

The Assembly met at 10:00.

Prayers

## ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

### PRESENTING PETITIONS

**Mr. Elhard:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the issue of the renewal of Crown grazing leases in the southwest part of the province, particularly in the constituency of Cypress Hills, is gaining momentum; it's not actually dying away as the government might like. So I've been asked to present this petition again on behalf of producers there. And the prayer reads as follows:

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.

Mr. Speaker, this petition has been signed by people from the communities of Shaunavon, Tompkins, Cabri, and Lancer, as well as Abbey.

I so present.

**Mr. Stewart:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to present a petition signed with ... by citizens concerned with the dangerous and deplorable condition of Highway No. 42. 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 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.

Mr. Speaker, this petition is signed by individuals from the communities of Central Butte, Tugaske, Eyebrow, and Elbow.

**Ms. Eagles:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, again today I rise to present a petition on behalf of those people in my constituency who are very concerned over the state of Highway 47 South. 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 this is signed from folks in Estevan, rural Estevan, as well as Regina.

I so present. Thank you.

**Mr. Hart:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I rise to present a petition on behalf of the constituents who are concerned with the condition of Highway No. 22, particularly that section of the highway between Junction 6 and Junction 20. 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 the necessary repairs to Highway 22 in order to address safety and economic concerns.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

And signatures to this petition, Mr. Speaker, come from the community of Southey.

I so present.

**Mr. Allchurch:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again I rise in the Assembly to present a petition on behalf of citizens of Saskatchewan who are upset with the 2003 premium increases to crop insurance:

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

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

And the signatures on this petition, Mr. Speaker, are from Rabbit Lake, Glaslyn, and North Battleford.

I so present.

## READING AND RECEIVING PETITIONS

**Deputy Clerk:** — According to order the following petitions have been reviewed and are hereby read and received as addendums to previously tabled petitions being sessional papers nos. 12, 13, and 18.

## NOTICES OF MOTIONS AND QUESTIONS

**Mr. Hart:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I give notice that on day no. 19 I'll ask the government the following question:

In 2003-2004, how much of the provincial highways and transportation budget comes from federal programs; what are those federal programs; and how much will each federal program contribute?

And I have similar questions, Mr. Speaker, for the fiscal year '02-03 and '01-02, Mr. Speaker.

**Mr. Dearborn:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I give notice that I shall on day no. 19 ask the government the following question:

To the minister for the Public Service Commission: under

the existing process, how many cases of confirmed sexual harassment were found to have occurred in the fiscal year 1994-95; further, how many of these findings were passed on by the Public Service Commission to the Royal Canadian Mounted Police for possible criminal investigation?

Further, Mr. Speaker, I have similar questions for the years from '95-96, '96-97, '97-98, '98-99, '99-2000, 2000-2001, and 2001-2002, and 2002-2003.

I so present.

**Mr. Wiberg:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I give notice that I shall on day no. 19 ask the government the following question:

To the minister responsible for the Environment: for the fiscal year 1995-1996, how many ranchers in hunting zone no. 50 did your department construct fences for to protect feedstock; and for that same year, how many requests to construct these fences did your department receive?

Mr. Speaker, I have similar questions for every year hence, up to including the present year 2003-2004, with a slight modification.

I so present, Mr. Speaker.

#### STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

##### All Saints Anglican Church — 100th Anniversary

**Mr. Gantefoer:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, and members, 100 years ago, the All Saints Anglican Church held its first service in a schoolhouse at Flett Springs. The Canon, T. J. Clarke, their first minister, presided over a small congregation of 10 to 20 people. A short time later the congregation moved to their permanent home in Melfort where generations have found comfort and celebrated in their church.

Mr. Speaker, as many of us know, maintaining a church in a rural setting involves the hard work, dedication, and faith of the religious leaders and everyone in the congregation. It is a testament to this church's successful role in the Melfort area when, 100 years later, they have 200 families listed as members of their church. Canon T. J. Clarke's grandson, Tom Clarke and his family still live in Melfort and will be among the 300 people expected at the 100th anniversary celebration this weekend.

Mr. Speaker, and members, I was honoured to be invited to this celebration and I would like to bring the congratulations of the House with me when I attend this weekend. Please join me in expressing our hope that with the help of God, the All Saints Anglican Church will continue to perform an essential role in our community.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

##### Employment Statistics

**Mr. Yates:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today is jobs Friday,

Mr. Speaker. Those experts of statistical objectivity have released their monthly report and that means just one thing, Mr. Speaker, more good news for Saskatchewan.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Yates:** — Mr. Speaker, for the 11th straight month, jobs are up. For the 11th straight month, we have more concrete evidence that the plan we have been working on . . . and that our future is wide open for the people of Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, a slogan did not create these jobs.

During March of this year, 477,100 Saskatchewan people were employed. That's 1,600 more than in February. And get this, Mr. Speaker, 11,400 more people were working this March compared to March one year ago.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Yates:** — Mr. Speaker, our unemployment rate for March was 5.9 per cent, a decrease from February. The national rate was 7.9 per cent, Mr. Speaker.

Here's another fact or two, Mr. Speaker. Agricultural employment in March was up by 500 from February.

And get this — employment for people between the ages of 15 and 24 increased by nearly five and one-half thousand from March a year ago. The Saskatchewan Party tells us that that these kids can't find work here, Mr. Speaker. The Sask Party is wrong.

For those who believe in this province and believe in it, this is very good news. For those others, Mr. Speaker, we feel sorry for them.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

##### National Wildlife Week

**Mr. Weekes:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, Sunday, April 6 marks the beginning of National Wildlife Week. The week is in honour of Jack Miner, one of the founders of Canada's conservation movement.

This Act was proclaimed by the parliament back in 1947 and it gives Canadians the opportunity to give extra focus on conservation. This year's Canadian theme is Native Species, Nature's Choice.

The Canadian Wildlife Federation states that timeline . . . that the theme highlights the growing concerns about the devastating impact of alien species on Canada's wildlife and the environment. Mr. Speaker, the Canadian Wildlife Federation reports that these species wreck havoc on biodiversity and ecosystems.

Mr. Speaker, we must recognize the importance of maintaining a healthy and safe environment, and that we must do all that we can to ensure responsible stewardship.

Mr. Speaker, it is our hope that everyone take some time during National Wildlife Week to reflect upon the importance of our

environment.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

### Saskatchewan's Economy

**Hon. Mr. Wartman:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, this government is building for the future. Through investment in business and research and reductions in business taxes, we have fostered a prosperous and competitive economy and we plan to build on that momentum.

Mr. Speaker, there is good economic news flowing from all corners of this province and our current initiatives of reducing personal income taxes, corporate capital taxes, and small business taxes, and our investments in such areas as green technologies, mineral exploration, health, education, community resources, tourism, and forestry will ensure that this good news continues to flow.

Mr. Speaker, that Saskatchewan has a prosperous and competitive economy and will continue to have a prosperous and competitive economy is good news for everyone in this province — except it seems for the Sask Party because, Mr. Speaker, the Sask Party sees good economic news for this province as bad political news for them.

Mr. Speaker, the Sask Party's entire agenda consists of predicting doom and gloom for this province and then hoping their predictions come true. Pathetic, but there you have it. On the other hand, Mr. Speaker, this NDP (New Democratic Party) government has a plan and clearly that plan is working.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

### Watrous Winterhawks Win Senior Hockey Title

**Mr. Brkich:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm glad to rise in the Assembly today to talk about another winning team from Watrous. Quite recently the Watrous Winterhawks won the 2003 SAHA (Saskatchewan Amateur Hockey Association) Senior "B" provincial title by defeating the team from Leroy in a two game sweep of the best of three series.

Team manager Dennis Fry said that the team is very pleased with the recent victory and have had a good season this past winter. Mr. Fry indicated that the team posts a regular season record of 17 wins, 5 losses, 2 ties, including that four of the five losses were the Leroy team. This made the provincial victory over the Leroy team just that much sweeter for the Watrous Winterhawks.

Mr. Fry, who became team manager in 1995 and also team president in 1999, has enjoyed working with the team and their head coach, Craig Miettinen, who joined the team as assistant coach in 1994 and has been head coach since 1999.

This is now the third provincial title that the Winterhawks have won in recent years. Mr. Fry went on to say that this team is a

balanced squad consisting of men between the ages of 18 and 35. Indeed there are six players who have been on this Watrous team for all three provincial title victories.

The team's scorers included Lindsay Hoerd, Craig Collins, Graham Potts, and Jeff Gorman. Mr. Fry said that he expects the team to stay together for the 2003-2004 hockey campaign.

I would ask that all members of the Assembly join me in congratulating the Watrous Winterhawks in the provincial title.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

### Growth in Yorkton and Region

**Hon. Mr. Serby:** — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You remember the old Dixieland song, "Hold That Tiger?" Well, Mr. Speaker, on this day, more good news on job front; good news about the budget, Mr. Speaker, as well.

On this day when members who believe that the Saskatchewan have the opportunity to vote, have the opportunity to vote in favour of the budget, I am happy to tell colleagues that in my city of Yorkton we have been proclaimed, the tiger of the East, Mr. Speaker.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Hon. Mr. Serby:** — Mr. Paul Martin of the Saskatchewan Party recently . . . or of Saskatchewan said this, and I quote, that:

Yorkton and the east central region of this province (has seen some of the greatest growth that we've seen in the province. In the past eight months we're) . . . creating jobs at an unusually high rate (and) . . . It (has) outpaced . . . other parts of Saskatchewan [in 2002] with an increase of (over) just under 6 per cent in (other parts) . . .

But in Yorkton, Mr. Speaker, and that region, now over 13 per cent, Mr. Speaker. Not 6.8 but 13 per cent, Mr. Speaker. And, Mr. Speaker, when we note the trusted objective commentator of Mr. Martin points out that it's outstripped any growth in the province, Mr. Speaker.

(10:15)

Yorkton has expanded its industries like Harvest Meats and Pastry World, Mr. Speaker, and Popowich Milling which we've all invested in as government. And we have partnered with Painted Hand Casino — 208 jobs, and 57 per cent of First Nations people employed there, Mr. Speaker — and 75 people working at SecurTek, Mr. Speaker, and it goes on and on.

And the tiger, Mr. Speaker, has just begun. Mr. Speaker, to demonstrate its economic strength in Saskatchewan. And I want to say in spite of the doom and gloom of the Saskatchewan Party, Mr. Speaker, the tiger of the East is on the move, Mr. Speaker.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

### Macklin Pee Wee Girls Provincial Champions

**Mr. Lorenz:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the Macklin pee wee girls are provincial champions. The pee wee girls beat out the Fort Qu'Appelle Foxes in a two game, total point of 5 to 4 to be the provincial finalists.

The girls also won their league championships in the East Central Alberta female hockey league by beating the Hardisty Long Horns in the final game 1 to 0.

Congratulations to the girls. Help me congratulate these girls. Thank you.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

### Funding for Saskatchewan Communities

**Mr. Forbes:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, to help fulfill this government's commitment to building for the future, and in keeping with our tradition of managing our province's finances responsibly while investing to meet the needs of Saskatchewan people, we are injecting more than \$10 million in new funding as part of a total \$115 million commitment to support our vision of strong and vibrant Saskatchewan communities.

Mr. Speaker, our strong economy enables us to assist in renewing water and sewer systems, repairing roads, and improving urban parks. Our strong economy enables us to allocate \$75 million in revenue sharing to Saskatchewan municipalities. Mr. Speaker, our strong economy enables us to allocate \$10 million for year three of the Canada-Saskatchewan Infrastructure Program. Our strong economy enables us to subsidize transit assistance for the disabled to the tune of \$2.3 million and provide \$1 million to purchase 17 additional vehicles for people with disabilities. And, Mr. Speaker, our strong economy enables us to provide funding to hire 10 additional police officers to support integrated, community-based approaches to reduce crime.

Mr. Speaker, this government has a plan that includes fostering strong, safe, and healthy communities. And, Mr. Speaker, that plan is working.

Thank you.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

## ORAL QUESTIONS

### Government Reaction to Harassment Allegations

**Ms. Julé:** — Mr. Speaker, the people of Saskatchewan are still incensed and outraged about how the NDP government handled the Murdoch Carriere sexual harassment case, and in particular they are wondering about the NDP's initial decision not to fire a sexual harasser and instead make him a special adviser to the government.

In particular, the people of Saskatchewan want to know who was responsible for that decision. Was it the deputy minister alone? Did he consult with the minister? Did he consult with the

Premier's office? Mr. Speaker, is it the government's position that Terry Scott made this decision entirely on his own?

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Hon. Ms. Crofford:** — Mr. Speaker, I will again reiterate that I made a commitment to review the decision. I reviewed all the background materials, I made the decision, and I would hope that the opposition supports that decision.

Now what I will say further is that I did inquire into what advice was given regarding the decision. And it was done in the usual way the process dictates. There would have been legal advice, there would have been labour relations advice, and there would have been the normal supports that there are for managers who make decisions in government. I can assure you 100 per cent, Mr. Speaker, in this House, on the record, that no minister interfered.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Ms. Julé:** — Mr. Speaker, if Terry Scott ultimately made this decision on his own, then he either didn't understand the government's zero tolerance policy or he didn't follow the government's zero tolerance policy. And, Mr. Speaker, if he didn't follow it, then the government has a big problem with the deputy minister. If he didn't understand the policy, then the NDP has done an extremely poor job of communicating this policy.

Mr. Speaker, which one is it? Did Terry Scott not understand the zero tolerance policy? Did he not follow the zero tolerance policy? Or is there some other reason that the government initially decided to protect the job of a sexual harasser?

