

The Assembly met at 2 p.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Mr. Hagel: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to introduce to you, and through you to the members of the Assembly, 17 grade 5 students from St. Margaret School in Moose Jaw. Mr. Speaker, St. Margaret's School is a French immersion school in Moose Jaw, and I understand that the tour that these students just completed was conducted in French. They are accompanied today by their instructor, Mr. Vic Lavallée, and following question period I will be joining them for pictures and a visit and drinks which will be in room 255 of the Legislative Assembly Building.

I introduce them on behalf of my colleague, the member from Moose Jaw South; the school is located in his riding although several of the students will live in my riding as well.

Mr. Speaker, they are seated in the east gallery, and I would ask you and all members of the Assembly to show a warm welcome to these students from St. Margaret School.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Hepworth: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, I would like to introduce to you, and through you to all members of the Legislative Assembly, some 60 students seated in your gallery, sir. These are grade 8 students from the Weyburn Junior High School. We had a similar group here yesterday with us, Mr. Speaker. They are accompanied by teachers Dean Leach and Jim Nedelcov. I know they have had a tour already of the Legislative Building. This is, as I mentioned yesterday, a tradition of Weyburn Junior High to bring their students here. I will be meeting with them after question period, and I would ask all members of the Legislative Assembly to join with me in welcoming these young people to our Chambers, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ORAL QUESTIONS

Alleged Budget Leak

Mr. Romanow: Mr. Speaker, my question is to the Minister of Finance. According to recent news reports, most notably on the CBC, there appears to have been a major leak from the Department of Finance respecting Thursday's budget to be delivered in this Chamber which, as you know, Mr. Speaker, if so, represents a very major breach of parliamentary tradition and privileges.

My question to the minister is this: Will you advise the House whether or not portions of your budget, as reported on the CBC, were leaked to the media, and if those portions as reported are accurate or false.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lane: Well as I indicated to the media yesterday that there's some speculation on the CBC, and speculation is all it is.

Mr. Romanow: Mr. Speaker, a new question. The Minister of Finance would have us believe and the public believe that this is a matter of speculation, yet the CBC news report was not speculative, Mr. Speaker, it was directly specific saying in part, quote: "The CBC has learned some of the details of the budget," referring to the budget, and then indeed identifying three or four major matters pertaining to tax increases which, as you know, sir, is indeed a very grave matter because it would give public advantage to some and not to others with respect to the announcement of prospective budget increases.

So my question to you, Mr. Minister, is this: the House needs a clear answer from you to the question which I have asked — whether or not there was a leak. I'll put it to you another way. Has the CBC learned the details of portions of the budget or has it not? A simple yes or no would suffice.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lane: Well I've been in this House 17 years and I've never figured out what the CBC has learned, so I can't answer the Hon. Leader of the Opposition's question as to what they've learned.

I've indicated that the news report was speculation, and I can't tell you more than that. You'll have to do a comparison when the budget's announced to see whether you think there was a leak or not. I don't think there was any leak and certainly the speculation about the budget . . . Even the hon. member, the Finance minister, was speculating about the budget the other day, and if it's improper for him to speculate the budget, I am surprised. That's not the way the system works.

I think that I can indicate to the hon. member, Hansard back in 1982 where his seat mate was then Finance minister and did in fact have a leak, and there were many discussion with your predecessor that day as to the public consultation and the public involvement in the budgetary development, so I would urge the hon. member to calm down a bit, that it's speculation, and that's all it is.

Mr. Romanow: Mr. Speaker, a new question to the Minister of Finance. And with the greatest of respect to the Minister of Finance and the treasury benches opposite, I think this is a matter which deserves a serious consideration by them. Because I repeat again, Mr. Speaker, and I have a copy of the CBC news report, and I must simply beg the indulgence of the House to cite this one sentence of the report. It says, quote:

Although Lane won't reveal the contents of the budget until Thursday, CBC News has learned some of the details. The deficit will be the second or third lowest since the Conservatives came to office . . .

And so forth. I'm mindful of your rules that the question should not be long, or the preamble long. And on it goes in specific details. Note, Mr. Speaker, the words are specific, that CBC "has learned."

My question to the Minister of Finance is this: one of the things the CBC has learned, it says, is that the flat tax which you have imposed, this unfair flat tax, will go from 1.5 per cent to 2 per cent. Will the minister specifically deny that statement? And if not, will he then admit that there's been a serious breach of parliamentary tradition and practice?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lane: Mr. Speaker, speculation about the flat tax has been going on for some time. I have indicated that the government would be considering changes to the flat tax. I've said that publicly for some several months. The opposition critic for Finance has indicated that he believes the flat tax is going up. You're saying the flat tax is going up. If there's a change to the flat tax, it should be of absolutely no surprise to anybody; I've said that for several months.

I really think, Mr. Speaker, the bigger problem that the opposition leader faces right now is that if there was a leak, he should be talking to his Finance minister, who wasn't aware of the leak in the first place.

Mr. Koskie: A question to the Minister of Finance. Mr. Minister, I want to ask you: as a result of the CBC leak of their report, I want to ask you whether, in fact, that you have conducted an investigation into your department, outside of your department, to determine whether or not . . . And I ask you, Mr. Speaker, in your investigation can you indicate the nature of that investigation if indeed you did carry out an investigation; and I ask you, did you investigate yourself and your immediate staff?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lane: Fully aware of the Peter Principle, I apologize to the House for calling the opposition Finance critic the minister. I recognize one may reach certain levels, but having said that, no, there was no investigation. Secondly, I don't believe an investigation is necessary. Thirdly, there has been much budget speculation. I think the hon. member for helping assist me in that speculation. But finally, let me assure the hon. member that even if there was an investigation, which I don't believe is necessary, the investigation would not be broad enough to include . . . to find out why the opposition critic didn't get a copy of the so-called leak.

Mr. Koskie: Mr. Speaker, a new question. I want to ask you, Mr. Minister: when the budget comes down, and if in fact it turns out that the CBC story is based on more than mere speculation, and that it does indeed contain factual numbers, and particularly in respect to the tax on tobacco, I want to ask you: in light of that — as you will appreciate and as you raised in this House back in 1982 — it would follow that some people could in fact gain some advantage by a pre-announcement of the tobacco tax, if indeed it comes to pass?

I ask you, Mr. Minister, I want to ask you, Mr. Minister, do you not consider that that in fact would constitute a serious breach of confidentiality of the budget? And under those circumstances, if it comes to pass, I ask you whether you are in fact prepared to do the honourable thing, and to submit your resignation as Minister of Finance?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lane: Well, Mr. Speaker, if anyone is surprised that tobacco taxes go up in budgets, it's only the NDP that would be surprised, and that's very recent, because I believe tobacco taxes have gone up virtually every year. Let me just refer the hon. member to *Hansard* of March 16, 1982 where the then leader of the opposition, then premier of this province, the former leader of the opposition, when he talked about . . . that their government had increased the tobacco taxes in every single budget, so that is not surprising speculation.

And I'm quoting *Hansard* from the then premier of this province, so if tobacco taxes go out . . . and go up and the average person here buys an extra couple of cartons, I'm not going to begrudge them that.

You may recall last year that I indicated well in advance of the budget that there was a likelihood of the sales tax going up. I made that clear so that the average person could take some advantage of that. So I think that your point is not particularly well taken, and if you're at all surprised, or if anybody's surprised if tobacco taxes go up, they shouldn't be.

Mr. Koskie: Well, Mr. Minister, you stood in this House and you didn't show any surprise when the circumstances were on the Minister of Finance and the then Blakeney government, a similar situation in respect to tobacco tax. And I'll tell you what they did in that time, under those circumstances because the . . .

Mr. Speaker: Order, order, order. I believe the hon. member is getting into a fairly lengthy preamble, and I'd ask him to get to his question.

Mr. Koskie: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'll get directly to the supplement. In those circumstances as you have been familiar with when there was a release of the imposition of a tobacco tax, the then minister, what he did was to then announce immediately that the tobacco tax would become effective. And I'm asking you: have you considered that, in the light of your lack of denial and in light of the fact that there could be people who could benefit from the pre-announcement of the tobacco tax?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lane: I would expect, Mr. Speaker, that as we approach budget, that having had tobacco tax increases for 15 years, in every single budget for 15 years, that the smokers in this province don't go out pre-budget to buy some cigarettes, I would be very, very much surprised, Mr. Speaker.

And I suggest to the hon. member, if you want me to impose a tax in advance of the budget so that the average

person pays more taxes, that's a change in policy of the New Democratic Party, and I'm glad it's on record.

Possible Flat Tax Increase

Mr. Goodale: Mr. Speaker, I wonder if the Minister of Finance could indicate whether the Leader-Post is correct today when that newspaper suggests that there will in fact be a flat tax increase included in your budget on Thursday, and in one specific detail that newspaper suggests that the tax will take effect only on July 1. Can the minister confirm that that detail as reported by the Leader-Post today is correct?

