both national and provincial monies that are available to pursue a green agenda at the local level.

Mr. Speaker, I look at the expansion that SaskPower is undertaking in terms of providing assistance to schools and

hospitals and community facilities to upgrade their energy efficiency on both . . . both in terms of electricity and natural gas.

And I look at the changes that are happening, Mr. Speaker, within SaskPower, which I think are exceedingly exciting, as SaskPower, Mr. Speaker, moves away from thinking about more coal, moves away from the agenda that has been set by the Sask Party of a nuclear reactor in the province, and focuses instead, Mr. Speaker, on new cogeneration facilities.

And on wind power facilities, we've seen the first two wind power stations, Mr. Speaker, in Saskatchewan history open at Gull Lake last year. And you know what, Mr. Speaker? This year we're going to be looking at a ninefold increase over what we did last year — over the next three years, a ninefold increase in wind power in the province of Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Prebble: — And in addition to that, Mr. Speaker, we're looking at a Saskatchewan Power Corporation that is saying to independent power producers around this province, we welcome proposals for environmentally friendly electricity generation — whether it would be wind power or biomass development, Mr. Speaker, or an array of other green energy products, Mr. Speaker — and we're willing to buy that power from independent power producers and integrate that power into our grid system, Mr. Speaker. This is all very welcome news, Mr. Speaker.

And I think, Mr. Speaker, it demonstrates that this government is on a green path that young people around this province will be truly excited about, Mr. Speaker, and that all residents of this province will support.

Mr. Speaker, I want to take five minutes to look at some of the other initiatives around environment that I hope our government will consider in subsequent budgets. I've talked about the green agenda that we're moving forward on, as spelled out in this budget. And I'm looking for four additional measures, Mr. Speaker, that I hope we'll consider and that this legislature will consider in the next couple of years, Mr. Speaker.

And one of the priorities that I want to suggest revolves around the Great Sand Hills. And in our current budget, Mr. Speaker, we have dollars for a review of land use in the Great Sand Hills, which I see as one of the great resources of this province, Mr. Speaker. There are 20 species in the Great Sand Hills, animal and plant species that are endangered or threatened and that are unique — many of them unique in Canada; all of them unique in a Saskatchewan context, Mr. Speaker.

And I believe the time has come, Mr. Speaker, to not only look for leadership for the protection of the Great Sand Hills at the local level — we've been getting excellent leadership from the planning commission there and the three municipalities, three rural municipalities that are part of it, Mr. Speaker — but now it's time for leadership at the provincial level.

And I hope that the province in the months ahead, Mr. Speaker, will establish a special provincial designation for ecologically fragile lands in the Great Sand Hills that will allow ranching on

these lands; in other words, will allow the grazing of cattle but will not allow natural gas or oil development or road development or other forms of commercial development on this land, Mr. Speaker. So that we have provincial protection as well as local protection, Mr. Speaker.

I also, Mr. Speaker, hope that our government in the months ahead will set an objective with respect to recycling in this province — a very ambitious objective. In this budget, Mr. Speaker, we see a \$525,000 budget increase for the work of SARCAN in the province of Saskatchewan, about which I'm very pleased, Mr. Speaker.

Now, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker, I believe the time has come for the province to set a target of recycling 50 per cent of all our waste products in the province of Saskatchewan. And we could take the budget allocation that currently goes to SARCAN and we could allow, Mr. Speaker, SARCAN to keep the money that it makes from recycling aluminum cans and invest that in a much more comprehensive recycling program right across the province of Saskatchewan that could create hundreds of new jobs in this province, Mr. Speaker.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, an investment, a target of 50 per cent waste recycling needs to include a commitment by our government to curbside recycling, Mr. Speaker. And in the budget for 2004-2005, I'll be urging the Minister of the Environment to move forward with such a commitment.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I want to touch on two other environmental matters and then make a few concluding comments about the budget.

But in this budget, Mr. Speaker, we see support for our organic farmers in this province. I'm proud to say we now have 1,000 organic farmers in the province of Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker. And we have a staff representative in place in the Department of Agriculture and Food to support their work.

And, Mr. Speaker, I think we need to go further. It's time now to establish an office of organic agriculture and organic gardening in the province of Saskatchewan to help urban gardeners and our farmers move towards a more expansive organic initiative, Mr. Speaker. And I would like to see hundreds of research plots across this province, Mr. Speaker, that support the work of local organic producers and invest in their work, Mr. Speaker.

And I'd like to see, Mr. Speaker, a move by our provincial government to phase out the use of . . . the cosmetic uses of pesticides in this province; in other words, uses of pesticides that are non-essential to food production, Mr. Speaker. And this is particularly feasible in our urban centres. We now see 30 municipalities across Canada, Mr. Speaker, that have put a ban on the cosmetic use of pesticides and I believe, Mr. Speaker, that the time has come for the province to consider such a ban as well. I support such a measure, Mr. Speaker, as the MLA for Saskatoon Greystone and I urge, Mr. Speaker, that we look at that as a provincial government.

And, Mr. Speaker, I hear the Sask Party opposite saying well, what about genetically modified products. And I want to say to members of the Sask Party that I believe it's time in the

province of Saskatchewan to look at a ban on genetically modified wheat in this province, Mr. Speaker. Why jeopardize, Mr. Speaker, our overseas markets for wheat export, Mr. Speaker? It's time, Mr. Speaker, to tell the Government of Canada that we don't want GM (genetically modified) wheat grown at their field stations, Mr. Speaker, as they're doing at Indian Head. And I support, Mr. Speaker, a ban on GM wheat in this province.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I want to say a few more words about the official opposition because they've been talking a lot, Mr. Speaker, about debt. And, Mr. Speaker, the hypocrisy of the Saskatchewan Party talking about debt in this Assembly is . . . It's just beyond belief, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Prebble: — The predecessors of the people who ran up a \$14 billion debt in this province, Mr. Speaker — many of the members of the Saskatchewan Party were advisers, Mr. Speaker, to the former Devine government, working actively in the public service or as ministerial assistants for the former Devine government, Mr. Speaker, when they ran up that \$14 billion debt.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, the Sask Party member for Moosomin was part of the Devine government, Mr. Speaker, that ran up that debt.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I just want to review the record, because this government has taken that \$14 billion debt and we've reduced it, Mr. Speaker. We've reduced it year after year after year.

And, Mr. Speaker, every year we have to deal with an interest payment legacy on that debt left behind by the predecessors of the Saskatchewan Party. And that interest payment every year comes to \$650 million, Mr. Speaker.

So then you know what the Sask Party has the nerve to complain about, Mr. Speaker? They have the nerve to complain about the fact that the debt is going up this year because, Mr. Speaker, because our crop insurance premiums for the year, that the farm community paid in, was \$500 million and our payout to the farm community has been \$1 billion, Mr. Speaker. And they complain about that, Mr. Speaker.

And I say, Mr. Speaker, I'm proud of this government's record in debt management. I'm proud of this budget, Mr. Speaker, and I'll be supporting the budget.

And I'd like to adjourn debate. Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Debate adjourned.

The Assembly adjourned at 17:00.

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