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Hon. Ms. Crofford:** — Mr. Speaker, I think in making the decision we did, we clearly took responsibility that the process needs to be improved and I've asked for a report at the end of April regarding those matters that clearly need improving.

But I will say that zero tolerance, in the way that people understand it who work in this field, is that it means you act immediately. And this was done. When this came to light, when the complaints were made, the employee in question was removed from the workplace, immediately — not five days later, Mr. Speaker, but immediately. That meets the first standard of zero tolerance.

The second question is a question of whether the punishment fits the situation, and that is the question, Mr. Speaker, on which I made a different determination. And we will have a report at the end of this month and that will be public. Thank you.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Ms. Julé:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, this government has never told its deputy ministers what this zero tolerance policy really means. As a result, they have created a culture where people look the other way when sexual harassment occurs. That is clear, Mr. Speaker, when you read

the investigator's report about Murdoch Carriere.

One of his victims, one of his victims reports that she had approached two of her superiors about Mr. Carriere's actions. One of them told her, I don't want to hear it. Another one told her, he wouldn't do that.

Mr. Speaker, clearly this zero tolerance policy is not being applied and immediate action was not taken, when persons in positions of authority are refusing to deal with sexual harassment complaints and not advising employees of their rights.

Mr. Speaker, this government as an employer has a duty to ensure a harassment-free workplace for all employees. Why are some people in your government looking the other way when harassment allegations are raised?

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Hon. Ms. Crofford:** — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. First of all I would point out for anybody who cares to examine The Occupational Health and Safety Act, Freedom of Information, and The Public Service Act that that member had freedoms I don't have to reveal that information. So if she was so concerned about this information, Mr. Speaker, why didn't she bring it to someone's attention?

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Ms. Julé:** — Madam Minister . . . or Mr. Speaker, it's easy to see why a deputy minister might not understand the government's so-called zero tolerance policy when the NDP seems incapable of explaining it themselves. Mr. Speaker, what specific direction has this government given to its deputy ministers and Crown corporation heads on how to apply this policy? We want to know that and so do the people of Saskatchewan.

Can the minister please table any memos or directives . . .

**The Speaker:** — Order, please. Order, please. I would ask the members to allow the question to be put.

**Ms. Julé:** — Mr. Speaker, can the minister please table any memos or directives that were ever sent to department heads on how the zero tolerance policy is to be applied in the case of sexual harassment?

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Hon. Ms. Crofford:** — Mr. Speaker, every manager in government is aware of this policy. As well, it is posted on the Public Service Commission policy and procedures manual for managers and employees. It is a matter of . . . it's embedded in the collective bargaining agreement with the SGEU (Saskatchewan Government and General Employees' Union).

I do take exception, Mr. Speaker, for her implying that everybody's running around abusing everyone. This is a huge accusation to make that everyone's guilty until proven innocent. You implied that managers do not understand this, was the direct implication, Mr. Speaker. And you know, I have to say

that there are people to advise people if they're not sure how that's applied.

But you know, Mr. Speaker, every workplace in the province is required to have a harassment policy. I am today tabling the harassment policy of our NDP caucus. And I want to know, does that caucus give any direction to their employees to protect them from sexual harassment?

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

### Financial Support for College of Medicine

**Mr. Gantefoer:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Health.

Late last year we learned that the College of Medicine at the University of Saskatchewan is in danger of losing its accreditation with the Association of Canadian Medical Colleges. The college has been placed on probation and given two years to make improvements to its staffing levels, its library, and its curriculum.

Mr. Speaker, the situation is very, very serious. Yet despite knowledge of the situation and his own personal commitment to help the college meet the accreditation requirements, the Finance minister left the college high and dry in this year's provincial budget.

Mr. Speaker, how is the university, and specifically the college, to plan for improvements to meet the accreditation standards when they have no budgetary commitment from this NDP government?

**Hon. Ms. Junor:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We continue to support a strong and viable College of Medicine at the U of S (University of Saskatchewan), for the U of S and for the province.

We are working together with our partners in Health and in our departments to address the issues that the accreditation report identified. Some of the issues are being addressed within the college as we speak. Some of the recommendations . . . The recommendations came to us from the Academic Health Sciences Network. Those recommendations came before the . . . or too late for the budget process to include them in the budget determinations. But we do have a commitment to the college that we will provide financial assistance to them as necessary later on in the year.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Gantefoer:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When the college was notified that it was in danger of losing its accreditation, alarm bells sounded across the province and people started looking at the NDP government's commitment to supporting our medical college.

In fact, one of the NDP's own cabinet minister, the former minister of Learning and now the new Finance minister, told CBC (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation) Radio that indeed the college has been underfunded for years. Yet despite this belief, he continues the same tradition.

Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan is facing an uphill battle when it comes to attracting health care professionals to our province. Training and retaining doctors here in Saskatchewan should be a priority for this government. Yet they've given up on their responsibility to the point that our only medical college is now at risk.

Mr. Speaker, why was this not considered important enough to be a budgetary item for this government, given the light of the information that the Health minister has said in the past?

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Hon. Ms. Junor:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I said before, the recommendations that came to us from the Academic Health Sciences Network were . . . came too late for the budgetary process. We are reviewing those recommendations now and anticipate being able to assist the college in meeting its requirements with announcements as early as this spring.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Gantfoer:** — This government must be asleep because everybody in the province except this NDP government understands the critical importance of the College of Medicine.

And the Finance minister, when he was Learning minister, acknowledged that the college was underfunded for years. And yet this government stands here and says, we didn't know anything about this in time for this budget. The Finance minister, last fall, acknowledged that this was a critical issue.

The report says and the dean of the College of Medicine indicated that it may need as much as \$10 million to rectify the issues confronting the College of Medicine. And the Finance minister says, no big deal; we can kind of handle that on a special warrant basis as time goes by.

Mr. Speaker, this is not the planning for the future of health care service delivery in the province. This is sitting here and fiddling while Rome is burning.

(10:30)

Mr. Speaker, will the minister commit to the necessary funds to get the College of Medicine's accreditation handled?

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Hon. Ms. Junor:** — Mr. Speaker, for the third time, the recommendations that came to us from the Academic Health Sciences Network, in response to the accreditation report, came to us too late in the budgetary cycle to put money in without reviewing those recommendations.

They are being reviewed now, and we will be working with our partners to resolve . . .

**The Speaker:** — Order, please. Order, please. I want to be . . . make sure that the response is able to be heard.

**Hon. Ms. Junor:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The recommendations are being reviewed, and we will be making

some announcements as early as this spring. It's interesting that the member stands on his feet and asks for more money from us, where his commitments in the last . . . their last platform were zero funding for health.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Gantfoer:** — Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker, the member says where is the money going to come from the College of Medicine. Mr. Speaker, if this government doesn't make the appropriate commitments to the College of Medicine they're going to be presiding over the loss of the only college of medicine in our province.

If that's what they intend to do, just stand up in this House and say we don't need the College of Medicine. Tell them you don't value the College of Medicine. Tell them that . . . the people of this province that you had no way of understanding . . .

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

**Mr. Gantfoer:** — Mr. Speaker, let that government tell the people of this province that this comes as a complete surprise to those members. Mr. Speaker, the Finance minister's a graduate from that college. Is he going to preside over the loss of the College of Medicine in Saskatchewan?

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Hon. Mr. Nilson:** — Mr. Speaker, we have a long record of working very closely with our partners in supporting those institutions which support our health system.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Hon. Mr. Nilson:** — The College of Medicine is the core of many of the services that we provide in our province and we are working very closely with them. And we will make sure that that college is here for the long term because that's a key part of our action plan for Saskatchewan health.

Mr. Speaker, the members opposite talk about themselves as a grassroots party. Well, Mr. Speaker, I think we should be actually calling them an Astroturf party — no roots, no policy, and no plan.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

### Mega Bingo

**Ms. Bakken:** — Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my question is for the minister of Liquor and Gaming. How much did the NDP government spend installing link bingo, also known as mega bingo, in bingo halls across Saskatchewan and what were the results of this program?

**Hon. Mr. Osika:** — Mr. Speaker, I welcome the question from the member. I regret I don't have the specific responses but I will get them for you. You could have contacted my office at any time. I'd be pleased to share that with you.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Ms. Bakken:** — Mr. Speaker, well I will inform the minister that the NDP spent 6 million in taxpayers' dollars in its failed mega bingo expenditure that ran for just over one year. Mr. Speaker, here's what an SLGA (Saskatchewan Liquor and Gaming Authority) official had to say about the \$6 million failure and I quote:

... there was a fair amount of thought at the time ... that the game ... would attract ... new players, revitalize the industry, and ... those new players and those new dollars would pay for the system.

The unfortunate part of the process ...

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

**Ms. Bakken:** —

The unfortunate part of the process was ... those new players ... never really materialized.

Mr. Speaker, those new players never did materialize so the game was shut down and the province lost \$6 million. Mr. Speaker, what sort of due diligence did the NDP do before it spent \$6 million on this failed mega bingo scheme?

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Hon. Mr. Osika:** — Well, Mr. Speaker, I guess members opposite feel that they live in a perfect world. We attempt to work with local groups, local communities on any endeavours that will try to enhance our charities and people in communities that want to get into any kind of entertainment. And, Mr. Speaker, as a result of what happened there, we chose to not proceed. It was an attempt we made to work with communities.

But you know, Mr. Speaker, it's curious that members opposite are asking these kinds of ...

**The Speaker:** — Order, please. Order, please, members. Order. Order. We seem to have about half a dozen debates taking part at one time, but I at this stage yield the floor to the minister responsible for Liquor and Gaming.

**Hon. Mr. Osika:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are many charitable organizations that rely on games such as bingo to support their efforts for their community. Mr. Speaker, I think those kind of questions should be asked at the Crown Corporations Committee meetings to get all the specific details. This just proves what was reported in the *Leader-Post*, and I quote:

"What the Sask. Party has shown is that it doesn't appear capable of governing," Schmidt said, adding that Sask. Party MLAs don't have enough experience or education and are too easily taken in by "simplistic right-wing dogma."

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Ms. Bakken:** — Six point two million dollars to link bingo halls across the province because according to Saskatchewan Liquor and Gaming officials:

The game was commenced because of the industry demand. They wanted a province-wide game ...

Then according to the same Saskatchewan Liquor and Gaming officials:

... after approximately one year ... the bingo hall operators told us they didn't want it any more; they wanted to develop something else.

Mr. Speaker, will the minister table any market research or any other due diligence the NDP did before they blew \$6 million?

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**The Speaker:** — Order. Order.

**Hon. Mr. Osika:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The members there obviously paid attention to what was said and are behaving accordingly.

Mr. Speaker, there are numerous charities that rely on our efforts. And we do, we make every effort to try and assist those people.

That game ran from February 2000 to June 2001, and it was suspended at the recommendation of the bingo industry's advisory committee, Mr. Speaker. The mega bingo was developed to attract new players to a bingo market to generate, to generate additional revenues for charities right across this great province of ours, Mr. Speaker. It's not an industry; it's a support mechanism for charitable organizations in this province, Mr. Speaker.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Ms. Bakken:** — Six point two million dollars — this is more than all the new money budgeted for urban municipal governments in this year's budget. After months of the mayors in this province, after months of the mayors in this province making their case to government that they need more funding from the provincial government, what was this government's response? They gave municipal governments, urban municipal governments, under \$5 million.

Yet this minister, the same minister that is responsible for municipal government, spends \$6.2 million on a failed bingo venture without any due diligence because bingo operators asked for it.

Mr. Speaker, how can this minister justify this expenditure?

**Hon. Mr. Osika:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We remain committed to working with people to try and support charitable communities right across this province, Mr. Speaker.

And if that member is accusing this government of not supporting municipalities, Mr. Speaker, let me point out that ... let me just point out that we recognized their infrastructure needs. In 2002-2003 we increased ... 10 million last year; we increased it by \$10 million again this year. The 2003-2004 budget provides again a revenue sharing with municipalities, Mr. Speaker.

And I would like to read a letter from one of those municipal leaders. And I commend all the municipal leaders that work so hard on behalf of their communities and the people they represent, as this government does. And let me just quote, and this is from the mayor of Moose Jaw, Mr. Speaker. I want to read this into the record:

I am pleased to advise that the City of Moose Jaw may very well be able to hold our mill rate again for the 2nd consecutive year.

We look forward to working with you as we (continue to) develop a positive working relationship . . .

Thank you.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Ms. Bakken:** — Mr. Speaker, the NDP . . .

**The Speaker:** — Order, please. Order, please. I recognized only one person.

**Ms. Bakken:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the NDP thinks \$6 million is nothing. They decided they were going to spend this on a new gambling product, a product which went bust in one year.

Mr. Speaker, who gave approval for this \$6 million expenditure? Did the minister approve of this \$6 million that was spent on mega bingo in Saskatchewan?

**Hon. Mr. Osika:** — Mr. Speaker, the industry, the industry — and that's what it is — has formed a strategic planning committee to put together a strategy to revitalize the bingo industry in the province, Mr. Speaker.

And let me just explain — and this could be all asked in Crown Corporations Committee, but I'm pleased to answer here — that it cost approximately \$1.2 million to develop the game. As well, SLGA (Saskatchewan Liquor and Gaming Authority) invested approximately \$5 million in equipment which included cost of installation, secure lines in the province's bingo halls. With the suspension of the games, SLGA wrote off approximately two and a half million dollars of these costs in its 2001-2002 financial statements. So not all the \$5 million of equipment that was spent was lost, Mr. Speaker.