Hon. Mr. Lane: Well again it's pure speculation, and I think that the hon. member will find out on Thursday as to when the tax goes into effect. And I simply indicate to the hon. members opposite that, just so you don't get all caught up and wound up, that the budget was printed before the stories ran, so there's no changes in the budget to reflect any changes, as has been done, I believe, in past federal governments.

Mr. Goodale: Mr. Speaker, would the minister not agree that the suggestion in a media publication, not only that a tax may be changed but in fact the specific date when it might come into effect, would the minister not agree that that is more than just idle speculation, and which should indicate to him that somebody somewhere has had specific access to some of his budget documents, and that is a subject that should be of concern to him in terms of the security of his own system.

Hon. Mr. Lane: Well I don't have the concerns of the hon. member. I certainly made it clear that I have discussed thrust and indications of where the budget was going for the last couple of years, last three years. I have been, I believe, as open as I possibly could in indicating to the people of this province what the thrust of the budgets were, and I will continue to do that.

That certainly one can interpret that as the Minister of Finance leaking his own budget, but I'm not sure that's the case. I can go back to the past history in this province where others have stood up and said that involving the public as much as you can in a budget is a desirable practice. I happen to believe that it is. All I can indicate on the specific question to the hon. member is that the dates that he referred to, he can judge those in the budget on Thursday.

Mr. Romanow: I have a new question, and I have to direct it to the Deputy Premier, in the face of the obviously unsatisfactory answers from the Minister of Finance.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Romanow: Mr. Speaker, nobody on this side of the House denies the right of the Minister of Finance to talk about the general thrusts of taxation and fiscal policy. That is clearly within his domain, if I may say so, but that's not the issue here.

Mr. Speaker, the issue is the announcement of specific details on tax increases which, under parliamentary

tradition, have got to be kept strictly confidential to the budget day for obvious reasons. And this minister has displayed a total lackadaisical, indifferent attitude to that very serious problem in question period today.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Romanow: My question to the Deputy Premier is this — in the absence of the Premier, since the Minister of Finance obviously does not want to treat this with any degree of gravity, obviously does not want to treat it as a matter of parliamentary tradition — my question to you, sir, is: will you do what is right and conduct an investigation of the Minister of finance's office, including the Minister of Finance, to find out whether or not the CBC was leaked this information, and if so, what steps were taken to prevent it in the future?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Berntson: Mr. Speaker, I think that it's impossible to tell whether or not it is pure speculation until such times as the budget is tabled, Mr. Speaker.

The member for Quill Lakes, the opposition Finance critic, yesterday didn't find this to be such an urgent and compelling thing. He sat there on his hands all during question period yesterday, Mr. Speaker. And I'm told that this speculation was going on in the media as early as yesterday morning. So this, quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, is a tempest in a teapot.

Ward system in Municipal Elections

Mr. Tchorzewski: Mr. Speaker, I have a question to the Minister of Urban Affairs, the minister in charge of the proposed municipal gerrymander Bill.

Mr. Minister, your statements about your intentions to arbitrarily do away with the ward system in municipal elections has caused widespread concern. Last night the city councils of Prince Albert and Regina passed resolutions saying to you in no uncertain terms that you're dead wrong, and that it is the right of municipal electors to decide whether they wish to have a ward system in their municipality or not.

In light of that, Mr. Minister, will you make it clear to this House and to the people in Regina, Saskatoon and P.A. and other cities, that you will not proceed with this arbitrary notion of yours that you should do away with the ward system in spite of the wishes of the majority?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, I don't believe that our government has made a fair commitment or an announcement to that regard. But in any event, regarding the plebiscites — regarding the plebiscites, plebiscites are costly and expensive procedures. Plebiscites are matters which have been established — as a matter of fact can, I think, be open to some serious criticism, some serious criticism of the judgement in terms of the expenditure by city fathers, in terms of all of the other priorities for money spending that they have. A plebiscite will in fact be an expensive and costly opinion poll which will hurt the

ratepayers. And it goes on and on. I didn't say that, but in May of 1973 the Leader of the Opposition did.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Tchorzewski: Mr. Speaker, a new question to the minister. Mr. Minister, here we have a case of you, sir, and your government dictatorially imposing its will on the people who live in the cities, who appreciate a ward system.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Tchorzewski: Plebiscites have already been held in Prince Albert and Regina and in Saskatoon, and the electors in those municipalities said they want a ward system in Regina — 70 per cent of them said that they wanted the ward system.

Now in view of these undeniable facts, Mr. Minister, can you tell the House who it is you're representing when you talk about your intention to arbitrarily do away with the ward system?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, this debate has been going on since 1959. Regina in 1959 voted no. Regina in 1970 voted no. In 1973 the NDP government imposed it. Saskatoon voted no, and you still imposed it.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Tchorzewski: Mr. Minister, can I ask you a supplementary, and it is this: have you consulted with Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association on your proposal, and have they said that you should proceed?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, we consult with SUMA (Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association) an awful lot. This seems to be an issue, however, that affects four cities. The major consultative process of this issue is with the taxpayers.

As Minister of Urban Affairs, Mr. Speaker, believe that it is my responsibility to be concerned with the high, rising property taxes that exist in all of our urban centres throughout Saskatchewan and to control those escalating taxes as best we can.

Clearly the ward system is a very inefficient way of operating a municipal government, and day after day — they hoot and holler. They put it in. We saw what happened. But none the less, the sophisticated taxpayer today and the intelligent voter today has no problem distinguishing amongst the aldermen that choose to run at a particular municipal location.

The only people that are really hollering about this, Mr. Speaker, really, are the aldermen, and I suppose it might be better to ask them, what do they fear? Do they fear representing their cities at large, their cities as a whole? And in any event, the next question that it brings forward — and this is controlled in the Act, and it's strange that the

media has never asked me this.

We haven't made any announcement on the ward system yet, but if we're talking efficiencies, the Act also control one other important thing: how many aldermen should these municipalities have?

Mr. Tchorzewski: Mr. Speaker, a new question to the minister. Mr. Minister, 70 per cent of the voters in the city of Regina in a plebiscite said they want the ward system. That is pretty definitive and pretty certain.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Tchorzewski: You have said before, and you said again today, and you're saying that the ward system is responsible for increased spending by municipalities and the increased debt load of municipalities. Can you explain to this House on what you base that accusation, Mr. Minister, and can you also tell us if you are saying that the system of provincial constituencies are at fault for the massive \$3.4 billion deficit that your government has rung up?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, what my learned friend is bringing up really amazes me. We in this Assembly are elected on a totally different process. We have a government; we have an opposition. So that as a result, we come in here and we're responsible to the entire tax paying public of the province.

At the municipal level, when you have ward aldermen that come in and represent a very narrow viewpoint and make trade-offs — this for that, and all the rest of it — you know, it really begs the question. And I suppose that I could refer to an article in your reference library, the Leader-Post, where a municipal expert, a professor from the University of Saskatoon, spoke out against the ward system, and why.

Now here's a municipal expert; I've never met the man, but obviously agrees with exactly what we're talking about. And as we go around and talk to the people and hear their complaints and hear their concerns, and why can I only elect one alderman, why can't I elect the entire government of that municipality, and the like, it really overwhelms me that the benches opposite can't, when they fought like the devil in 1973 to impose it against plebiscites and all the rest of it, why they can't use the same argument now when we're in a discussion of bringing some reasonable form of government back to municipalities.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Tchorzewski: A new question to the minister, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'm appalled . . .

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Tchorzewski: I'm appalled by the minister who would stand in this House and condemn men and women elected by voters in municipalities throughout all of Saskatchewan, as he's done today. Mr. Minister, the

financial pressure on municipalities and on the taxpayers in those municipalities has been brought about because of your government's deliberate shift of the tax load from the province to the property taxpayer.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Tchorzewski: Why don't you admit, Mr. Minister that your purpose in suggesting that you will do away with the ward system is strictly political, partisan politics, in which you feel that without a ward system the people who will get elected to municipal councils will be people who are representative of only your point of view. Mr. Minister, why don't you admit that and become honest for a change?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, these people are living so far in the past it's unbelievable. If our government chooses to do something with the ward system, we'll get into some very interesting debate because the Leader of the Opposition, again in 1973, assured us there was no political politics involved in that system. So we can talk about them, but they're living in the past.

The new Leader of the Opposition waited — he's admitted that he's waited 17 years to get crowned the Leader of the Opposition. But it's kind of like the captain of the Titanic — he switched around his deck-chairs over there, and now we've got a new critic of Urban Affairs who just said that the ward system exists in all municipalities. There's only four that they . . .

An Hon. Member: Three.

Hon. Mr. Klein: No, not three. Four. There's only four that it exists in. And in those four, one chose not to go with it.