Once again, this is an effort by this coalition government to assist charitable organizations, something that they, the members opposite, obviously do not support.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Ms. Bakken:** — Mr. Speaker, \$6.2 million maybe doesn't sound like a lot of money to this government who loses \$28 million and calls it a success story. It is a lot of money to the people of this province. It would go a long way to addiction services. It would go a long way toward building schools and hospitals. It would go a long way to spending money on seniors in this province. It would go a long way to building a health facility in Saskatoon at the university to educate doctors.

Mr. Speaker, there are a lot of ways this money could have been spent, and this government just laughs about it — \$6.2 million — it doesn't matter to this government. Mr. Speaker, where is this government's priorities and did the minister approve of this expenditure?

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Hon. Mr. Osika:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There is a reaffirmation and a confirmation that those members would not support charitable organizations in this province. That's obvious.

Mr. Speaker, I'm very, very curious. I wish, I wish that some entity in this province, in this country, had the money that those people deem to have in order to spend on all the demands that are placed on the taxpayers of this province. The holier-than-thou attitude, the sanctimonious attitude, Mr. Speaker, when we add up all the expenditures that they are promising, is phenomenal and totally unbelievable, Mr. Speaker.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**The Speaker:** — Order, please.

(10:45)

## ORDERS OF THE DAY

### WRITTEN QUESTIONS

**Mr. Yates:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We'll convert this for debates returnable.

**The Speaker:** — Question 37 has been converted.

### 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.

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

**Mr. Wiberg:** — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It has been a pleasure to be able to say a few comments in regards to the budget, the 2003-2004 budget brought forward by the member from Saskatoon Northwest.

Mr. Speaker, it appears as though . . . that the government of the day is certainly quite interested in my remarks and are enthusiastically joining me in this debate. And we certainly on this side of the House appreciate their enthusiasm for listening to our comments and making sure they understand clearly some of the concerns that we have in regards to the 2003-2004



budget.

Mr. Speaker, yesterday I ended the day by talking and making a few comments on how the budget might affect the people from northern Saskatchewan, the community leaders in northern Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker — certainly those municipalities in northern Saskatchewan who were certainly looking forward to some promises being fulfilled that this government has been promising since 1991 and even earlier, Mr. Speaker, in regards to infrastructure, in regards to education and to health.

And again I was able to point out by going through the budget and pointing out to the government, Mr. Speaker, that there were some significant shortfalls, some significant shortfalls, Mr. Speaker, in this budget when it comes to improving the lot of life for the people of northern Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, there was one comment that I didn't get a chance to finish up on yesterday . . .

**The Speaker:** — Order please, members. Order, members. Order, please. Order, please. I would ask members just to contain their conversations across the floor.

**Mr. Wiberg:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And again I want to thank the government for being so . . . participating so enthusiastically in my response to the budget speech.

Mr. Speaker, the one area that I was unable to finish up on yesterday before time was called on the clock was the area of infrastructure and how it relates to economic development in this province and specifically, Mr. Speaker, how it relates to the people of northern Saskatchewan.

I know the government in their own way is talking about . . . And I want to reiterate they talk and talk and talk about how they're trying to help the people of Saskatchewan. And of course the biggest thing they can do to help the people of Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, is to call an election on Monday — call an election on Monday — and that's how they can help the people of Saskatchewan, so that the Saskatchewan Party can get elected to ensure that the promises the NDP have made can be carried out by the Saskatchewan Party.

Mr. Speaker, in the area of infrastructure for northern Saskatchewan, specifically as it relates to economic development, it is important for the people of Saskatchewan to understand that not only do the people of northern Saskatchewan need access to the South, but southern Saskatchewan needs access to the North. Mr. Speaker, I want to talk about two areas specifically that relate exactly to this subject.

Mr. Speaker, on the east side of the province there's a highway that runs right from the United States border up through Prince Albert, La Ronge, and further north. As you get north of La Ronge, Mr. Speaker, the highway starts to diminish in its ability to carry. . . for capacity.

And what has the NDP government done over the past several years about this, Mr. Speaker? Well, Mr. Speaker, they've made promises. They've talked to people. They've gone into the North. They've met with community leaders. They've talked

about having a study. We'll study this issue. We'll hold some more meetings. And what has been the result of that, Mr. Speaker? Well in this budget the result of that has been they would like to hold more meetings and have a study. Well the studies have been done, Mr. Speaker. They're sitting on a shelf in some minister's office, collecting dust.

The result of that, Mr. Speaker, the result of those studies is that they believe, the people of northern Saskatchewan believe, Mr. Speaker, that northern Saskatchewan needs to be opened up for development. The people of northern Saskatchewan believe that northern Saskatchewan needs to be opened up for development, Mr. Speaker. And they are telling us, the Saskatchewan Party, representatives from the Saskatchewan Party — whether it's the member from Rosetown-Biggar, they've told the member from Wood River, they've told the former member from Carrot River, they've told the member from Shellbrook-Spiritwood, they've told the member from Thunder Creek — we want assurances that we . . . of no more talk.

If there's going to be a Saskatchewan Party government, Mr. Speaker, they want to know that the North is going to be opened up so that they can participate in the economy of Saskatchewan and not be held back by the regressive policies of that NDP government any more. That's what the people of northern Saskatchewan are waiting for.

So the Highway No. 2, it's a very good highway, Mr. Speaker, up to La Ronge. It proceeds in very good condition for about another 10 kilometres further north to the La Ronge airport, Mr. Speaker, but after that, Mr. Speaker, it becomes a gravel highway. It's in fairly good condition but . . . up to Otter Rapids, up to the Churchill River, and after that, Mr. Speaker, the road progressively begins to rescind into . . . By the time that it gets to Stony Rapids it is nothing more than a tote road.

I noticed in the budget, in some of the . . . in the budget, Mr. Speaker, the plans by this government for that road north of Lac La Ronge. Are they going to make major improvements to that road so that there will be access for economic development up as far as Stony Rapids, Mr. Speaker? There was absolutely nothing in that budget, in this present 2003-2004 budget, Mr. Speaker, that alludes to the fact that this road needs to be developed to a primary highway status to improve the economic conditions of the people of northern Saskatchewan.

All they're talking about in the budget, Mr. Speaker . . . And I read the report; the member from Cumberland House has read that report. He knows full well, Mr. Speaker, all they're going to do is fix up a couple of soft spots in that road, and nothing more. There's a few little soft spots in that road, Mr. Speaker, and all they're going to do is fix up those soft spots.

Nowhere does it allude to the fact, Mr. Speaker, that that road will be improved to carry heavier traffic, that it'll be improved to be a safer highway for the residents that live in northern Saskatchewan. Nowhere in the budget, Mr. Speaker, is there any mention that that's going to happen for the No. 2 Highway.

And, Mr. Speaker, on the east side of the province going into the North we have the No. 2 Highway. On the west side of the province there's Highway 155, and I'd like to make a few comments about this.

This is infrastructure. This is clearly infrastructure, Mr. Speaker. This is the kind of spending that the people of Saskatchewan are demanding. They want spending in health. They want spending in education. They want spending in infrastructure. They don't want spending in bingos. They don't want spending in SPUDCO (Saskatchewan Potato Utility Development Company). They don't want the Crown corporations spending taxpayers' . . . hard-earned taxpayers' dollars in Atlanta, Georgia. They don't want it spent in Nashville, Tennessee. They don't want it spent in Australia. They want it spent in Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, and it's important that this NDP government understands that when the next provincial election is called. The people of Saskatchewan understand that even though that NDP government does not, Mr. Speaker.

Highway No. 155. It's a secondary highway in this province, Mr. Speaker, carrying primary weights. I've been on that road so many times, Mr. Speaker, that it's reached the point that the frustration level that I feel, the frustration points of members on this side of the House feel when they have driven that highway . . . the frustration level is extreme, Mr. Speaker, of the people who have to live along that highway and drive it on a daily basis, trying to carry out their business affairs, and having to use a highway that is only a secondary highway and primary weights being used on that highway, Mr. Speaker.

Well, Mr. Speaker, it's very important, Mr. Speaker, that the people of Saskatchewan understand that the Saskatchewan Party is in favour of opening up northern Saskatchewan for economic development. And that the people of northern Saskatchewan — whether on the east side or the west side of the province — as far north as Stony Rapids, Uranium City, even as far north as Camsell Portage, Camsell Portage, Mr. Speaker, those people want to participate in the economic growth of this province.

The ability to grow this province by 100,000 people in 10 years, Mr. Speaker, that's what the people of northern Saskatchewan want. They want that highway, that 155 Highway upgraded. They want it rebuilt. They want it completely rebuilt to a status of primary highway status in this province, Mr. Speaker. That's what those people want.

What's in this budget to accomplish that? Is it even on the radar screen, Mr. Speaker? No, no — no to both questions, Mr. Speaker. All that's in the budget is a little bit of tinkering. And that's what this government is very good at, Mr. Speaker, is simply tinkering — tinkering with the infrastructure in this province.

Mr. Speaker, I have one final comment in regards to the budget that I think is important and needs to be said. As I eluded to yesterday, Mr. Speaker, there was three speakers by the government who spoke, who got up to talk about the budget, who spent their allotted time — some of them a little more than their allotted time — not talking about the budget. They got up and spent their time talking about what the Saskatchewan Party will not tell them they need to do to run this province.

We hear that again and again on a daily basis, Mr. Speaker. This budget is so devoid of vision, is so devoid of a strategy to make Saskatchewan a better place to live, that their entire

strategy as a government, as a caucus, Mr. Speaker, is to harass the Saskatchewan Party for ideas because they are completely bereft of ideas, Mr. Speaker.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, the whole NDP caucus is so incensed that the budget is so devoid of ideas that the whole concept of what needs to be in a budget spread through the entire, the entire government, Mr. Speaker, by a NDP government that is so lacking in direction, that they're actually coming to the Saskatchewan Party to come up with a sexual harassment policy for them to bail them out, to bail them out, Mr. Speaker, of their own pitfalls.

Mr. Speaker, it is important the people of Saskatchewan know that the Saskatchewan Party will run this province when they become the government.

But in the meantime if the NDP government, Mr. Speaker, is having problems running this government, running this province, then what they should do is the Premier needs to go across the pond, talk to his . . . talk to the godfather, Frank Hart, ask for his permission, Mr. Speaker, to call an election. That's what this government needs to do instead of getting up on the floor of this House on a daily basis and questioning the Saskatchewan Party on ideas to bail them out of their problems.

Mr. Speaker, that is why, that is why, Mr. Speaker, I'm going to be supporting the amendment by the member from Rosetown-Biggar. I will be supporting the amendment by Rosetown-Biggar. It is bereft of me . . . It is beyond my ability, the demands, the demands of my constituents, Mr. Speaker, to be able to support the budget of this NDP government.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Ms. Hamilton:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very proud to be able to stand in this Assembly and support the budget of our government, just as I have done for the past 11 budgets presented since I was elected by the great people of Regina Wascana Plains.

One needs to look no further than my constituency of Regina Wascana Plains to see the future for this province is indeed wide open. We're looking at new homes springing up, people moving in, families moving in, and new businesses coming on a daily basis and opening up to provide goods and services for an expanding economy.

The future is wide open for Wascana Plains, Mr. Speaker, but with this budget the future is indeed wide open for the province of Saskatchewan.

(11:00)

Mr. Speaker, I'm going to be voting against the amendment presented by the members opposite. And I find it very strange that the members present first to the public of this province that they're going to grow or expand this province by 1,000 jobs over the next number of years, and at the same time they're saying that within 30 days of forming government they're going to have a core services review that will put thousands of government workers out on the street, that will cut back programs and services to thousands of Saskatchewan residents,

and somehow say that that major unemployment initiative by the members opposite, the Sask Tory government wannabes, will be increasing the jobs in this province.

They're also saying that their predictions of the numbers of tax cuts that they have, and their own economists will say, that the tax cuts they project will increase unemployment and see further drops in the economic growth of this province. Mr. Speaker, when you have a group that say that they want to grow Saskatchewan, well the weather out there is telling us exactly what they're trying to do is snow Saskatchewan into believing that somehow at the same time they're going to have job increases when they're laying off people. And their own tax cuts would suggest that there's . . . the highest rate of unemployment will ever be caused by the members opposite to this province.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Ms. Hamilton:** — It's also very strange that a group who say that they're not the gloom and doom of this province — although every day we hear it in this Assembly — that they're somehow going to be positive on the economic prospects of this province, will then stand up and say that when we say that we're going to return to a normal crop year and our economic growth projections are 6.8 per cent, they're hollering, that can't be so, Saskatchewan doesn't have that kind of a future, for Saskatchewan it's awful, it's going to be terrible.

When we have members stand up and talk today about the job numbers in the province, who's looking gloomy and doomy but the members opposite. Can they be positive? Can they be happy, have a positive outlook and attitude about the province of Saskatchewan and take that out to businesses to make certain that they're selling this province not only here but into other provinces and abroad? No. It's the gloom and doom message.

Well I'm not taking their word for it and I'm not supporting their amendment. I'm going to take the word of the bond raters, the bankers, the people who look at the world economics and tell us that, for example, CIBC (Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce) World Market notes:

. . . the associated level of real output falls within the band foreseen by economic forecasters . . .

The Bank of Montreal doesn't question the 6.8 per cent forecast. They simply note it's based on a return to normal crop levels after two years of severe drought.

The Conference Board of Canada has said that if we get a normal crop I don't think 6.8 per cent economic growth is overly optimistic. It's just based on the assumption of a normal crop.

An economist at Scotia Economics has said the government's forecast is entirely possible, especially in the agricultural sector. History has shown that when you have a sharp decline as you have had, particularly over the past two years with the drought, that very often the bounce back is major.

Lastly, Mr. Speaker, here's what one economist had to say about the 6.8 per cent forecast:

Is this estimate too rosy? Well, normally I would say yes but there is one nagging problem. Saskatchewan Finance Ministry has always gotten it right. In fact the department has been remarkably accurate in its economic growth forecasts (says Paul Martin, Paul Martin on March 31 of 2000 . . . of this year.)

He goes on to say:

It's not the first time that they were out of step with everyone else. When the bean counting was done, it was our finance department that had nailed it (Mr. Speaker).

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Ms. Hamilton:** — Well when I'm talking about 6.8 per cent forecast, I'm not going to listen to the gloom and doom of our opposition members, the Sask Tories who want to be. I'm going to listen to the people who say when we return to a normal crop year. And, Mr. Speaker, at Ducks Unlimited the other evening people were telling us it's looking pretty good. This snow is very good for the province of Saskatchewan.

I think it's important for the people of the province, but in my constituency I know they found it interesting, when we're putting budgets together, that every year putting a budget together is no easy task. It has not been easy. It was particularly difficult in the early '90s and since then there's been no easy year.

When there's a little bit of money there's pent up expectations by groups and individuals that we should catch up for them first, and it's not an easy job to distribute fairly a little bit of money; even more difficult when there is none after the devastation that was left behind by the cousins and the people who have been associated with the members opposite. But each year has been a very difficult budget year and this year has been no different.

We've been faced with many challenges, many challenges, Mr. Speaker. We've talked about them in here, and one of them is forest fires. Who can predict that in our second year of drought we would be faced with the kinds of devastation that fire can present to our northern communities and throughout this province? And it was us, it was the members of government, who had to look and see how we were going to fight those fires and what budget we could find to do so. And that required \$47 million extra in the budget.

The second worst drought in the history of this province and it's this government and on this side of the House that came up with the livestock program that was an additional \$25 million.

If that wasn't enough, Mr. Speaker, the daunting enough task to address the drought and the forest fires and all the things attendant with very dry conditions, the federal government presented to us, presented to us a bill in the order of \$300 million on equalization. We are very thankful that we were able to work with the federal government and get that down to half, but that's still quite a bill in a second year of drought — \$150 million. And it was up to us to face that challenge and meet that challenge.

We've had some further investment in this province by the federal government, but we have to come up with money at the local level first to be able to get that money and to be able to go after the money for health and education and other initiatives that the federal government comes up with because they say, show us your money. And so on this side of the House we do that, Mr. Speaker. We put that in the budget; we go for it; and we present good programs and services to the people of this province.

So we've had resolve to get past the difficult circumstances of global economic conditions because we all know that there have been conditions globally that have had an impact on our province as well.

But our economy is performing well. There's been steady economic growth and it's projected for 2003 and beyond. We fulfilled that by both our traditional strengths and by the emerging new industries that we've been willing to take on and to invest in and to see this province grow.

No budget happens just in any one given year, Mr. Speaker. And I'd like to give credit where credit is due because it's certainly by the hard work of past ministers, and particularly the member from Saskatoon Mount Royal, that we see Bruce Johnstone commenting that:

Previous budgets by former finance . . . (ministers) were logical, measured, and built on conservative assumptions.

(Now the member from Mount Royal in) His four-year plan to reduce personal income taxes was carefully laid out, with offsetting increases in other taxes, and aimed at modest, but attainable, targets.

(The former minister's) goal was to get most Saskatchewan taxpayers within spitting distance of Alberta's personal income tax rates, without bankrupting the provincial treasury. And for the most part, he has succeeded.

So it's in this budget, in this year we'll see the culmination of that grand plan, with the final instalment of the personal income tax cut on January 1, and inflation indexing of income tax brackets and exemptions to prevent bracket creep starting in the year 2002.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Ms. Hamilton:** — Why have I been on my feet to not only support this budget but previous budgets, Mr. Speaker? Well let's look at what people have said again — bond raters, bankers, people who are involved in looking at the economic situations. People like the people of Regina Wascana Plains who are accountants, who are professionals, who are business people, who are farm people, who look at these forecasts and really want to make certain their province knows how to govern. And they agree with these individuals, Mr. Speaker.

For example, David Rubinoff of Moody's Investors Services says:

Saskatchewan has done a great job over the last few years in getting its fiscal house in order . . . Saskatchewan has

done a great job in addressing what was a very serious debt problem. It has its fiscal house in order and we're quite pleased with what we see.

Now that's from Moody's and of course what they do then, the bond raters, they look at their . . . the situation, they look at those kinds of statements, and they increase the credit rating for this province which saves the taxpayers millions of dollars when we want to provide programs and services. Have we got bond rating increases? They just keep going up.

Now the other person that the people of Saskatchewan look to, to say well what's it like? You've got a look at the books; you know the accounting practices. What are you saying, Mr. Provincial Auditor? Well the Provincial Auditor, Fred Wendel, said:

. . . the government's financial condition has been improving considerably over the last many years. When we compare ourselves inter-provincially, we stack up about third place in Canada.

So then an attendant story from the *Leader-Post*, October 9 of that year, last year, said Saskatchewan ranked third out of 10 provinces — fourth overall behind Alberta, Ontario, and the federal government on a budget performance index compiled by the right wing think-tank, none other than the Fraser Institute. The Fraser Institute, Mr. Speaker, gave Saskatchewan a 53.6 point rating, one of only four provinces to score higher than 50 on an index that measures fiscal performance in three areas: spending, tax rates and revenues, and debt and deficits. Saskatchewan was ranked second on debt and deficit, and third on taxation.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Ms. Hamilton:** — The economic forecasters, for the members opposite — the same people who say their numbers just don't add up, don't add up — well there is a long list of others that would give credit where credit is due to not only this Finance minister but the ministers that have come before him, particularly the minister from Mount Royal.

So despite many of the fiscal challenges we talked about, the first nine months of last year we were pleased when the revenue side fell into place especially during the last quarter. And why we said . . . When all was said and done, our government was able to declare that in 2002-2003, that it was a successful year financially and we ended up with a surplus of just over \$2 million — a surplus.

What's also important to note is that this is not done by drawing down the Fiscal Stabilization Fund for that year. And what did Nesbitt Burns say about that? "Balanced Budgets — No Drought About It," Mr. Speaker.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Ms. Hamilton:** — No drought about it.

The last few days, I've been watching with interest the unfolding of the city budget for a number of reasons — because, Mr. Speaker, you would know that I was once a

member of city council in the city of Regina — and noted that over the Tory years, as a member of SUMA (Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association), we always asked when was the municipal government going to become a pillar of that government and the budgets of the Tories. And the members opposite would know that municipalities never did make that hit parade, never did become a pillar or was ever supported by the Tories opposite, Mr. Speaker.

This year, what have we done for municipalities? We've increased their revenue sharing by \$10 million on top of the \$10 million from last year, and next year another \$10 million. That's not \$30 million, Mr. Speaker, because that's \$10 million last year which makes 10 for this year and an additional 10 which is 30 million. And next year, it's an additional 30 million which comes to \$60 million . . .

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Ms. Hamilton:** — . . . additional monies for revenue sharing in this province.

At the same time, we're looking at an 8 per cent increase in health care approximately, about a 5.6 per cent increase in education.

Municipalities received a 15.4 per cent increase in the revenue sharing to their municipalities. But in addition to that, there was \$12.8 million in grants in lieu of taxation which particularly impacts on the city of Regina — \$12.8 million in grants in lieu of taxes to governments where Saskatchewan Property Management owns properties, Mr. Speaker. And another \$10 million for the Canada-Saskatchewan Infrastructure Program.

Then there's another one that I'm very proud to be able to support is \$2.38 million in subsidies for transit for the disabled.

(11:15)

Right now I'm not going to go into talking to the members opposite about savings plans because it was obvious yesterday they didn't know much about that.

But, Mr. Speaker, I must say the other reason I've been watching the city budget deliberations with great interest is because in the days when I served there, I served with a member named Darlene Hincks — Darlene Hincks, who made no bones about her work to recruit candidates to run for the Progressive Conservative Party. Mr. Speaker, to me and others, she made no bones about it that her and her husband at that time, Terry, were recruiters for the Progressive Conservative Party.

Now she's a candidate for the Tory wannabes, the Sask Tories, Mr. Speaker. And what's she saying over there at the budget deliberations for Regina city council? Well we promised no tax increases so what should we do? We've got a reserve of \$3.9 million; why don't we take that reserve and balance the budget?

Mr. Speaker, the members opposite should call an executive meeting. Here's another one. Here's another embarrassment. While they're saying we should not be using our Fiscal Stabilization Fund, a fund that was a savings plan for

Saskatchewan — not a reserve plan but a fiscal plan to say when times were good put it in a savings account and take it out when you need it — but the city's reserve, she's saying spend it all, spend it all.

There we are. Two faces — one face, two sides of the story. Are they going to call their executive and expel her before she gets a chance to run? You never know. Democracy doesn't mean much to the members over there.

We were, on this side of the House, chuckling yesterday because the members opposite . . . And I'm sorry to say that a member who is a former Finance minister for our government has forgotten that before it was a Fiscal Stabilization Fund, there was a Liquor and Gaming reserve here.

And to look at budgets, every year we would look at whether or not, in the Liquor and Gaming reserve, there were monies that were made in that area. And of course most years there's some. But you can't rely on that every year there's going to be money in that fund. It depends on whether people drink or they gamble. That's not a stable source of revenue so you don't put it into ongoing operating. You can't rely on it.

But it was there. It was there every year and former ministers also used that money when forest fires emerged that were out of control or when there were unexpected expenditures or when people called about crisis in health care. Two hundred new nursing spaces came from the Liquor and Gaming reserve. How is this different than a Fiscal Stabilization Fund?

Well, number one, the members opposite every year spent the Liquor and Gaming reserve 46 different ways. They'd stand up every day and say, why aren't you spending the Liquor and Gaming reserve? Why wouldn't you give more money to farmers out of the Liquor and Gaming reserve? Mr. Speaker, this same group of people now stand up and say, you've got a savings plan, the money that you had when times were good.

Mr. Speaker, when I take my children to the bank for their first savings book, I don't say to them the bank has a drawer with your name on it and the money's in there. Of course I don't. Mr. Speaker, when you have a savings plan you take that money and, as the Provincial Auditor said, what have we been doing? Good cash management practices.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Ms. Hamilton:** — You take that money . . . you don't put it in a box labelled Fiscal Stabilization Fund, and the money lays there in the drawer. You utilize that money. And how did we use it? To buy down debt or interests payments that were higher, to invest in things that made more money to be able to put into that drawer for the future.

But there's no monies in there. No one would expect it to be there. A bank doesn't keep the money that you put in savings into a drawer and say any time you go to that drawer, you take your bank book, the money falls out. No, Mr. Speaker.

What did the Provincial Auditor say about the Fiscal Stabilization Fund and how we use it for cash management practices? It saved the province of Saskatchewan already over

\$20 million in good cash management practices.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Ms. Hamilton:** — I'm going to be out of time here, Mr. Speaker, but if there's one other area that gives me the greatest deal of personal satisfaction in this budget is that it's a people budget. It's a caring budget. It's a budget of hope, Mr. Speaker. We dared to care.

And I could go into, but I know others have covered the areas that strategically have focused on Saskatchewan Community Resources and Employment, their housing initiatives, their child care initiatives.

There's the Kids First program. There's a program for people with disabilities. Two million dollars in new funding for employment supports. An additional \$1 million in social assistance provided . . . funding provided for an increase of about \$10 a month to disability allowance available through social assistance. And there's also an additional \$1 million for new and enhanced residential and day programs for people with disabilities.

There's a bit more money, not as much as we'd ever like to give to groups who need more, but more money for the community-based organizations and targeted programs for high-risk children.

Mr. Speaker, this is a budget that is a budget of hope. It's a caring budget. It contains the foundations for a future wide open, a future wide open for Wascana Plains but for the province of Saskatchewan.

I stand in support of the budget that has been presented this year by the Minister of Finance, and I will stand and vote against the amendment by the members opposite.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. D'Autremont:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, a Speech from the Throne or a budget speech should be about vision; it should be about leadership; it should be about hope and faith; it should be about a plan, Mr. Speaker. And, Mr. Speaker, both of those documents presented by the Premier of this province, the member from Riversdale, fails on those counts, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, listening to the previous member speak, she was talking about how the mayor of Moose Jaw agreed with this budget. Well indeed, Mr. Speaker, the mayor of Moose Jaw came out and praised this budget. But he was the only mayor, Mr. Speaker, that spoke in favour of it. When the mayors were here, Mr. Speaker, when the head of SUMA spoke about this particular budget, his words were anything but complimentary, Mr. Speaker. And included in that was a representative from the Moose Jaw council who spoke out in opposition to this particular budget, Mr. Speaker.

So again what happens, Mr. Speaker, is that the NDP like to take a minority of comments, the ones that are a little bit happy about it, Mr. Speaker, and then they try to blow that up. Well, Mr. Speaker, when you look at a budget that has a growth

projection of 6.8 per cent, which is double, Mr. Speaker, double of what any other jurisdiction is saying is possible, you have to stop and say to yourself, what's happening here?

You look around this province, Mr. Speaker, and there is high hopes in agriculture and yet this government was saying, not more than two years ago, that agriculture does not carry that much weight in this province any more. We are so diversified in Saskatchewan that what happens in agriculture is irrelevant to the financial stability of this province. Now all of a sudden, Mr. Speaker, now all of a sudden, Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance is hanging his entire budget on agriculture, Mr. Speaker.

Well, I agree with him in the sense that agriculture is extremely important in this province. It is the engine that drives the economy of Saskatchewan. But the growth rates that they are projecting, Mr. Speaker, are unrealistic.