Now you refer to plebiscites, and I could refer to plebiscites as well, and in 1976 Saskatoon turned it down. And did the government of the day do anything? No. So that I think that in our wisdom, if the government firmly believes that a more efficient way of operating is electing at large, then I suppose that's the way we'll have to go.

In the meantime, the aldermen that represent the existing wards — and I never did criticize them; I just simply indicated that they come in with narrow points of view — but a good alderman, elected at large, and those ward aldermen could very well be elected at large, I believe that the taxpayer, who I am concerned with, has the right to elect the entire city council.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. Order, please. I believe question period is over. I'd like some quiet, please.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

SPECIAL ORDER

ADJOURNED DEBATES

ADDRESS IN REPLY

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the address in reply which was moved by Mr. Neudorf and the amendment thereto moved by Ms. Simard.

Hon. Mr. Berntson: Mr. Speaker, I know that many members opposite have waited in eager anticipation of this moment, and so, not wanting to let them down, I want to talk firstly, Mr. Speaker, about the annual report of SaskPower that was tabled just a few moments ago.

In that annual report, Mr. Speaker, it shows that the corporation made a profit of \$36 million in 1987, Mr. Speaker. Both the gas and the electrical utility were profitable — gas with a \$16 million profit and the electric utility with a \$20 million profit, Mr. Speaker.

Although the corporation has made a significant turn-around financially, this year's profit of \$36 million is only a dent in the debt of 2.6 billion. It comes after a \$10 million loss in 1986 and a net loss of 22 million over the last five years. Unless the corporation can resolve this debt problem, Mr. Speaker, it will have to begin to achieve profits of at least 100 to \$150 million a year to reduce the debt and finally bring costs to a level, Mr. Speaker, so that the rate changes can be held to inflation or less, or possibly even be reduced.

At the beginning of 1987, Mr. Speaker, the management of SaskPower, the board of directors, and the government decided that the situation had to change immediately or the long-term consequences would be unbearable. SaskPower had to control spending, including interest charges paid on the debt. They had to make significant charges paid on the debt. They had to make significant profits, Mr. Speaker, to substantially reduce the debt that had been accumulated. Making a profit was the only way to get some money to start paying it back, Mr. Speaker.

I expect SaskPower, Mr. Speaker, I expect SaskPower to continue seeking alternatives to work its way toward a positive financial position. This will mean diligence, prudent management, and creative thinking. Judging by the turn-around, Mr. Speaker, which has already started, I believe the current SaskPower leadership will achieve this financial health while keeping rates down and serving their customers in the excellent fashion that has been SaskPower's tradition, Mr. Speaker.

And, Mr. Speaker, I want to also point out that this has been done, this beginning of a turn-around has been done at a time when the number of employees at SaskPower has been reduced significantly. So we have fewer employees delivering the service, and I think to the customer's satisfaction in a very effective way, Mr. Speaker. And I think that the employees of SaskPower deserve a great deal of credit for the work that they've done in that respect over the last year, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Berntson: Before I leave the annual report, just so the members of the opposition have the fact before them, I want to point out a couple of comparisons, Mr. Speaker. Rate increases, and this is the system

average, Mr. Speaker, on the electrical side of the utility on the seven years immediately previous to April 26 of 1982, on the electrical side in those seven years there was a 99.9 per cent rate increase in those seven years, Mr. Speaker. That's an average rate increase of those seven years, Mr. Speaker, of 14.3 per cent — 14.3 per cent, Mr. Speaker.

Now let's take a comparable period — since April 26 of 1982. Well we've only got six and a half years, and during that six-and-half-year period we have had a total rate increase, Mr. Speaker, of 42.9 per cent, or an average of 6.6 per cent, Mr. Speaker, in that period.

Now that's a fair and reasonable comparison, Mr. Speaker. Members opposite, during their last seven years in office — and the people of Saskatchewan in light of these facts will never see them back again — had rate increases on the electrical side more than twice of a comparable period of this government, Mr. Speaker. On the gas side of the utility, in the same seven years prior to '82 gas rate increased 188.5 per cent, an average of 26.9 per cent, Mr. Speaker. Compare that to the years since April of 1982, Mr. Speaker. The total increase on the gas utility since April of 1982 is 5.3 per cent, Mr. Speaker, or an average of .8 per cent. Mr. Speaker, the rate increases in the gas utility for the last seven years that they were in power as compared to the first six and one-half or seven that we've been here, Mr. Speaker, their rate increases, I think a quick calculation will show you, about 35-fold more than ours. I hope members opposite are paying attention, Mr. Speaker, because those happen to be the facts.

Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure for me to have the opportunity to speak to the throne speech and the motion of my friend, the member from Rosthern. In his remarks moving the motion, Mr. Speaker, my colleague noted that this throne speech is one that embodies the principles of responsibility and commitment. I would like to address those principles in my remarks today, particularly as they relate to the duties that I've been asked to carry out in this legislature, Mr. Speaker, and in this government; and indeed, Mr. Speaker, to relate to the duties of some other members of the Legislative Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, I will not assume, even though the evidence so strongly points to it, I will not assume that the member for Regina Rosemont is intentionally uneducated about his responsibilities as a critic. Nor will I assume that the lack of factual information in his statements and claims is rally his own fault. I've decided instead, Mr. Speaker, to believe that the problem must be that he has not had time to acquaint himself with all of the facts relative to the responsibility that he has. After all, Mr. Speaker, I can understand that when one is busily designing a quote: massive intervention, massive government intervention into the economy, end quote, that one must not have much time left for such trifles as facts about the Rafferty-Alameda and Shand projects, even of such an apparently unimportant thing as SaskPower.

Or perhaps, Mr. Speaker, the member from Rosemont has simply been unable to follow the explanations of the professionals in this subject. Therefore, Mr. Speaker, I'd

like to give some help to the member and take some time to go over the details of the Rafferty-Alameda and Shand projects and explain to him in the simplest terms possible what the facts are.

The first thing the member has said about the project, Mr. Speaker, is that it is a political boondoggle because it was built — it was built in the constituencies of Estevan and Souris-Cannington, or that's where it's proposed to be built — and those constituencies happen to be represented by Conservative MLAs. But, Mr. Speaker, I don't think — I don't believe the member would really expect us to build such a project in Regina Rosemont. The river is in Estevan and Souris-Cannington.

It seems logical then that — and I know that there may be a storm drainage gutter that runs through the riding of the hon. member, but, Mr. Speaker, it simply could not support the needs of a major project like Rafferty, and the hon. member ought to know that. In fact, Mr. Speaker, the suggestion that the project should be built in any NDP-held riding is absurd, and that suggestion in itself is a political boondoggle, Mr. Speaker.

One further thing, Mr. Speaker, is the fact that a study conducted by the previous administration in 1981, the NDP administration, provides an interesting revelation.

The study, called the Estevan redevelopment study, looked at a number of options for increasing the electricity supply in the province. This study identified Shand, Mr. Speaker, and concluded that it was the best option for the next stage of power generation in the province of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, even the former NDP minister of the Environment, one Neil Byers, recognized the need, and he stated in 1974:

The Souris Basin has been the subject of more theoretical development than any other river basin in our province. Development has been advanced by every political party. This interest in development comes naturally to people of the Souris. The big barrier has been water. The immediate problem is to ensure a regular supply of water in the face of wide variations of flow during the year and from year to year.

Mr. Speaker, so even an NDP minister recognized the need and the validity for these developments. But the member for Rosemont has said that there will not be enough water to cool the Shand power plant. And again, Mr. Speaker, I understand how busy he is with his NDP rule books and planning meetings and so on, but it doesn't seem unfair, Mr. Speaker, to ask that member to acquaint himself with the facts, or at least to say nothing.

(1445)

The facts are, Mr. Speaker, that the Saskatchewan Water Corporation has conducted a hydrology analysis, and for the benefit of that member, hydrology, Mr. Speaker, is the study of water, the flows of water. The results of that analysis make it quite clear that there will be sufficient water to cool two units at Shand, Mr. Speaker, and irrigate

12,000 acres of land, provide water for recreational use, municipal consumption and, Mr. Speaker, an added bonus of flood control.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I did not do that analysis. SaskPower did not do that analysis. The professionals at Sask Water did that analysis, Mr. Speaker. And I find it a little annoying that the member from Rosemont would care so little for his credibility that he would impugn the efforts and the reputations of very highly qualified professionals at Sask Water. The member for Rosemont has said that even if all this is true, Saskatchewan should have bought the power that will be generated by Shand from the Manitoba electrical utility instead.

I don't know if he will be of that opinion, Mr. Speaker, after April 26 of this year. I doubt it. But, Mr. Speaker, I suppose it all fits in with his values of putting the NDP ahead of the truth, ahead of the professional advice, and ahead of the people of Saskatchewan, because the simple fact is, Mr. Speaker, that for every dollar we will invest in Shand, we would have had to spend \$1.50 to get the equivalent amount of energy from Manitoba Hydro. The member for Rosemont is advising us to spend 50 per cent more to buy from his friends in Manitoba. I ask you, Mr. Speaker, where is the political boondoggle?

The member has said we should at least have studied the thing more, that there has not been enough examination. Well, Mr. Speaker, there was the Estevan study I just mentioned from 1979 to 1981, and in fact, the fact is that this project is the culmination of 80 years of effort and study, with the first proposal for the Alameda in 1907. And in 1932, Mr. Speaker, the Rafferty was proposed.

There was the 1940 IJC (International Joint Commission) study; there was the 1959 IJC study; there was the Red Rainy Basin study; the Nelson basin study; the Souris Basin study; the Burlington study; the Lake Darling study; the Souris Basin Development Authority study; and the Souris River study; our environmental impact hearings, and on and on, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, this particular river, the Souris River, is one of the most studied rivers in the world.

At a time, Mr. Speaker . . . there comes a time when you either act and proceed with the development and building, or you give up. But the member for Rosemont wants us to study it some more — study it some more and in fact, study it until the area is represented by NDP MLAs. And, Mr. Speaker, I think if we were to wait for that, we'd be waiting a very long time.

The member from Rosemont has said that Environment Canada has taken the position that the project is not viable. Mr. Speaker, I don't want to speak too harshly here, but that simply is not true. So one of two things: either the member is deliberately misleading the people of Saskatchewan, or, I continue to assume, he has simply not informed himself.

Environment Canada will examine the project carefully, and because I have confidence in the professionalism and knowledge of our people at SaskPower, Sask Water, and Environment, I am completely confident that Environment Canada's approval will be forthcoming, Mr.

Speaker.

I believe that the Assembly can agree with me that we have strong reason for that confidence, given the kinds of comments coming out of Environment Canada to date. Let me quote a Mr. Pat Finlay of the electric power section of Environment Canada, Mr. Speaker, who said:

The Shand plant's zero discharge concept means that no water will be discharged into the Souris River. The Shand station will be the first power plant in Canada with a zero discharge water system. This is a very progressive step in environmental protection, and SaskPower is to be commended for this initiative.

He went on to say, Mr. Speaker, and I quote:

The proposed design will surpass water management practices recommended by Environment Canada.

Mr. Speaker, this is one of the people who has spent his life protecting the environment, not from political handbooks and NDP rule books, but with hard scientific information.

And remember, he is not my official. He is not with SaskPower. This gentleman is not even in any remote branch of the Government of Saskatchewan. He is an employee of Environment Canada, and he says, contrary to the prognostications of the member for Rosemont, that our design exceeds standards, that we are to be commended for the sensitivity to the environment that we have demonstrated.

You know, Mr. Speaker, the old story about the lion being the king of beasts. Well the member for Rosemont should take a lesson from mother nature, Mr. Speaker. The lion is king of beasts because its roaring is matched by its credibility, its ability to deliver. The roaring, Mr. Speaker, of the member from Rosemont is like the mewling, or more like the mewling demands of a newborn ferret than that of a lion. There is no credibility to the noises he is making; they are just noises without substance.

For example, Mr. Speaker, that member has suggested that one of the ways — now listen to this carefully — one of the ways to avoid the need for Shand would be to invest several hundred million dollars to insulate seniors' houses.

Now I'm all in favour of programs what would help seniors insulate their houses. But, Mr. Speaker, one of two things is the case here. Either we would be saving natural gas, with which the majority of houses are heated, in which case this measure would not mean a thing as it relates to the Shand project, or we would cause all of those people to switch to electric heating, in which case the demand for electricity would be greatly increased and Shand would be more necessary than ever.

So either way you take the argument, Mr. Speaker, he is wrong, simply mewling again and knows not whereof he speaks, or is he trying to generate even more support for Shand? And I quite frankly think that's highly unlikely.

Mr. Speaker, my friend from Rosthern speaks of responsibility and commitment. I know that he is speaking of a responsible attitude to our people — not an attitude that allows any amount of misinformation so long as it serves some narrow political end; not an attitude, Mr. Speaker, that defines commitment, not in terms of the protection, economic development, and respect for the people, but only in terms of the maximum return for the NDP.

Let me ask: where is the commitment, Mr. Speaker, where is the responsibility to the people of Saskatchewan, and particularly the people of southern Saskatchewan, in the attempt to deny those people water that is desperately needed? Where is the commitment, Mr. Speaker; where is the responsibility in telling people that they must continue to haul water in dry years, mile after mile, that they will have to continue to ration water, that their economic future must continue to be subjected to the extreme swings of the weather and the climate?

Where is the commitment, Mr. Speaker, and where is the responsibility that says those people must continue to accept the opposite as well — the floods that occur in years of excess water? That is not commitment and that is not responsibility. In fact, Mr. Speaker, I suggest that never before has this House been witness to the height of irresponsibility demonstrated by our Richard the ferret-hearted, across the way.

The member for Rosemont has said he has a plan for southern Saskatchewan. Mr. Speaker, we will call it the Rosemont plan. He plans to call for the construction of small off-stream impoundments, the expansion of the Weyburn and the Midale dams, the expansion of the wetlands in the basin, and the establishment of a heritage park. Yes, Mr. Speaker, the member has come up with a number of sound and original ideas. Unfortunately, none of the sound ideas are original, and none of the original ideas are particularly sound. And out of this intellectual morass of the socialist textbook thinking we have the Rosemont plan for the disruption of southern Saskatchewan.

Let's take a look at the proposal to build this network of off-stream impoundments. Has the member produced any wildlife baselines? No. Has he even identified where these will be built? No. Has he determined whose property will be affected and to what extent a whole network of such impoundments will affect this property? No. Has he produced any geo-technical analysis that these can be safely built without endangering the life of those downstream? The answer again, Mr. Speaker, is no.

The Rosemont plan calls for the expansion of the Weyburn and the Midale dams. Is he aware that the Weyburn dam cannot be expanded without significantly increasing the risk of flooding through the city of Weyburn? Well apparently no, or if he does, he doesn't care.

Has he produced any hydrological analysis that would indicate the facilities would optimize the water storage-evaporation ratios, etc.? No. Has he produced any civil engineering analysis that indicates that it would

even be possible to expand these dams? Once again the answer is no.

He has no environmental assessment of his proposals, no analysis on the effects downstream, no information on the impact on wildlife, fisheries, soil or people, no information at all, Mr. Speaker, except that it would create a gargantuan network of government projects that fits in with the socialist dream.

But that's not the end of the irresponsibility for that particular member, Mr. Speaker. He has gone the furthest mile in his commitment to the NDP and his disdain for the people. He has said that should the province ever have the misfortune to be governed by his party they would decommission the dams.

Mr. Speaker, here we have a man proposing that even after the project has been built, after all of the millions of investment have been made, after the international treaties have been signed, the irrigation developed, after all of that, Mr. Speaker, he would tear it down, tear up the international agreements, unplug the irrigation, throw away the investment and destroy, Mr. Speaker, all that has been built — the height of irresponsibility, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I do not believe I have ever heard such outright contempt for the people of the province as I hear from that member when he speaks on this project. It is, to say the least, absurd; to say the most, a sinister warping of the democratic process.

Genuine responsibility and genuine commitment, Mr. Speaker, speak loudly from the actions of this government. We will have security of supply in our electricity needs. We will have irrigation for 12,000 acres of farm land. We will have major new recreational facilities that will contribute to economic growth and diversification of this province, Mr. Speaker. We will have security of supply for municipalities that live under constant threat of shortages. We will have the security of property that comes from flood control, Mr. Speaker. We will have security for cattlemen — who even this spring may be hauling water for their livestock. We will have the benefits of the investment retained in Saskatchewan for Saskatchewan people, and at a saving of 50 per cent compared to the Manitoba hydro offer. We will do these things because we are committed to our people and we accept the responsibility they have placed in our hands, Mr. Speaker.

(1500)

And before I leave the subject of SaskPower . . . Mr. Speaker, the member for Rosemont likes to roar about rate increases at SaskPower. And again, there is no credibility, none whatsoever, in those roarings, Mr. Speaker. Let me . . . One of his friends and allies, the member for Regina University in 1980, when they were, in fact, sitting on this side of the House, urged his government to increase power rates because to take that sort of action would lead to conservation — and I remember it well — increase the power rates to lead to conservation. And they practised that in some significant way when they had, in seven years prior to 1982, Mr.

Speaker, a 99.9 per cent increase, 100 per cent larger than the increase in a comparable period since 1982. And I suppose that after the member for Saskatoon University gets together with his friend from Rosemont, a new part of the Rosemont plan will be to increase rates so that they are so prohibitive as to discourage people from putting on the lights at night.