Mr. Speaker, a number of the members want to stand in their place on the opposite side and try to explain the Fiscal Stabilization Fund. Well, Mr. Speaker, they can try to explain it and they have to try to explain it, Mr. Speaker, because it isn't there. And the fact is, Mr. Speaker, the previous minister of Finance stood in his place during estimates and admitted, Mr. Speaker, more than two years ago, that there was no money in the Fiscal Stabilization Fund; that there wasn't even one red cent there, Mr. Speaker — not one.

So when the members opposite speak about taking money out of the Fiscal Stabilization Fund, in reality they're simply using NDP doublespeak to try and confuse what is actually happening. What's actually happening, Mr. Speaker, is that at one time it was possible the minister of Finance transferred some money into a savings account, into the Fiscal Stabilization Fund, but then he promptly came along with a sledgehammer, smashed that little piggy bank up, and took the money out, and left behind an IOU — an IOU, Mr. Speaker.

So now when they go to the piggy bank to look for the money that they put in there, all they got is a paper . . . piece of paper saying I owe the piggy bank X millions of dollars. So when they use money out of that savings fund, Mr. Speaker, which isn't really a savings fund, what they do with that money, Mr. Speaker, is they have to borrow it, driving up the debt of this province; a debt which, Mr. Speaker, is now higher than it was in 1991 when this government took over, an issue that they vilified the previous government for, Mr. Speaker, ran around the province saying how horrendous the debt was, Mr. Speaker, and yet they've driven it higher. And they're saying, Mr. Speaker . . . I remember the Minister of Finance made a comment, well, Mr. Speaker, there's good debt and there's bad debt.

Well I'd like to try that line on my banker sometime, Mr. Speaker. He looks at it and says, it's debt. I don't care whether you think it's good or you think it's bad, you got to pay it back, and it's debt, Mr. Speaker.

And that's what the members opposite are trying to hide from the public. They've increased the debt under this Premier, Mr. Speaker, by over \$1 billion in the last two years, and it continues to go up. It's costing us \$1 million a day, Mr. Speaker

— \$1 million a day. And yet they dare to say that that's leadership, Mr. Speaker. That leadership is driving us into the hole. They're selling the future of our province, Mr. Speaker, by driving us into debt for programs and policies, Mr. Speaker, that don't work.

We've seen so many examples, Mr. Speaker, for this government where they have simply lost money. Their whole idea of growth in this province is simply to grow the size of government.

Well, Mr. Speaker, if growing government, if growing Crown corporations is the economic salvation that the members opposite believe it is — they've been practising it since 1944 — why is this province not number one, Mr. Speaker, in Canada, instead of number six and dropping? Pretty soon Nova Scotia's going to pass us, Mr. Speaker. We haven't grown in population since the mid-1930s. And yet the members opposite keep claiming that growth in government and Crown corporation is the solution.

They go out buying up businesses across the province. They buy businesses offshore and lose millions and millions of dollars. Mr. Speaker, they have failed to provide a vision for this province, a vision of growth. And yet they like to brag about how good they are — how sanctimonious they brag about it, Mr. Speaker.

I'd like to read a quote from the budget. It says:

Within our vision of a wide open future for Saskatchewan  
...

Which they are promoting outside of the province again, Mr. Speaker. They're trying to bring people back to the province, so they have an advertising campaign. They spend a little money in Alberta where most of the people go to — our children, Mr. Speaker. They spend a little money across the rest of Canada. And yet they're saying this program is to bring people to Saskatchewan and the majority of the advertising money gets spent in Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker.

(11:30)

You have to wonder is this a campaign to bring people back to Saskatchewan or is it a pre-election campaign, Mr. Speaker, funded by the government? Mr. Speaker, I think it's the latter rather than the former.

So, Mr. Speaker, when you look at this, Mr. Speaker, it says our government believes in secure families and vibrant communities. Well, Mr. Speaker, we saw an example in the House this week of the government's belief in secure families.

We saw an example, Mr. Speaker, that happened with one of the government's employees in the bureaucracy. Well, Mr. Speaker, I think what we see from this government is words and not actions. And I think we need to judge the government, Mr. Speaker, by their actions not their words. Because they're very good with the words, Mr. Speaker — there's no doubt about it — very good with the words. See how they work together, Mr. Speaker, to camouflage what the Fiscal Stabilization Fund is, Mr. Speaker. It's simply debt. But they work very hard to

camouflage that.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to talk a little bit about the case that came before this legislature. Mr. Speaker, the case of sexual harassment. This issue was raised, Mr. Speaker, this issue was raised a number of times in the past to the employees, the supervisors, Mr. Speaker, of the women involved and, Mr. Speaker, nothing happened. And the fact is to quote, Mr. Speaker, from some of the affidavits in the report, Mr. Speaker, you have to wonder what was happening in that department.

What was happening that allowed this to happen, Mr. Speaker? How in allowing these things to proceed does that square with the comments in the budget, Mr. Speaker, of secure families?

Mr. Speaker, the employee involved told a number of people these issues but I'd like to quote this one sentence. He — referring to Mr. Carriere — and I quote:

He has told her of his importance within the department, his political ties, and (that he has had many . . . ) that he has had people fired in the past.

Well, Mr. Speaker, this was an attempt to intimidate that employee.

Mr. Speaker, employees in that department have come forward and complained to their supervisors that there was incidents happening, that there was problems developing there, and yet, Mr. Speaker, what happened about him? Well, Mr. Speaker, a quote from another affidavit, and I quote:

. . . stated that a staff member had told her that she had brought her concerns regarding Mr. Carriere forward to an individual who said, I don't want to hear it.

Further, Mr. Speaker, she had, and I quote:

She had also went to see another supervisor about the issue and was told, he wouldn't do that.

So, Mr. Speaker, twice, even before these complaints came forward — a minimum of twice — these issues were raised. And I've listened very carefully to the minister of the PSC (Public Service Commission) who said, as soon as these issues are raised, we deal with them.

Well, Mr. Speaker, that's clearly not the case. The minister stood in her place on Tuesday proclaiming the NDP's vaunted policy on zero tolerance and today she reinforced that by saying, whenever we find an incident, we deal with it immediately.

Well that's not true, Mr. Speaker, it didn't happen that way. Again, the minister on Monday and — excuse me — on Tuesday and Wednesday and Thursday was using NDP doublespeak. Yes, we have a zero tolerance policy, Mr. Speaker, but they don't know what it is. But it sure sounds good, Mr. Speaker, to have a zero tolerance policy. The only problem is when it comes to being secure, having secure families, they don't enforce it. They don't even know about it, Mr. Speaker. It's all words; it's no action to protect the families that are involved, Mr. Speaker.

I'd like to quote again from another affidavit, Mr. Speaker, and I quote:

There were complaints of Murdoch kissing staff, touching them, and acting inappropriately. Usually staff have not wanted to make formal complaint because they fear they will lose their jobs. Staff have a genuine fear of retaliation.

Well that fits in very well, Mr. Speaker, with the quote from the first affidavit, he has told her . . .

And I quote:

He has told her of his importance within the department, his political ties, and that he has had people fired in the past.

Inappropriate, Mr. Speaker, the sexual harassment and the intimidation that this government allowed to go on.

Mr. Speaker, those complaints were initially ignored. Then six women came forward, Mr. Speaker, and complained to the department. The department did investigate, Mr. Speaker, and filed a report that found Mr. Carriere guilty of sexual harassment. That report went to a long-time, long-serving deputy minister who we have to assume, Mr. Speaker, knew of the government's zero tolerance policy, knew that the government was saying, when we find these incidents we deal with them immediately.

And this wasn't one complaint, Mr. Speaker, this was six complaints. It wasn't some sort of comment in the hallway, Mr. Speaker, in passing. It wasn't laughing at the *Playboy* jokes, Mr. Speaker. This was serious. It was physical contact, Mr. Speaker — not once, not twice, Mr. Speaker, but six times — and involved, Mr. Speaker, visits to employees' homes. It involved staking out an employee's home in the middle of the night and then demanding of that employee, why weren't you at home when I came to visit?

These were not minor allegations, Mr. Speaker. These are the kind of things that families need to be protected from. These are the kind of things that a statement out of the budget book should deal with — our government believes that secure families and vibrant communities are fundamental. Those are very good words in the budget, the government's budget. But why don't they believe in them, Mr. Speaker? Why don't they act on those words, Mr. Speaker? Why do they ignore these incidents, Mr. Speaker?

The deputy minister in his report, Mr. Speaker, suspended Mr. Carriere with pay and then transferred him to Regina to take a senior adviser's post to commence in May. Mr. Carriere is punished with a promotion, a transfer, approximately five or six months off with pay, Mr. Speaker, and retains his position as a government employee.

On April 1, *The StarPhoenix* reports the incident as a headline in its paper. The Sask Party, Mr. Speaker, raised the questions in question period to the Minister of the Environment who does not respond even though it's his department, Mr. Speaker, and they are dealt with by the minister of PSC who states they have a zero tolerance policy — zero tolerance.

Now when people look at zero tolerance, that means you have no acceptance of it. It's not a little bit of acceptance. It's not a medium amount of acceptance. It's not a large amount of acceptance, Mr. Speaker. It's no acceptance. And yet, Mr. Speaker, the minister when we asked her to explain the policy, couldn't do so, Mr. Speaker. She could not explain her own government's policy of zero tolerance, Mr. Speaker.

So April 2 . . . You have to remember, Mr. Speaker, the minister stood in the House and said she had no knowledge on April 1 of the incident, other than what was printed in the paper. Well the papers come out early in the morning, Mr. Speaker, available to all of us. Question period . . . The House starts at 1:30, question period generally starts quarter to 2 or so. So the minister had four hours at least, if not six hours, to have inquired into this situation, comes into the House and says she knows nothing about it.

April 2, Mr. Speaker, in further questioning, the minister steps forward and says she's reviewed the case and now Mr. Carriere is fired. Well you have to ask yourself, Mr. Speaker, what was the difference between April 1 and April 2? The only difference, Mr. Speaker, is it was now a public story and the families of Saskatchewan were no longer feeling secure. The words that the government was putting into their budget speech, Mr. Speaker, about secure families, about vibrant communities, Mr. Speaker, were shown to be hollow words.

You have to look at some of the other issues we've had before this legislature of a similar nature, Mr. Speaker. We had the case of the minister of Environment last year who was accused of harassment. The government investigated, had an independent investigator do the investigation, report comes back, and there's no conclusions drawn in that report, Mr. Speaker. The minister retained the position in cabinet. But then, Mr. Speaker, the minister decided to speak out on the issue and make it a larger public issue. And the minister was subsequently fired.

Why, Mr. Speaker? Why was the minister fired? Was the minister fired for the alleged harassment incident? No. So what can we conclude from this, Mr. Speaker? Mr. Speaker, the only valid conclusion is that the acts of harassment themselves do not bother the NDP. It's getting caught by the . . . and published by the media that's the punishable offence, Mr. Speaker. That's the offence. Doing it is fine. Don't get caught or you'll be punished.

Mr. Speaker, harassment, sexual harassment, intimidation, are obviously, from the actions of the government, acceptable business practices in an NDP workplace. It's a major offence, Mr. Speaker, to get caught and get reported by the media.

Murdoch Carriere and the previous minister of the Environment were both fired because they embarrassed the NDP with the NDP's own inaction, the NDP's acceptance of harassment, and the NDP's hypocrisy, Mr. Speaker.

There's one other group, Mr. Speaker, when it comes to the workplace, when it comes to families in this province, you have to wonder where they stand. Mr. Speaker, that's the unions. Where are the unions on this issue, Mr. Speaker? I haven't heard a comment in the public from them.



I haven't heard a comment from the union representatives sitting on the floor of this Assembly on the opposite side. Where is their defence of those six women that brought forward the complaint? Where is their defence of the two women who have gone to the Human Rights Commission? Where is their defence of the woman who has gone to the RCMP (Royal Canadian Mounted Police)?

(11:45)

You know we have the member from Moose Jaw Wakamow here, I believe it is, the Minister of Labour. We have the member from Regina Elphinstone. The member from Regina Dewdney, the government whip. The member from Saskatoon Eastview and the member from Saskatoon Meewasin.

Now the member from Saskatoon Fairview, Mr. Speaker, cannot be held accountable for this. That member is newly elected in here. Just took his place, Mr. Speaker, and I'm sure that had he known about this, he would have spoke up on behalf of the union membership.

But I have to question those other union leaders that do sit on that side, Mr. Speaker. Where is their defence of these women that were being harassed by their manager?

Why is the union leadership not standing up for the rights of their members against the harassment of a senior manager? Are they condoning the actions of Carriere or is the relationship between the NDP Party and the union leadership more important than protecting the people and working on behalf of their union members? Where is this vaunted solidarity against the oppressor, against management, Mr. Speaker? Perhaps silence gets the union leader a shot at an NDP nomination or at a cabinet position. But what price, Mr. Speaker, does the union membership have to pay so that the union leadership can get a title?

Mr. Speaker, when it comes to protecting the security of families, the minister's zero tolerance policy is important. But her own comments, Mr. Speaker — but he was a long-term employee, he was a good manager — does that somehow excuse the guilt he has in sexually harassing six of his employees, Mr. Speaker? No. It should not and does not, Mr. Speaker.

And that's confirmed by the minister's own actions. She fired him or had the Minister of the Environment fire him or the deputy minister, but anyways whoever did the firing, he's gone, Mr. Speaker.