Of course, Mr. Speaker, we have not followed the advice of the NDP and raised the rates at the pace they did. And since I've already put those rate increases and comparisons on record, Mr. Speaker, unless somebody has some compelling desire to hear them again . . .

An Hon. Member: I'd like to hear them again.

Hon. Mr. Berntson: Would you? Well, okay. I'll give them to you again. I'll give them to you again. And are you listening?

An Hon. Member: I sure am.

Hon. Mr. Berntson: This goes back — this goes back to seven years prior to the April 26 election of 1982. And the electric rate . . . the electricity rates at SaskPower were increased during that period a total of 99.9 per cent, Mr. Speaker — 99.9 per cent, as compared to the six-and-a-half years following that election where the rates have increased by 42.9 per cent. That, Mr. Speaker, is less than half the rate increase of that comparable period under the NDP.

In natural gas, on the gas side of the utility, the distinction is even more profound, Mr. Speaker. Under the NDP seven-year term, gas rates were pushed up 188.5 per cent — 188.5 per cent. And under this administration, Mr. Speaker, for a similar period, the total increase was 5.3 per cent.

In other words, Mr. Speaker, the rate of increase under the NDP exceeded that of the PC government by more than 35-fold. So when members opposite want to make a noise, perhaps part of the noise ought to include the record because they were part of it, Mr. Speaker.

Let me say, Mr. Speaker, that I will put the Rafferty-Alameda project beside the Rosemont plan any day. Let the test be who has provided the detailed information, the entire history of study, the proven economic benefits and environmental security, because on every one of those issues, Mr. Speaker, the Rosemont plan is not only deficient, it is silent.

And now, Mr. Speaker, one of the fundamental objectives of this government, this government's commitment to the people, is economic growth and diversification. And I know the members opposite don't agree with growth, although they often try to gloss over that position, but if anyone needs reminding of the NDP position, all they have to do is look at the record.

The member for Saskatoon University in this House, in the budget debate of 1980, demanded that legislation be passed to limit the growth of his own city, Saskatoon. He opposed the growth of Saskatoon because, he said, it caused social problems — social problems, I suppose,

like more jobs, more tax revenue, more opportunities for our children; these terrible things are the things the NDP wished to stop.

They also opposed the growth of the agricultural industry, Mr. Speaker, that happens with the wise use of farm chemicals, and in fact, just like the Rosemont plan for SaskPower, the Peter plan for agriculture involved schools being required to, quote: "... grow chemically free food in greenhouses on school property.

Mr. Speaker, that is the compelling and exciting Peter plan of the NDP for agricultural development in the province of Saskatchewan, so now we know what the Rosemont plan is, and we know what the Peter plan is, and we even have a good idea about the Riversdale plan, but we're not quite sure because he's yet to take a real position on any issue since being "coronated", Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, where in all of this rhetoric and vitriol and hysteria coming out of the members across the way, where is there a Saskatchewan plan? Mr. Speaker, they just don't have one.

Before I conclude, Mr. Speaker, I would like to touch on one more area where this government has demonstrated its commitment to the people of Saskatchewan, and that's through the activities of Agdevco (Agricultural Development Corporation).

Mr. Speaker, Agdevco has grown exponentially under this government's management and commitment. In fact, in just the last three years Agdevco has grown from a concern doing about \$10 million worth of foreign project contracts to one doing over \$50 million, Mr. Speaker. That makes Agdevco the largest Canadian-based operator of international agricultural projects, Mr. Speaker — number one, and growing still under the Saskatchewan plan of Premier Devine and the Progressive Conservative government.

To give you a quick example, Mr. Speaker: in just a few days, leaving Regina will be a plane load of beef cattle that will take off for the U.K. This will be the largest such shipment ever, resulting from agribition activities, Mr. Speaker, and the people who bought these livestock at agribition because of Agdevco's reputation and credibility in the international market-place were asked to facilitate this shipment. And I know members opposite don't much appreciate what Agdevco is doing for the people in the province of Saskatchewan, or people, for that matter, in the third World, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to make that the subject of a whole other debate, because that's quite a story as well, Mr. Speaker.

I am also pleased . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Are you asking us to privatize Agdevco? Is that what I heard members opposite say? Well I appreciate having your position on the records, Mr. Member for the Quill Lakes.

I am pleased, Mr. Speaker, that as part of the agreement to have Hitachi, Marubeni-Hitachi plant established in Saskatoon, we also signed what is called an offset agreement. You will recall that Hitachi-Marubeni formed a joint venture called S.K. Turbines, and they have a plant

in Saskatoon. And members opposite, I remember when the sod was turned, laughed about that particular project. But the project is real, the ribbon will be cut, and the equipment's in place, and they will be building turbines, Mr. Speaker, for the continental market and beyond.

But we signed what is called an offset agreement when we signed the Shand turbine agreement, Mr. Speaker. That offset agreement provided for \$72 million of incremental exports or investments in Saskatchewan by the companies Marubeni and Hitachi of Japan. That means that the company agrees to take a combination of \$72 million worth of our exports and . . . or to make investments in the province, and that, Mr. Speaker, I think is a pretty good example of how to build this province.

And I want to tell you one more thing about Agdevco, Mr. Speaker. When we go into one of these foreign projects, we do so with a plan to use Saskatchewan goods and Saskatchewan people, so the equipment and parts and work-force are sourced right here in the province of Saskatchewan. It provides markets for our manufacturers and world-class experience for our people, and that, Mr. Speaker, is part of the building that this government is doing.

Contrast that, Mr. Speaker, with the platform of members opposite to stop growth, to ban this and to ban that and to produce cheaper right here in the province of Saskatchewan. Contrast that concrete action of responsible members with the kinds of hysteria about Nazis and bank robbers and farm chemicals and boondoggles that arises out of the swamp across the way, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I'm proud of the commitment shown in the throne speech to continue with the building of this province. I am proud that this government accepts its responsibility to the people of Saskatchewan and to the people of southern Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, particularly relative . . . I'm proud, Mr. Speaker, of the Rafferty-Alameda project and the Shand power station. I'm proud to stand in this House to try to provide the members opposite with a brief education, Mr. Speaker, and I can only hope that some of them have paid attention. And if they continue to ignore their responsibility, Mr. Speaker, to be accurate, fair and constructive, then they will have to face the people, the electorate, in due course.

Because it is all well and good for the member for Rosemont to play at being an expert on the Souris, and it's all right for the member for Saskatoon University to pass himself off as an expert in agriculture, but, Mr. Speaker, at some point their constituents want to hear something from them that affects their lives, Mr. Speaker — their lives. And they do not want to hear their MLA opposing the growth of their city or fighting the building of this province or calling for the coddling of terrorists in far-off lands. So members opposite better get real and they had better do it quickly, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I will be proud to support the motion moved by the member for Rosthern and seconded by the

member for Moosomin. Mr. Speaker, I will be opposing the amendment.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Goodale: Mr. Speaker, I wonder if I might have the leave of the Assembly to introduce some guests in the gallery.

Leave granted.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Mr. Goodale: Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to introduce to you, and to other members of this Assembly through you, a family from Gravelbourg which is seated in your gallery — Normand and Joanne Girardin from Gravelbourg, together with their children, Danielle, Gaëtan, Suzanne, and Lynne. And they are joined in your gallery, Mr. Speaker, by Chris and Bob Steenhoff, and their children, Tony Keith, and Darrell, who are visiting Regina today and Gravelbourg in the company of the Girardins, from New Denver in British Columbia. And I would ask members of the House to join with me in welcoming them to our Assembly this afternoon. Bienvenue.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(1515)

SPECIAL ORDER

ADJOURNED DEBATES

ADDRESS IN REPLY

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the address in reply which was moved by Mr. Neudorf and the amendment thereto moved by Ms. Simard.

Mr. Koskie: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to enter in the debate on the throne speech. I can only say that listening to the Deputy Premier, it's a difficult act to follow.

I want to say that the members opposite, in introducing this throne speech, I think what it indicates is that their spirit has been broken, their confidence riddled, and in order to escape any further retribution from the voters of this province, they decided that in this throne speech they should say nothing, do nothing, promise nothing — look like a smart Tory, in other words.

I want to say, Mr. Speaker, that the members here thought that this was an opportunity for this government to show some leadership in respect to the main problem in Saskatchewan. But sadly to say, Mr. Speaker, this government has run out of ideas, has run out of steam; it has even run out of slogans. I want to say again that this document illustrates the moral and intellectual bankruptcy of this government. This should have been a major opportunity for this government to show leadership in the difficult times ahead in this province.

And I want to say that the farm crisis, I maintain, should have been dealt with. Where is the solution to the

problem in agriculture? In the throne speech, Mr. Speaker, all they had to say in respect to it as a result farm debt is a crisis — crisis proportions. Now this is not the first that they identified the problem, because last year in his budget the Minister of Finance indicated that farm debt was at crisis proportion. That's a year ago. And he said we must act on it.