But when does zero . . . When does zero mean zero, nil? Does it mean your first offence and you're out? Well obviously to the NDP it doesn't, Mr. Speaker. The NDP have a three-step policy on all issues, Mr. Speaker, not just this one.

The first step is, don't ask and don't tell. That was the response actually from the Minister of the Environment when asked about some of the items in the budget a couple of years ago. They didn't ask, so I don't have to tell.

Mr. Speaker, the second step in their three-step platform policy is see no evil, hear no evil, and speak no evil to the media.

That's their policy, Mr. Speaker.

And the third step of the policy is, if someone tells, if someone speaks, then punish the one who spoke out or the one who embarrassed the NDP. That's their three-step policy, Mr. Speaker. It's not a zero tolerance policy, it's a don't ask and don't tell policy.

So, Mr. Speaker, let's look at the NDP's record of responsibility. Channel Lake is involved in improper gas trading and loses \$5 million, poof, because somebody can't read — no minister is responsible. SPUDCO loses 28 million and the minister misleads the public and the legislature for six years — and no minister is responsible. SLGA fails to ensure proper accounting of SIGA (Saskatchewan Indian Gaming Authority) funds, resulting in millions of dollars of inappropriate spending — no minister is responsible. Million dollars of Crown corporations' dollars are lost on foreign adventures and affairs — and no minister is responsible.

These are only a small sample, Mr. Speaker, of the NDP failures. And finally there's the Murdoch Carriere case which clearly shows the failure of the NDP's zero tolerance policy on sexual harassment — and no minister is responsible.

Mr. Speaker, I do know of one NDP ministerial responsibility that the members opposite take very seriously, and they practise it diligently, Mr. Speaker, and that is to pick up their paycheque at the end of the month. That's the only responsibility that the members opposite accept, Mr. Speaker. That's the only responsibility they accept.

Mr. Speaker, the Speech from the Throne and the budgets fail to provide a vision. They fail to provide leadership to this province. Mr. Speaker, the only ones who provide faith and hope for the future and a plan to accomplish the growth of Saskatchewan — which these members opposite say Saskatchewan cannot grow; it's statistically impossible, Mr. Speaker, and they've proven it to themselves for failing to grow this province in the last 60 years Mr. Speaker — the Saskatchewan Party has a plan to grow.

We are going to grow this province, Mr. Speaker, by 100,000 people in the next 10 years. And we're going to do it, Mr. Speaker, in spite of the failures of the NDP, in spite of their driving up the debt, Mr. Speaker. We will do it in spite of the fact that they're driving the young people out of this province, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, we have a plan to do, indeed, grow this province. Mr. Speaker, the member opposite asks, what is it? Well, Mr. Speaker, all he has to do is read the comments made by my colleague, the member from Canora-Pelly, our Finance critic. He laid out the finance plan. My colleague from Melfort, Mr. Speaker, the Health critic, laid out some of our health policy. The member from Watrous laid out, Mr. Speaker, some of our agriculture policy. The member from Kelvington-Wadena, Mr. Speaker, laid out some of our education policy.

Mr. Speaker . . . And the time is growing very nicely for me.

Mr. Speaker, my leader has asked me to coordinate our efficiency and innovation review and I am pleased to be able to

do that. We look forward, Mr. Speaker, after the next election, to working very closely with the bureaucracy in developing a plan for this province to grow Saskatchewan. And yes, Mr. Speaker, the members opposite laugh at that concept, but we believe, Mr. Speaker, that there are very, very good and competent people in that bureaucracy.

The failure lies, Mr. Speaker, at the political level and the lack of leadership from this government, the lack of vision to take this province forward. Given direction, Mr. Speaker, and a vision so people know what the goal is and where we wish to . . . what we wish to achieve, the people who work for this province in the bureaucracy, the civil servants, Mr. Speaker, will gladly carry out those programs, Mr. Speaker.

Because they too . . . It's in everyone's interest, including the members of the public service, that this province prosper and grow, Mr. Speaker — not that it be driven into debt; not that it continue to shrink, Mr. Speaker. We need more people here helping to pay the bills, not fewer, Mr. Speaker.

So, Mr. Speaker, because of this government's failure to provide leadership and vision for the future, because of their inability to grow this province, I will be supporting the amendment and not the motion, Mr. Speaker.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Hon. Mr. Sonntag:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great deal of pleasure to join in to the budget debate as well. I want to begin by acknowledging the good work of my colleagues, the Minister of Finance and the now current Minister of Justice and Industry and Resources, who has done such a good job, in my estimation, of managing the finances of our province.

The former minister produced a string of balanced budgets through the ups and downs of global economic conditions and federal transfers and droughts, Mr. Speaker. And I want to personally congratulate and thank him.

The new minister has demonstrated in his first budget, Mr. Speaker, that he will continue our government's approach of investing in the priorities of Saskatchewan people while maintaining a strong balance sheet for our province.

The soundness, Mr. Speaker, of that approach, has been recognized by credit rating agencies who have given Saskatchewan 10 upgrades in the last number of years, Mr. Speaker — 10 upgrades that I think a lot of the public of Saskatchewan are not aware of, Mr. Speaker. And it is something that speaks very well and speaks to what the people of Saskatchewan have given in getting those upgrades.

Mr. Speaker, the turnaround of our Crown corporations over the last decade is a big part of the turnaround of the finances of the province of Saskatchewan as well. The Devine government left a lot of fiscal destruction in its wake. And nowhere was the damage greater than in the Crown corporations sector.

The member from Swift Current and others on that side, who were part of the government, may have a new name for their party, Mr. Speaker, but they should remember it very well.

When we began sifting through the debris in 1992, we found the Crowns had a \$2 billion — I repeat, billion dollar — debt within the Crowns which had been run up through the 1980s. We found the equity had been stripped out of the Crowns and we found that the retained earnings were gone. Public assets like the Potash Corporation, which could have helped, had been sold for a song, Mr. Speaker.

It was like taking over a successful farm — which I suspect a number of the members over there would understand — taking over a successful farm that had been run well for several generations and then running it into the ground in less than a decade. And I think it's something they should be ashamed of and they should apologize to the people of Saskatchewan for.

Mr. Speaker, our province was taken on a ride to near bankruptcy by the Devine government and the Crowns were absolutely gutted along the way. The situation was so bad that hundreds of millions had to flow from the General Revenue Fund to the Crowns in the early 1990s to repair their balance sheet; I repeat, from the General Revenue Fund to the Crown corporations.

By 1995 our government had the fiscal situation in the province and in the Crowns turned completely around. Since that time the Crowns have put \$1.6 billion — I repeat, \$1.6 billion — into the General Revenue Fund back from the Crowns into the General Revenue Fund in the form of dividends and equity payments.

That averages out to more than a quarter of \$1 billion a year to help pay for schools, hospitals, highways, and other services across our province.

Over the same period, the \$2 billion in Crown debt run up by the '80s version of the Saskatchewan Party has been paid entirely off, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The major Crowns are at or near their industry appropriate debt ratios, and the holding company, CIC (Crown Investments Corporation of Saskatchewan), has absolutely no dead-weight debt left whatsoever.

Now, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the rapid return of the Crowns to financial health in the 1990s is indeed a remarkable achievement. It's been acknowledged by credit rating agencies who have cited improved Crown performance as one of the main reasons for the straight A's they have given our province in recent years.

Saskatchewan people continue to pay the lowest overall utility bills of any province in Canada, amongst the lowest rates, I should say — not entirely the lowest, but amongst the lowest overall utility bills of any province in Canada. So this recovery has not, I repeat, not been achieved on the backs of utility customers, nor has it been achieved by cutting back on services.

SaskTel, for example, has invested heavily in improving high-speed Internet to rural Saskatchewan, and we are a world leader in that area. The 1.5 billion that Crowns have spent over the . . . that the Crowns spend every year on goods and services in Saskatchewan continues to help grow our economy.

(12:00)

Now you might expect that the members opposite would have learned from the events of the last two decades, Mr. Speaker. Unfortunately, when it comes to Crown corporations that doesn't seem to me to be the case. It's the same old hostility to public enterprise in the Saskatchewan Party that we saw in the previous version of that party some 20 years ago. It's the same old triumph of ideology, Mr. Deputy Speaker, over common sense, in my estimation, though it is dressed up in different words these days. But it is the same old privatization agenda hidden away from the public, Mr. Speaker.

There are many criticisms that can be made of the Devine government but at least — I say at least, Mr. Deputy Speaker — they were upfront with the Saskatchewan people on their pet plans for public assets.

Now again I say, the member from Swift Current never stands in this Assembly and says that his party would sell the Crowns, Mr. Speaker. He never directly says that he would sell the Crowns. He knows that Saskatchewan people don't support privatization so he says it in other ways, Mr. Speaker.

Some days he attacks the Crowns for competing inside our province. Other days, Mr. Speaker, he attacks our Crowns for competing outside of the province, Mr. Deputy Speaker. But every day he demands that they be restricted — so-called — to core services.

Now I wouldn't have the time ordinarily in a news conference or in a clip, or an eight-second clip, to explain this. So I'm about to do it now for the people of Saskatchewan and for the members opposite because I think there might even be some over there, Mr. Speaker, who don't quite understand what restricting Crowns to core assets really means.

This policy adds up . . . This policy of the opposition adds up to — which involves, I should say, growth, which involves growth or diversification of the Crowns — it adds up to anything but growth and diversification, Mr. Speaker.

No business can stand still. Either a business is going forwards or it's going backwards. A policy of no growth and no diversification is a policy of shrink and of sell. We know what the results would be of putting the members opposite in charge of the Crowns.

Mr. Speaker, Mr. Deputy Speaker, if I could, I'm going to again refer to *The Outlook* of Monday, February 17, 2003. And I quote:

But it is no secret the Sask. Party wants to rid the province of most Crown corporations, however, (and I quote, Mr. Deputy Speaker) Brkich said the "core Crowns" — such as Sask Water, SaskPower, SaskTel and SGI — will be treated differently than the other "treasure (Board) Crowns," (now here's how they're treated differently) which would not be sold off immediately (not immediately), but when the selling price would reap the "best bang for the buck" (Mr. Speaker).

So it's not an issue of policy. Absolutely not an issue of policy. It's only an issue of timing — when they would get their best bang for the buck.

And I say, Mr. Deputy Speaker, if they're talking about SaskTel, SaskTel is doing very well. It's the strongest company in . . . it's the strongest telco in all of Canada right now, Mr. Speaker. So if they ever form government, I say to the people of Saskatchewan, get ready because SaskTel's the first one on the block, the first one on the block, so they can pay for the promises that they've made in this legislature on a daily basis, Mr. Speaker.

Now let's look at SaskTel, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as an example of the consequences of applying the Saskatchewan Party's no-growth policy to a thriving Crown.

SaskTel, like every other viable telecommunications company on the planet, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is diversifying for a couple of very good reasons. The first is that there is a rapid change and fierce competition in the telecommunications industry and no company can stay in business any more if it is just providing traditional local and long-distance services.

As competition has brought down the cost of these services, it has brought down the earnings of the companies that provide them. That revenue has to be replaced by leveraging the assets and the expertise of the company into related services, Mr. Speaker. And that's why SaskTel has invested heavily to provide digital and high-speed Internet services to most of our province.

That's why it's offering the latest digital interactive services to its customers. And, Mr. Speaker, that's why it has partnered with security dealers in Saskatchewan and other provinces to establish SecurTek, a venture which has resulted in 75 new jobs — I repeat, 75 new jobs — in Yorkton at the SecurTek call centre.

The second reason for diversification, Mr. Speaker, is that the telecommunications market has been flung wide open by the CRTC (Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission). The federal regulator has looked at where the industry is headed and created regulatory environment that forces telephone, Internet, and cable companies to compete to provide the same kinds of services. And that's why cable companies have teamed up with Rogers AT&T to sell telephone service to their customers.

And that's why, Mr. Speaker, SaskTel, MTS (Manitoba Telephone System), and other telecommunication companies are offering their customers an Internet and television package.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the rules are the same for every telecommunications company in every province. The CRTC didn't make special rules for Saskatchewan just because we have a publicly owned telecommunications company and an opposition which is hostile to public enterprise.

So if you strip away the diversification initiatives at SaskTel and you are left with the part of the business that is growing, instead of the healthiest telecommunications company in Canada that we see today we would have a company rapidly losing value that might just as well be sold, as I said earlier.

That's the real Sask Party policy on SaskTel and the other Crowns that provide vital services across our province. It's a

plan, Mr. Speaker, to shrink some of our province's biggest companies from a party that claims that they want to grow Saskatchewan — a direct contradiction.

Mr. Speaker, our Crowns are a Saskatchewan success story that go back to 1901, Mr. Speaker. I know the . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . The member says, "Yeah, right." Well the first Crown was formed in 1901, Mr. Speaker — 1901. They may want to pay attention and listen, Mr. Speaker, so they know about the role the Crowns have played in our province.

I know the members opposite don't like good news, Mr. Speaker, but I want to review the many ways our Crowns contribute to growing our economy. I mentioned earlier SaskTel's heavy investment in bringing the latest telecommunications services to people throughout Saskatchewan.

Although Crowns have invested nearly \$6 billion in upgrading and expanding their services over the last decade, just to put their investments outside the borders of the province in perspective, that's \$20 invested here in Saskatchewan for every \$1 invested elsewhere — 20:1, Mr. Speaker.

Every year Crowns, guided by buy Saskatchewan policies, purchase over \$1 billion — \$1 billion — worth of goods and services from local suppliers here in Saskatchewan. They are important customers for 12,000 Saskatchewan businesses. Crown employees spend an annual payroll of more than a half a billion dollars a year in communities they work in throughout our province.