Now one year later, or approximately, they say farm debt is still a crisis proportion. And all they have to say to the farmers in this document is that tough times come and tough times pass. And I think what it should say is that . . . it better said, is that Tory times comes but Tory times will pass, and that Saskatchewan will be for the better when that happens.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Koskie: Mr. Speaker, last year we saw this government again not supporting agriculture. I want to indicate and review the massiveness of the cuts that took place in respect to agriculture last year in last budget. And here again the government is also indicating they have no solution.

And in fact that silent Minister of Finance, which puts out his budget before the budget day, admitted that this government is throwing its hands up in respect to the agricultural problem. He says, existing agricultural programs may be modified, but don't expect too many new programs in agriculture, he said. Most immediate problem facing Saskatchewan farmers today cannot be solved by the provincial treasury. The problem has shifted in the last few years — well, what a revelation! That's a clear indication from the Minister of Finance that this government is prepared to abandon the farmers who are in dire financial crisis.

I want to indicate the degree of that crisis. The Royal Bank did a survey the other day, and a week — about a month ago — and they indicated that 17.5 per cent of all their farm loans in Saskatchewan is in arrears. That's twice as high as the national average, and higher than even Manitoba, which is 11.2 or 11.5 per cent.

I predict, Mr. Speaker, unless this government comes to its senses and deals with the farm crisis, that there is going to be a massive exodus of farmers from their land and from their home.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Koskie: And I'll tell you, during the budget debate and during this debate we're going to be calling for action by this government on behalf of farm families throughout this province.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Koskie: Mr. Speaker, I was indicating — and I want to repeat for the record and for those farmers that may be watching this afternoon — that last year, as I indicated this government made massive cuts. They cut the agricultural department budget by 25 per cent. They eliminated the property improvements grants. They cut the fuel rebate to farmers from 21 cents to 9 cents per gallon,

and they phased out what they promised in a previous election, the land purchase program. They phased out all the provincial funding for agricultural fairs and exhibitions. They phased out funding for 4-H regional programming. They reduced grants to the various producer groups such as Saskatchewan Livestock Association and the sheep-wool marketing commission. They plan to eliminate the provincial funding to the Prairie Agricultural Machinery Institute — subsequently re-evaluated that. They cancelled travel grants and clinic operating grants for veterinarians. Hundred and twenty thousand in grants to R.M.s for perennial weed control — eliminated. Cancelled grants to the University of Saskatchewan totally \$200,000 for feed testing, and they cancelled grants to the U of S totalling \$80,000 for soil testing.

That's what they did this year. Today in this budget they absolutely do not acknowledge more than that there is a crisis; indicate no solution whatsoever. And I'll tell you, Mr. Speaker, that in our caucus we're going around this province and meeting with farmers. Meeting with them in homes — in kitchen settings where several farmers will meet with us. We have been discussing what farmers are asking, and they're asking for support from this government which deceived the farmers of this province.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Koskie: Mr. Speaker, if we take a look at this here throne speech, there's no doubt that what we find is a government out of control, a government with no management, a government that has placed this province on its knees from a financial standpoint.

This province, when this government took over, was the envy of Canada. This province was the best managed area in North America from a financial point of view. Our credit ratings were rising, and I'll tell you, Mr. Speaker, we had the lowest per capita debt in all of Canada.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Koskie: And after seven years of Tory administration, Mr. Speaker, what is the record? We have had a deficit in every single year that they have brought in a budget. And I predict that they're going to come into this House with this budget on Thursday next, bragging about they have reduced the budget. Imagine, to \$350 million. And that's what the Minister of Finance allegedly leaked to the press.

Let's take a look at what they have done to this province from the standpoint of fiscal management. The total accumulated debt without this budget on the backs of the people of this province is \$3.4 billion — \$3.4 billion. Mr. Speaker, to service the debt created by this government costs the taxpayers of Saskatchewan annually — last year, \$294 million just to service that debt, and this government has indicated that they are efficient. That's their new kick: they're efficient administrators. I'll tell you, everything they have touched as been a disaster.

The Minister of Finance, if you could believe him — but I want to indicate how this government has lost credibility. Going into the election in 1986-87, after the first minister

was driven out of the portfolio, they brought in the current Minister of Finance, and he came in there and gave a pre-election budget, and he had the gall to state, as one of the highlights of his budget, that there was going to be a deficit of \$389 million dollars and that would be a reduction from the previous year.

And do you know what happened? During that year he ran up \$1.2 billion of debt — \$1.2 billion. That was the cost and the waste to the taxpayers to get those birds elected.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Koskie: Yes, Mr. Speaker, certainly this government has increased our debt, has mortgaged our future, but they've done more. This government has imposed on the people of Saskatchewan one of the largest tax grabs in the history of Canada. Over the last four years the total amount of increase in taxes, direct taxes brought in and introduced in the budgets, exceeds \$460 million - \$460 million of new taxes on the backs of the people, at the same time that they are driving up the accumulated deficit.

And now the Minister of Finance is indicating that he has some more goodies for the people of Saskatchewan, and the leak indicates another \$150 million of taxes on the backs of the people of this province.

I want to say, Mr. Speaker, that the people of Saskatchewan are getting the worst of every conceivable deal.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Koskie: This government is driving this province into debt and it's taxing its people to death. But worse than that, Mr. Speaker, what this government has done is to undermine and cut those things that we had built up during the years. We had built up the best health care system in North America. We had a fine drug program that assisted those that needed drugs - our seniors and those that were ill - all prescribed by a doctor. And the Premier said, we love you, so we're going to make you pay for them yourself.

But the problem is, Mr. Speaker, many of the people in Saskatchewan can't pay for them. I have gone from house to house, and I've visited seniors, and they're paying \$185, \$150. I went to my uncle and he's paying \$115 a month and his wife is at \$84 or \$85 - \$200 a month that they have to put out. Now fortunately, as he said, we had saved a little money and we can afford it. But many people across this province can't afford it, and this cruel government, this government that would give away to the rich and expose the people that built this province to that type of treatment, needs to be kicked out of office.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(1530)

Mr. Koskie: And I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, I feel confident out in Quill Lakes. I feel confident because this government has no longer any credibility - none. This

government came into office, fanfare, farm production . . . on the farm purchase program. Where is it today? Gone; history; forgotten.

They promised the people that they'd give them a better way of life. And ever since they came into office, I'll tell you, it has been a disaster for many of the people of this province. And I'll tell you, Mr. Speaker, they'll have an opportunity to test how well-received they are by the people of Saskatchewan. I challenge the Deputy Premier to get his Premier to call a by-election in Elphinstone and in Eastview.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Koskie: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to say that when a government comes in to office there has to be some respect between the government and the people of the province.

An Hon. Member: Trust.

Mr. Koskie: Trust, it's called. And I will tell you, that trust is gone. There is no trust left because this government has betrayed the people of Saskatchewan. They have betrayed them in respect to the promises they made; they betrayed them in respect to health care. And it's interesting to hear, Mr. Speaker, the Deputy Premier get up and read in that eloquent voice and performance today, held everyone just in abeyance, the edge of their seat, to say how well they're doing, how all of this privatization is growing and we're world class - world class in everything they touch. But I'll tell you, I'll tell you, Mr. Deputy Premier, you're not world class with the people of Saskatchewan; I'll tell you, you're low-class.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Koskie: Mr. Speaker, I'll tell you, when we continue the debate here, I want the . . . our party here are going to be exposing this government for its mismanagement, for its incompetence, for its patronage, for its lack of managerial skills. We're going to be exposing the heavy burden of taxation that had been laid on the backs of the people of this province while the major corporations get a free lunch. We're going to expose this party, the government, and remind them of all the promises they made and all of the promises they have broken.

And I'll tell you, Mr. Speaker, we're going to speak out in respect to health care and demand that the Premier and this government come to its senses and reinstitute those programs which they so disastrously destroyed.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Koskie: And finally, Mr. Speaker, we're going to stand in this House and we're going to debate and we're going to call on assistance to the agricultural community to help agricultural families throughout this province.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Koskie: Mr. Speaker, in closing, I just want to say that we here in this province and the people of this

province have been very proud of its former premiers - Tommy Douglas and Woodrow Lloyd and Allan Blakeney.

And I would have hoped that when time came, that we could have said the same thing about this Premier. But I'll tell you, on the record of this government there is no way that he will ever possibly be in the same pages of history in line with those that I have mentioned previously.

I think that what we have to do is, as a people of this province, to remember those leaders with love and respect for their contribution to Saskatchewan. And I want to say that in my view they were people of vision, people with a dream and a determination to make that dream a reality. But they did not dream of an exercise of power just for power's sake; they dreamt of how power could be used by ordinary people for the good of all. They dreamt of building a better world by building a better province. And I want to say, those leaders of our party, they dreamt well, they built well, and they gave much to us to be proud of. And indeed they gave their life in the service to our province.

And I say to the people of Saskatchewan that there is a better way than what we have been having during these seven years. And I ask the people of Saskatchewan to join with us, to join with us in a cause of building a compassionate and decent society, a society where opportunities are available not just for the rich but for all members of society.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Koskie: This government, when it went to its privatization, as it's called, went to Great Britain to seek out assistance of how to dispose of our assets.

Now what the Minister of Finance is saying, we're going to bring in a budget and we're going to have a white paper on tax reform. And I'll tell you the type of tax reform the people of Saskatchewan can expect, because Margaret Thatcher has brought in some tax proposals in the U.K. And this says that, "Tax-cutting British budget snips cord of consensus politics" - by Richard Gwyn.

And I want to indicate and to warn the people of Saskatchewan that when these people talk about tax reform and equality, they're talking the British style under Margaret Thatcher. And let's see how great a lady she was. Someone across the way said, great lady. Well I'll tell you, she brought in a little budget the other day and she had a sweet package for some, and let's see what it said:

What Lawson, (he's the Exchequer, Chancellor of the Exchequer), (what Lawson) has done in turn is to turn Britain's haves into have everythings, and its have nots into have nothings. More than half of this \$9 billion tax cut ends up in the wallets and the purses of the top five per cent of British income earners. Those at the bottom of the income ladder will actually pay a pittance more, if you can believe it.

He goes on to say:

The profound effects of this budget though, will be political. What this budget does, (and this is Margaret Thatcher's I'm talking about) it legitimizes greed by giving those who already have. It sanctifies meanness of spirit by giving nothing to those who now have nothing.

That's the Tory vision for the future - hand-outs to the rich, govern for the rich, give to the rich, take from the poor.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Koskie: Mr. Speaker, we stand in this House committed to speak on behalf of the people of Saskatchewan, and I'll tell you, when the budget is released on Thursday, that's when the fight will begin. And I'll tell you, we'll go to every corner of this province to indicate how mean, how indecent, how ruthless this government is.

An Hon. Member: And incompetent.

Mr. Koskie: And incompetent. Mr. Speaker, I want to close and say that obviously I can't support a document which obviously has nothing in it, and that's evident by what the members from across the way have been able to say, and I'll be voting against the main motion and voting for the amendment. Thank you very much.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Klein: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure and an honour for me to participate in this throne speech debate. First of all, I would like to welcome you back, sir, in your role. I, for one, have appreciated the fairness and rulings that you have brought into this House as we progressed through our daily procedures. As well, I have to congratulate you for your perseverance, Mr. Speaker, in maintaining decorum and operating this Assembly in honour and in dignity, as it should be.

I would like to first of all thank my constituents again, in Regina South, for always providing me with their interest and their concerns — speaking with me, bringing all of the various things to my attention. And yes, it's fair to say including some criticisms, which I accept, because this is a democracy and well we should receive problems as well as our accolades.

One of the main things that my people in Regina South have been talking to me about, Mr. Speaker, is the oil upgrader. It's located here in Regina, and it's an exciting piece of news for our city that it seems has been overlooked by certainly a lot of our civic people; as they go about their daily duties in this city they don't really seem to talk much about the upgrader. And it's interesting to see, Mr. Speaker, as well, the opposition benches as they decry this project.

And basically it appears simple. It seems that because our government was able to put a deal together with, of all people, the co-ops, which was not supposed to happen with a Tory government, I guess, but we went about the business of dealing with them and talking with them and

we now have this magnificent project in place for Regina. And very soon we will see the first production coming out of that project. Mr. Speaker, and I'm very excited about that. I toured it recently, and when you see all of the activity that's going on out there now, it's simply amazing.

The other amazing part is this, and I say this to my constituents of Regina south as well, it seems that the NDP Party for some reason or other, and particularly their new leader, relishes and tries to bask in the new found support that they seem to think that they have - that of the small-business community. And it's kind of a joke really, and it's a sad joke because the small-business community is a vital and important part of our democratic society, and as well, it's a very important part of our society in Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker.

We totally understand, and we have ever since 1982, that it's small business that creates the employment in our province, small business that drives our economy. And the NDP seem to somehow have magically taken over this role of trying to become the small business advocate in this province. And it's sad to see them as they flounder through this because it seems that they go about their daily task of condemning the government for projects such the upgrader, for projects such as Weyerhaeuser, for projects such as Gainers and Vanguard; and say, well it's the big boys, they're all related to you, they're your first cousins, they're your friends, you line their pockets, and all of these other demeaning and degrading statements.

And it goes to show you the mentality of the Leader of the Opposition. He's waited 17 years for his coronation to become Leader of the Opposition. With all due respect to his age - he's probably younger than I am; there is no question that he's older than our Premier - I doubt that he will ever live long enough to see the office of the Premier. And it's just sad to see how on one hand he can condemn these major projects, condemn these major projects while speaking out of the side of his mouth of being a friend of the small business community.

(1545)

My gosh, Mr. Deputy Speaker, doesn't he realize that these magnificent projects that this government put together is probably one of the largest single supports of small business in the province. We went through Weyerhaeuser the other day and I can't recall the figure offhand, but it's some millions and millions and millions of dollars, tens of millions of dollars that they've put in the local economy of Prince Albert. And the Leader of the Opposition condemns that project, says he's speaking out for small business and doesn't understand how small business interconnects and works complementary to that one project.

Now think of the others, think for a moment of Vanguard - forgetting the fact that it created some 400 jobs, forget about that. They don't care about the jobs for our people anyhow, so forget that. But now just try to remember - the member from North Battleford, pay attention - so that you can go and talk to your chamber of commerce like you really appreciate small business. Those

Vanguard people, those Gainer companies that you keep knocking all over the place, they use small business as a source of supply, as back-up, and all the rest of that that goes with . . . they never did understand small business, they never will. And you and your leader can go about spouting as much as you want and it won't change a thing, and I always hearken back in my discussions with my small-business community friends.

Let's talk about the Regina Manifesto. He arbitrarily changed nomination rules for the NDP party. The president didn't do it; the leader of the party did. Now, if he can do that, why doesn't he change the Regina Manifesto? Why doesn't he do that, and really convince the small-business community that you do care for them . . . (inaudible) . . . I doubt it.

But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, my constituents of Regina South, they recognize the importance of small business. A lot of the small-business community, men and women alike, live in Regina South and are good, proud people of businesses in our community. But by far, by far, most members of my constituency don't own and operate business; they are employed and work for small businesses. And they recognize, they truly recognize, the importance of the small-business sector to them because it's their livelihood and it's what pays them a living.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'd like to congratulate my colleague from Rosthern for delivering a sound, solid message in moving acceptance of the Speech from the Throne. I know that it's an important part of this process to be able to move indeed the throne speech. My colleague from Moosomin as well did a fine job in adding further the importance and input into exactly what this government is trying to do.

The throne speech, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is a very broad document that outlines some, some of the activity that our government intends to undertake, some of the planning.

I was embarrassed during the throne speech . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Now there go the members speaking from their seat again. The member from Saskatoon South thinks he's funny, just as they did in that unfortunate, embarrassing situation when the throne speech, Mr. Deputy Speaker, made a mention of vicious dog legislation. They laughed; they giggled; they thought that it was amusing. Mr. Deputy Speaker, if this is amusing to the NDP, it's the most unfortunate and regrettable thing that I can think of.

In my role as the Minister of Urban Affairs, and my people from Regina south appreciate that, they know that the matter of dangerous dogs is a major issue across this continent, not only in Canada but in all of North America. Finally our government made the announcement that we believe that this year we're in a position to address that unfortunate problem that exists, and the member opposite giggled. Well, more than giggled, they downright laughed out loud at that issue. And since then, since then, we have heard them all referring sarcastically to the issue of dangerous dogs. Well, God willing, Saskatchewan won't have an unfortunate incident before this legislation is put into effect.

And I wonder, and I ask them if it would be that humorous, if it would be that comical, if one of their loved ones - their mother, a senior perhaps, their kids - were attacked by a vicious dog. And there goes the member from Saskatoon South, speaking from his seat, that thinks vicious dogs is a joke. You, sir, if a loved one of your family would be severely bitten and maimed for life, would you then think it's a joke? I doubt it. You should be ashamed of yourself for laughing at something as important as that.

Since the opening of this new session, the Government of Saskatchewan is pleased to demonstrate its continuing commitment in ensuring that Saskatchewan will continue to have, Mr. Deputy Speaker, a first-rate health system. They laughed at that, too, when we announced the major task force to help build an design an blueprint for Saskatchewan health care in the years to come.