That's a lot of economic activity from the users, from the user fees we all have to pay anyway for our utility services. And much of it would be gone if the Saskatchewan Party ever got the opportunity to implement its plan and to sell the Crowns.

Mr. Speaker, we have come a long way in Saskatchewan over the last decade. We have built a thriving economy that can weather droughts and keep on growing. We have repaired the damage done to the Crowns by the Devine government and restored their ability to contribute to the economic development of our province.

Mr. Speaker, I, with my last few minutes, want to as well talk about some of the other highlights in the budget, other than the huge success of our Crown corporations.

Mr. Speaker, a lot of people won't be aware of this — some will — but 13.5 per cent of our provincial population is Aboriginal and half of that is under the age of 18. I want to mention and want to point out, particularly through the Crowns and to our province and to our government, what a tremendous resource this represents for our province, Mr. Speaker. These young people, and many of them in my constituency, are the future of Saskatchewan and they will make great economic and cultural contributions to our province for years and years to come. And believe me, when I talk to them and when I talk to their leadership, Mr. Speaker, they see the Crown corporations, as well, as a vital and integral part of a growing Saskatchewan.

Now for the strategy that we have for Métis and off-reserve First Nations people. We want to address the circumstances

facing Aboriginal people and achieve meaningful change in the lives of Aboriginal people over the generations, Mr. Speaker, and I think we've made huge successes in that regard.

Here's some of the initiatives that we've launched. We've launched the Community Schools Program; skills training targeted at the growth sectors of the provincial economy, like forestry up in the North.

I have to look no further than my own constituency as proof of the point. The Meadow Lake oriented strand board or OSB mill is an economic partnership that includes First Nations and Métis peoples, Mr. Speaker. The Meadow Lake Tribal Council and northwest communities have an ownership stake in the project which will also employ First Nations and Métis people.

The Aboriginal Employment Development Program, a \$50,000 increase in the budget, Mr. Speaker, uses the unique approach to increase the number of skilled Aboriginal people in the provincial workforce. There's a focus . . . The focus, I should say, is to identify future job opportunities, match skills, assist in competition for jobs, and identify, I should say, economic development opportunities. And since 1992, Mr. Speaker, this program has achieved significant success and recognition. There have been 41 — I say 41 — partnership agreements with Saskatchewan employers to improve future job prospects for Aboriginal people.

Almost 1,500 Aboriginal people have been hired by the AEDP (Aboriginal Employment Development Program) partnership employees, and five provincial health sector unions have adopted representative workforce language in their respective collective agreements. I think that's a huge success, Mr. Speaker.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Hon. Mr. Sonntag:** — I want to speak briefly as well about the Kids First program. There was a 45 per cent increase to \$13 million, Mr. Speaker. That's helping 440 additional families receive the support that they need to build independence for themselves and ensure that their children get the best start in life. Mr. Speaker, this program is up and running in Meadow Lake and in our community in the North and has been very successful over the last few years.

The Community Initiatives Fund will see \$10.5 million over the next four years. Five million will go to increase the physical activity levels of Saskatchewan youth, and I think that's very important and a very good initiative. And even members opposite have complimented that, and I acknowledge and recognize that from them. At least they've complimented something in the budget, Mr. Speaker.

Five point five million to increase the participation and access to culture, recreation, sport, and leadership programs for Aboriginal people. Culture, recreation, and sport is such an integral way, Mr. Deputy, or Mr. Speaker, I should say, for youth to express themselves. And I'm proud to announce here that Flying Dust First Nation in my riding will be hosting the 2003 First Nations summer games and I know everyone in this Assembly will want to attend that event, Mr. Speaker.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Hon. Mr. Sonntag:** — The centennial affordable housing program, Mr. Speaker, is also a very good initiative. In that initiative there are 1,400 new units of affordable housing over four years, for an investment of approximately \$40 million which . . . with contributions from the federal government and from municipalities.

The fiscal year conditional . . . this fiscal year, I should say, conditional commitments will be made to community-based organizations for the construction of more than 40 new homes with contributions of about \$12 million. This includes the recent addition of eight new one-bedroom housing units in Meadow Lake as well, to address the affordable housing needs in my community.

I want to close on post-secondary or Learning if I could, Mr. Speaker, where their budget is now at \$390.1 million. Post-secondary, specifically institutions, I guess, the additional 40 seats in northern nursing education program. Again, for a member who represents a northern riding, this is received with huge applause in northern Saskatchewan. We think this is just wonderful and I want to take the opportunity to compliment the Minister of Learning for that initiative. In addition to that, 40 spaces for northern residents to upgrade their math and science skills through the northern health sciences access program.

These are all wonderful initiatives and it is for that reason, Mr. Speaker, that I will be voting against the amendment and supporting, with great enthusiasm, the budget delivered by our Minister of Finance.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

(12:15)

**Mr. Huyghebaert:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to enter into the debate on the budget. We've heard over the last few days a whole bunch of rhetoric from the other side about the budget.

But one of the things I'd like to touch on to start out, Mr. Speaker, is about the war in Iraq. I very much support the American position in the war.

But one of the things that really came to my attention within the last four or five days, especially when we've been debating the budget, in Iraq we have the Minister of Information that's getting in front of the TV and suggesting to the Iraqi people that all is fine, that in fact Iraq is winning the war. Even as early as this morning, or as recent as this morning, there is a clip of Saddam saying, we are winning the war.

The reason I use that, Mr. Speaker, because Iraq is very, very adept at the propaganda campaign. And the reason I bring that up is all you have to do is listen to members opposite about this budget. It has been a propaganda campaign from all of those that wish to speak about the budget. It has been totally propaganda.

I give you the example, 10 balanced budgets. Who in this province believes that it's 10 balanced budgets? Let me suggest, let me suggest in kindergarten finance 01, if you give a kindergarten student 50 cents and a candy bar costs 75 cents, guess what? The individual has a deficit. Goes to the piggy bank and there's no money in the piggy bank. What does the kindergarten student do? You either borrow money or you don't have the candy bar. That's finance 01 in kindergarten.

So what is this government saying? We're going to spend 6.6 billion but only take in 6.2 billion and it's balanced. The kindergarten kids could tell you people, those people, more about how a balanced budget or a deficit works. It's unbelievable that individuals could get up on that side of the House and display the propaganda myth that they're trying to put to the people of Saskatchewan. You have so much money in one hand and not enough in the other to pay it off, and yet it's balanced. Totally, totally fictitious.

If in fact this Fiscal Stabilization Fund is the be-all and end-all, I ask the government why they didn't put \$12.4 billion in the Fiscal Stabilization Fund, pay off all the debt, and the province would be rich? That's their way of thinking.

The actual fact, Mr. Speaker, is we would still be \$12.4 billion in debt. Where would the balanced budget be? It's totally, totally ludicrous.

And the 6.8 per cent growth, that's created a chuckle, that's created a chuckle throughout the province, and was identified again this morning with funding for the university. The Minister of Finance, all he had to do is go to the machine, crank up the 6.8 growth to 7.5. If one is fictitious, why not make the other one fictitious too? Crank it up more. That is how ridiculous this budget is.

And then we get on to some of the other aspects of the budget that I find are quite humorous. When I first picked up the budget document, Mr. Speaker, it says here:

The Government's plan for 2003-04 touches upon past accomplishments . . .

And I sat, and I thought, what are the past accomplishments of this government? And that's how quiet it was. I couldn't come up with any. So I got thinking, to be fair with them, was the waiting lists at the hospital an accomplishment? If you consider them growing, I guess that's an accomplishment.

How about the roads? And I look at my constituency — yes, there's talk in the budget about money for roads — I probably have collectively the worst roads in the province. Is that an accomplishment?

Balancing the budget. I've already spoke about balancing the budget and we know it's fictitious. So is that an accomplishment? I think not.

The control of spending, that's definitely not an accomplishment because it's going wild. We know since the unelected Premier took over, it's \$1 million a day more deficit. Now, do people on that side of the House consider that an accomplishment? I think not. At least we don't on this side of

the House.

How about fulfilling the promise of the police force for the province. Has that been done? Has that been an accomplishment? I think not.

How about out-migration. We have huge out-migration from this province. Is that an accomplishment? Unequivocally, no.

So, Mr. Speaker, when I picked up the copy of this budget and I tried to figure out what the accomplishments of this government was and is, I could see their accomplishment of cover-up, deception, deceit. But do they want to put that on . . .

**The Speaker:** — Order, please. I would just ask the member to keep all of his language parliamentary. And a couple of the words he just used are sort of outside of that category. So I would ask the member to continue.

**Mr. Huyghebaert:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think everybody gets the drift. So I looked at the accomplishments of this government in picking up this budget document and, Mr. Speaker, there was the list of accomplishments of this government on their own document.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to go on, I wish to go on and talk about the rest of the budget document.

We talked about . . . we talk in this government . . . in this document the government says, we have a strong, competitive business climate . . . is resulting in more prosperity for business in this province. Now just think about that for a minute. This government creating a climate for prosperity for business. And I wish to read again into the record the manifesto of this government:

No C.C.F. (NDP) Government will rest content until it has eradicated capitalism and put into operation the full programme of socialized planning . . .

So right there, right there, Mr. Speaker, that contradicts their own budget document where our strong, competitive business climate is resulting in more prosperity for our business.

It doesn't add up. It must take the innards of some of those people opposite to actually be able to read that in a budget document that they are promoting business when at the same time their manifesto says they want to eradicate it. Quite a dichotomy there, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I want to . . . as time is going to run out, there's a couple of issues that I really wish to touch on before time runs out.

Rural revitalization. I just can't believe the wording of rural revitalization. It's a joke. There's no doubt about it. And specifically I want to talk about infrastructure in the rural areas. And I specifically want to talk about cellular coverage for some of the rural areas.

I have talked about it in the Crowns. I've talked about it in a letter to the minister. I've talked about it or wrote a letter to the CEO (chief executive officer) of SaskTel. And you know what

comes back from all of those individuals, Mr. Speaker, is there's not a business case for it.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I want to ask a rhetorical question here. Is there a business case for Navigata? It only lost 2.4 million. What's the business case for that compared to the business case for cellphones in rural Saskatchewan?

What's the business case for SecurTek? We just had the minister get up and talk about how good SecurTek was but it lost \$1.3 million — 2001. And he talked about growing or shrinking the economy. Is that growing or is that shrinking? That's NDP finance. They probably consider it growing. To the taxpayers, they would ultimately say it's sinking and shrinking the economy.

How about Craig Wireless? Where's the business plan for that? How about the business plan for Soft Tracks? That was a small one, only 2 point something million. Retx, I would like to see the business plan for Retx. How about *tappedinto.com*? Persona Inc.? All-Star?

The point being, Mr. Speaker, there's a host of ventures that have gone sour on the NDP and yet they say they've done due diligence and there's a business plan. But when it comes to providing services to rural Saskatchewan, it doesn't make business sense so we're not going to do it.

I also want to touch base on rural revitalization. They talk about we're doing good for rural Saskatchewan. Well let's put some fact into this.

Rural businesses have a very difficult time with this government. I've had three businesses start up in my constituency in the last year, Mr. Speaker, and every one of them have contacted me and have said unequivocally that they would never set up a business in this province, under this government, had of they known the difficulty it was going to take. They had problem after problem, and every problem they had was with a government agency. And yet here we have a government that says we're open for business. Ask the people that are actually entrepreneurs and trying to set up a business in this province, and they will tell you how difficult it is.

We talk about rural revitalization and helping the livestock industry. I've already talked about the livestock . . . the livestock industry in the Throne Speech, Mr. Speaker. Here we ship our cattle out. We ship our grain out. And we ship our children out to feed these cattle our grain in another province. That doesn't make economic sense. And it's not something that just happened in the last six months. That's happened under an NDP government for the last number of years.

And now we're going through a very, very serious issue with land lease. And here on one hand they're talking about helping agriculture, helping the rural areas, expanding the livestock industry, and on the next hand they're talking about taking away the lease land from the ranchers of this province. Absolutely disgusting. Absolutely a shame.

Mr. Speaker, I'm going to find one that's a little bit quicker here. Mr. Speaker, I want to talk about highways for minute. When I talked in my opening remarks about highways and the

situation in my constituency, these are not just my words, they're the words of the constituent.

I have a letter here that talks about Highway 4. And it talks about the dissatisfaction of the council with the condition of Highway 4 since — since — the \$3 million improvement. That's after the highway is improved, Mr. Speaker, and there is a problem and an issue with it. And the minister has the letter and I don't know if he's responded to it.

Now also through my constituency runs Highway 13. And this is on behalf of the Red Coat Regional Economic Development Authority, and talk about the critical condition of Highway 13 from Assiniboia east to Highway 6. And this is a pivotal corridor, Mr. Speaker, and it's necessary for . . . it's a major corridor for tourism and for trade.

And, Mr. Speaker, as my time is winding down, I guess I will just like to close — I have about another hour's worth here — but I would like to close by saying I will definitely, definitely be supporting the amendment to this budget, but there is no way that I would support the budget. Thank you.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**The Speaker:** — Order. Pursuant to rule 15 of our rule book, it is my duty now to advise the Assembly that the Minister of Finance will have 20 minutes to complete the debate on this motion.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

(12:30)

**Hon. Mr. Melnychuk:** — Well thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. And I'd like to begin this afternoon by thanking my family, friends, constituents, and colleagues for their support of me in my new role as Finance minister, and for their support of this budget.

I was very honoured to stand in this House last week as the new Finance minister to deliver the government's 10th consecutive balanced budget. That's right, Mr. Speaker, despite what the members opposite might say, this is the 10th consecutive balanced budget.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Hon. Mr. Melnychuk:** — And it's not only us calling it balanced, Mr. Speaker. It's also CIBC World Markets and it's the Bank of Montreal Nesbitt Burns. They're all saying the same thing, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, putting together something as big and complex as a \$6 billion provincial budget is no easy undertaking. There are months and months of preparation undertaken by the staff of the Department of Finance who strive to provide the best analysis and information possible for government to assess the various needs and priorities and make the final decisions to develop the budget.

There are many long hours of work that go into a budget, Mr. Speaker. Staff do indeed burn the midnight oil. And I think it is

worthwhile to commend those public servants on their valuable service they provide to Saskatchewan people, Mr. Speaker. I find it a privilege to work with this department and its very, very fine staff.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Hon. Mr. Melnychuk:** — Mr. Speaker, in the past few days, we've heard criticism of this budget. But this is a budget that this government stands behind, Mr. Speaker, because we are building for the future.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Hon. Mr. Melnychuk:** — Now, Mr. Speaker, I'd wager you can never produce a budget that is all things to all people. Mr. Speaker, despite the empty promises of the members opposite, people will always say that they want more — more money for this, another program for that. That's just human nature, Mr. Speaker. But a responsible government must strike a balance, Mr. Speaker, a balance between addressing priorities — that's a very important distinction — and managing the province's finances in a prudent, responsible manner. And with our budget, Mr. Speaker, we are doing just that.

We are indeed building for the future, a future that's wide open, being mindful that we are accountable to the fine citizens of this great province.

And how are we building for the future, Mr. Speaker? By making a record \$2.5 billion investment in health.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Hon. Mr. Melnychuk:** — And a record \$1.2 billion investment in education.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Hon. Mr. Melnychuk:** — We're increasing revenue sharing to municipalities by over 15 per cent.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Hon. Mr. Melnychuk:** — We're investing almost \$300 million in road and highway improvements. We're investing \$145 million for research and development . . . (inaudible) . . . expenditures and tax credits. We're providing more than \$300 million in capital projects and \$650 million in capital investments from the Crown sector, Mr. Speaker. That's progress.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Hon. Mr. Melnychuk:** — Now, Mr. Speaker, these are real investments, real commitments, and we're very proud of them, Mr. Speaker.

Now what would the members opposite do differently, Mr. Speaker? Would they argue that health care and education do not deserve additional funding? Would they not be buying CT (computerized tomography) scanners or building schools? Do they argue that we shouldn't invest in our roads and highways?

Should the government not invest in research and development to keep Saskatchewan competitive? Well we know what they've said. They had a platform in the last election and it was frozen for education and frozen for health care, Mr. Speaker.

They talked about tax cuts. We've provided tax cuts but we've also been investing in the people of this province, Mr. Speaker.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Hon. Mr. Melenchuk:** — Now, Mr. Speaker, it's easy to say, don't spend. But where would they cut? Surely they can't take issue with these priorities, and I will remind them that two-thirds of our budget spending, budget over budget, goes to health and the other third to education. These are priorities of this government, Mr. Speaker.

Now I must remind the Assembly, Mr. Speaker, just who was out spending money like basically it grew on trees in the late '80s and early '90s. It wasn't the members on this side of the House, Mr. Speaker; it was the members across the way.

Mr. Speaker, with this budget we are building healthy and self-reliant families, we are building opportunities for youth, we are building a prosperous and competitive economy, we are building a modern and competitive infrastructure, and we are building strong and vibrant communities, Mr. Speaker.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Hon. Mr. Melenchuk:** — We make no apologies for building for our future, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the members opposite have made quite an issue of the Fiscal Stabilization Fund, despite the fact that jurisdictions across Canada use similar funds to balance their budgets. It's recognized as a prudent way to manage finances, and even the Provincial Auditor compliments this government on its cash management practices.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Hon. Mr. Melenchuk:** — And, Mr. Speaker, say what they might, the critics across the way cannot dispute the fact that we are forecasting to balance last year's budget with no transfer from the Fiscal Stabilization Fund. Mr. Speaker, zero transfer. It was there if we needed it, that's the intent of the fund. But we didn't need it.

We didn't even receive any equalization payments from Ottawa last year, and we are having a \$2.1 million surplus. That's amazing, excellent money management, Mr. Speaker.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Hon. Mr. Melenchuk:** — Now I've listened carefully to the week of debate here, Mr. Speaker, and I haven't heard the members opposite not once mention that surplus of \$2.1 million last year. Not once, Mr. Speaker.

Now last year, Mr. Speaker, they had plenty to say. The Leader of the Opposition, interviewed by CKRM radio, said of this government, and I quote:

They're in trouble. They've done some mismanaging.

He also said, and I quote:

This could be a 3-D budget — a deception and deficit and discouragement on the part of Saskatchewan people realizing that we've gone from surplus into difficult financial times.

And the Finance critic, what did he say? On CKTV last year on budget day wondered, and I quote:

Will it be a \$300 million deficit? Oh, will it be a \$700 million deficit?

And then he said:

We have to be able to create a situation in Saskatchewan where we have the revenue to be able to balance. This government is (providing) proving they are incapable of doing that.

Mr. Speaker, how wrong can they be and how wrong can they get? A \$2.1 million surplus is certainly not a deficit, and it's not a 300 million or a 700 million, it's a \$2.1 million surplus, Mr. Speaker.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Hon. Mr. Melenchuk:** — And now, Mr. Speaker, the doom and gloomers across the way say our forecast of 6.8 per cent growth in GDP (gross domestic product) for this year is, well, it's just not realistic, Mr. Speaker. But everybody else is saying it's realistic. Everybody else is saying that it's forecast . . . They're all forecasting growth. But the doom and gloomers don't want us to forecast growth, Mr. Speaker. They don't want growth, Mr. Speaker.

Now, Mr. Speaker, why are they saying that? Because the Finance officials have a proven track record and that's something that can't be disputed, Mr. Speaker. As much as the members opposite would like to say the numbers don't add up, they do. And the department officials have been right year after year after year.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Hon. Mr. Melenchuk:** — Now our numbers are predicated on a normal crop and it seems the members opposite don't believe we're going to have an average crop. Now I have to wonder what their forecast is? What are they predicting?

Mr. Speaker, it is important to note that while agriculture is terribly important to Saskatchewan, that the size of the harvest does affect the GDP, the size of the harvest does not have a whole lot of effect on the budget's revenue forecast. There is no one-to-one correlation between GDP and revenues. And last year, for example, our real GDP dropped 3 percentage points from our forecast yet revenues were up \$310 million on a net basis.

So the impact of change of GDP, up or down, on our revenues depends on the specific sectoral economic changes that occur.



The opposition's questions on this topic all week further demonstrate their lack of understanding of provincial finances, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, for the last 20 years our forecasts have been based on an average crop, and for the last 20 years our forecasts have been very accurate. So let's talk about accuracy of forecasts a bit again.

Last year the Finance critic called the government's provincial sales tax forecasts, and I quote, "a bogus revenue number." He went on to claim that an increase of 6.6 per cent or 51 million was not possible and didn't add up, Mr. Speaker. And I am pleased to report that the Department of Finance forecast was bang on, in fact it might have been a tad low.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Hon. Mr. Melnychuk:** — In fact, Mr. Speaker, PST (provincial sales tax) revenue for 2002-03 is up 7 per cent above the 2001-02 level. Department forecasters were extremely accurate on the revenue projection.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Hon. Mr. Melnychuk:** — Now, Mr. Speaker, when we talk about forecasts we know the Department of Finance is very accurate.

We know the members opposite are relatively inaccurate, in fact they've been mostly inaccurate the past few years.

And I would like to comment a bit about what the CIBC World Markets notes with regard to our increase.

The associate level of real output falls within the band foreseen by economic forecasters.

CIBC World Markets, "Provincial Budget Briefs," March 28, 2003.

And the Bank of Montreal doesn't question the 6.8 per cent forecast. They simply note it's based on a return to normal crop levels after two years of severe drought — BMO Nesbitt Burns Economic Research, Saskatchewan highlights, March 28, 2003.

And even the Conference Board of Canada has said, that if we get a normal crop:

I don't think 6.8 per cent economic growth is overly optimistic.

And that's a quote from David Madani, Conference Board of Canada, Regina *Leader-Post*, March 29, 2003, Mr. Speaker.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I will also point out that in 1990 we jumped 7 per cent after recording a 2.4 per cent in 1989 and a negative 3.4 per cent in 1988. So we rebounded after 2 years of drought. And we experienced another big swing in 1993 when we hit 6.6 per cent after recording a negative 4.5.

Mr. Speaker, we have a proven track record — a track record of accurate forecasts, a track record of balanced budgets, and also

a track record credit rating upgrades. To be precise, Mr. Speaker, 10 credit rating upgrades since 1995.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Hon. Mr. Melnychuk:** — And, Mr. Speaker, we're on the right track with our tax reform measures. We have been lowering taxes over the last decade and during the last three years we have made dramatic reductions.

A family of four earning 50,000 has had a 37 per cent reduction in personal income tax. We've also eliminated the flat tax, the high-income surtax, and the debt reduction surtax. The dreaded flat tax that hit fixed-income seniors the hardest, Mr. Speaker — it's gone.

We have reduced tax rates three times in the last three years. The final stage of personal income tax reform was introduced January 1, with lower tax rates and higher family tax credits, and will result in a further tax reduction of \$78 million this year, Mr. Speaker — significant tax reductions.

Mr. Speaker, our top marginal tax rate is now the third lowest in Canada, and beginning January 1, 2004 the income tax system will be fully indexed to inflation, eliminating bracket three.

Now let, Mr. Speaker, let me talk a bit more about taxes and how we're encouraging growth, and how we are building for the future of this province.

The small-business corporate income tax rate will be reduced from 6 per cent to 5 per cent over two years; that will be half of what it was in 1991. And we're also expanding the incremental corporate capital tax exemption for Saskatchewan-based companies from five to ten million over two years. That will make Saskatchewan the highest tax exemption threshold for all Canadian provinces, Mr. Speaker — the highest in Canada.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Hon. Mr. Melnychuk:** — Now, Mr. Speaker, the members opposite have expressed concern about debt levels, which is quite ironic and quite laughable, Mr. Speaker, when you think of their past experience in running up the debt for nine consecutive years on an accumulated deficit basis.

The cost to fight forest fires, the cost to providing drought and livestock assistance — these have contributed to our increase in debt, Mr. Speaker. And we're not apologizing for fighting fires or for providing assistance to livestock producers, Mr. Speaker.

I will also point out, Mr. Speaker, that Saskatchewan went from having one of the highest government debt to GDP ratios in Canada when that group left, Mr. Speaker, to having one of the lowest debt to GDP ratios.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Hon. Mr. Melnychuk:** — Mr. Speaker, our government has debt under control. In this budget we're also providing funding for social housing, social programs, more child care spaces, programs for vulnerable families and youth at risk. We are providing funding to hire more police; funding for

municipalities — a \$60 million increase in funding over three years to municipalities. And I might add we're adding \$27 million in funding for northern Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker.

(12:45)

More funding for health. More funding for education. More funding for highway improvements. Mr. Speaker, we are optimistic about the future of the province. It's wide open and we are embracing every opportunity that we can, Mr. Speaker.

We believe that this province has a future that is wide open and despite the negativism, the doom and gloom from the members opposite, we are moving forward with this budget. We are moving forward with progress for the people of Saskatchewan. And I obviously will be supporting the budget and not the amendment by the opposition.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**The Speaker:** — Order. Order, members. Members will come to order. Order.

The division bells rang from 12:48 until 12:50.

Amendment negatived on the following recorded division.

#### Yeas — 23

Toth	Heppner	Julé
Krawetz	Gantfoer	Bjornerud
Elhard		

**The Speaker:** — Order, please, members. Order. Order. Thank you.

Wakefield	Stewart	Harpauer
Eagles	McMorris	D'Autremont
Bakken	Huyghebaert	Dearborn
Brkich	Wiberg	Weekes
Lorenz	Hart	Allchurch
Hillson		

#### Nays — 30

Calvert	Addley	Crofford
Hagel	Lautermilch	Serby
Melenchuk	Cline	Sonntag
Osika	Lorjé	Kasperski
Goulet	Van Mulligen	Prebble
Belanger	Thomson	Junor
Nilson	Atkinson	Hamilton
Harper	Forbes	Jones
Higgins	Trew	Wartman
Yates	McCall	Iwanchuk

The division bells rang from 12:53 until 12:54.

Motion agreed to on the following recorded division.

#### Yeas — 30

Calvert	Addley	Crofford
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Hagel	Lautermilch	Serby
Melenchuk	Cline	Sonntag
Osika	Lorjé	Kasperski
Goulet	Van Mulligen	Prebble
Belanger	Thomson	Junor
Nilson	Atkinson	Hamilton
Harper	Forbes	Jones
Higgins	Trew	Wartman
Yates	McCall	Iwanchuk

#### Nays — 23

Toth	Heppner	Julé
Krawetz	Gantfoer	Bjornerud
Elhard	Wakefield	Stewart
Harpauer		

**The Speaker:** — Order, please. Order, please. Order, please, members, we must respect . . . Order. We must respect this process, members. We must respect this process. The vote will continue.

Eagles	McMorris	D'Autremont
Bakken	Huyghebaert	Dearborn
Brkich	Wiberg	Weekes
Lorenz	Hart	Allchurch
Hillson		

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

#### COMMITTEE OF FINANCE

The committee reported progress.

**Hon. Mr. Lautermilch:** — Mr. Speaker, I move this House do now adjourn.

**The Speaker:** — I wish everyone a good weekend.

The Assembly adjourned at 12:58.

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