Health care represents the foremost financial challenge facing the people of Saskatchewan, Mr. Deputy Speaker. More tax dollars are spent on health care than on any other program. At \$1.3 billion it represents one-third of provincial government spending.

This new task force will hold public hearings across the province to encourage the widest possible discussion from health care professionals and other organizations and interested groups and citizens with respect to renovations that may be needed to our existing health care system. Our health care system — indeed we've upheld it to be one of the finest in Canada — is now 25 years old. Some renovations could be required, so we must get everybody involved — all of us in making any changes that may be needed.

One of the major problems as I see it, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is how do we maintain and improve on this system while at the same time we can control the ever-increasing costs? And that's the challenge facing the task force.

The member from Saskatoon South is getting pretty annoying. He just seems to condemn everything that this government is doing, including the health costs and all the rest of it. I suppose he's got some magical answer. I don't know, but it would be interesting to see if he had anything either amusing or serious to say in regard to the Speech from the Throne. I doubt it. I'm sure that his constituents in Saskatoon South must be embarrassed by some of his activities in this House.

But none the less, the establishment of this task force by the provincial government, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is indeed a major step forward in the development and the planning of a health care system that will provide Saskatchewan citizens with first-class health care services for the next 25 years.

The Government of Saskatchewan further pledged at the opening of the new legislature, Mr. Deputy Speaker, its continued protection of our citizens that live in rural Saskatchewan. Our commitment to the protection of those who live in rural Saskatchewan remains as strong as the land.

There is no dispute that agricultural policies around the world have threatened the very fabric of our rural society. We, as government, will continue to exert whatever influence we can, world-wide, to bring an end to these senseless policies. And you can expect further measures to be introduced in the coming weeks to provide greater protection for rural families during difficult times.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I guess I'll get them hooting and hollering again. They've been reasonably quiet on this subject, but I understand that their leader has finally taken a stand on the matter of store hours. And this is an issue that has been very much in the news for the past several months, and indeed it's an issue that we here in this province simply have got to come to grips with.

We will be proceeding, of course, with input from the general public, varying opinions from municipal groups, indeed varying opinions from various church groups, and more varying opinions from business and retail groups, including the chambers of commerce across our province. It seems that it's a delicate issue and a difficult issue for everybody to handle.

Over the past few years, both in Saskatchewan and indeed across Canada, there has been widespread interest, widespread concern, widespread attempts at solutions in this major problem of extended store hours. There has been considerable confusion, many, many court challenges to the application of the law as it stands on retail store hours. And retail store hours seems to be the last — oh, little guarded area, you might say — of a part of our sector regulated, and as everybody knows, Mr. Deputy Speaker, our government chooses to deregulate.

We don't choose to regulate the lives of our people, nor should they be. This is a democratic society that we all believe in — all of us free to speak, all of us free to go to church, all of us free to do and live within and respect our laws.

So it's a very, very difficult issue to, indeed, deal with, but our government has concluded, Mr. Deputy Speaker, after careful consideration, that further tinkering with the present law tends to create more unfairness than it eliminates and only adds to the degree of uncertainty and challenges and confusion that already exists.

To proceed only piecemeal with adjustments to an Act which has, quite simply, been overtaken by the times will really serve no useful purpose. Other societal pressures must now be accommodated. Demographic factors such as the significant increase in the labour force of the number of families in which both mother and father work, a greater recognition of single parent families have led many, many people to call for a less restrictive approach to Sunday openings. And indeed, people my age with their grandchildren tend to see shopping as a family expedition now, and to go out and look at the latest trends and the latest toys if you're with your grandkids, or even the latest athletic shoes that seem to be abounding in our market-place.

But yet at the same time, as I travel this great province of ours, we in Saskatchewan must recognize that local market conditions vary tremendously across a province

as large as ours. Factors that affect consumers and retailers in Nipawin and Prince Albert and Yorkton are quite different, for example, than problems that are discovered in Regina or in Saskatoon or in Moose Jaw. And as a result, different approaches and different solutions are required in different communities. We feel that a universal provincial law on extended shopping hours is simply not workable.

For all of these reasons, Mr. Deputy Speaker, our government has come to the conclusion that only a local municipality, only a local municipality itself, can best address the appropriate solutions for its own locality. Who knows best about their market conditions, their people, their attitudes, their habits, than the local municipality?

These local municipalities too, Mr. Deputy Speaker, over the years have established their autonomy, have asked us to retain their autonomy, and we very much advocate that autonomy. And they should retain that. So being that the municipal government shave that autonomy, which we respect, and they are in the best position to determine their own local needs and the problems inherent in ensuring that equity and fairness prevail with respect to retail store openings, it only makes eminent sense that they continue to do that.

(1600)

In this way all of Saskatchewan will be guided by Sunday opening rules which better reflects the local condition and market-place and the attitude. Yes, indeed, it will reflect the wishes of the people, and that can be accommodated at the local level. And as we enshrine legislation in this great Assembly, we can't really reflect all of these local problems in one major piece of legislation.

So last December we announced . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . There goes the member from Saskatoon South speaking from his seat again. Goldam it, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'll tell you, you know, if he would wait at least . . . I'll get to the ward system and we'll discuss that, and then you can . . . Right now I'm trying to talk some serious business about store hours, and I haven't heard too much from your benches except that I understand your leader finally made a position. He finally got off that fence. I don't know if he fell off or if he was pushed off. But in any event, I understand that he's got a position. I'd like to hear it.

But last December, Mr. Deputy Speaker, pardon me, last December we announced that it was the government's intention to permit shopping seven days a week for those businesses that choose to open. We also announced that municipalities would continue as before to regulate both evening shopping and the opening of convenience stores after regular hours, which they do now. So it only made eminent sense, and we indicated that the new legislation would provide municipal governments with the option of closing stores one day a week of they so choose.

So I was accused of washing my hands and abdicating the problem and all. It's a ridiculous charge, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I believe that our government took a leadership role on this issue of store hours, and clearly we indicated

that in Saskatchewan we prefer not to legislate the people and not to regulate the people, but let the market-place decide. We prepared, we very visibly said, we want the stores to stay open seven days a week. So if that isn't leadership, if that's abdicating, I don't know how you can tie the two together. But out of respect to the autonomy, Mr. Deputy Speaker, of the local government, we did say that if they choose not to go with our legislation, then they would have the right to change it.

Moose Jaw — we have two members from Moose Jaw in the opposite benches. In the existing store hours legislation they didn't put in a local by-law, they were prepared to live with the government legislation. And I have every reason to believe that they will continue to live with the government legislation once it's changed. As a matter of fact — and this might be a piece of news to the two members from Moose Jaw, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because I know that contrary to what their leader says they do not talk to their business community — but the Moose Jaw chamber of commerce did indeed come out in support of government stance and saying, right on, quit regulating us. Even in the chamber of commerce they can't agree whether they should open or not open, but in any event, let the people dictate. Let the people decide what to do. And they're supporting us.

And they're yelling at me again, Mr. Deputy Speaker. All right, where does the general public stand on the issue of store hours? The general public — your voters, my voters — where do they stand?

An Hon. Member: What about the ward system?

Hon. Mr. Klein: I'll get to the ward system. Let's find out where they stand on store hours first.

What do our voters and the customers of the retail industry think about the situation? Well we should make no mistake about what the public wants, and there's no doubt that there's growing public demand for extended store hours, including Sunday shopping.

For those consumers that choose not to shop on Sundays because of a family day or a religious belief or whatever their reason might be, Mr. Deputy Speaker, their solution is simple — don't shop. Don't shop, because their non-support of the businesses that may stay open would be a strong indication that extra hours are not available. Market-place, let the market-place decide. And if the people don't shop, the stores won't open. They're not going to open if they lose money. So for those that don't want to shop on Sundays, don't shop on Sundays; the market-place will dictate.

There they go again, Mr. Deputy Speaker, now they're talking Superstore. They don't understand business. How can you let the super stores of this world open and unfairly tell all the other retailers to close. How can you do that? And how can you close, then Superstore and all of the little convenience stores equitably? Don't they realize anything about business, Mr. Deputy Speaker? Don't they realize that there's a difference between a convenience store in Cedoux, Saskatchewan, my home town — don't they realize that there's a great difference between a convenience store in Cedoux and a

convenience store in Regina or Saskatoon.

Now how do you describe that convenience store? It's impossible, in universal legislation. But they can do it at the local level, and again, they have the option at the local level, at municipal government; they have the option at the local level of the business community, and they have the option at the local level of, indeed, the people of this province, simply by doing what they choose, either support or not support. Why should we tell anybody what to do or what not to do?

Many consumers want the opportunity to shop in the evenings or on Sundays if the local market-place offers those extended hours. And I firmly believe that our various market-places across the province want to accommodate people who wish to shop for goods or services at their retail outlets. My gosh, that's why they're in business. That's why they're in business.

And this is the last, little, separate, regulated area. I mean, who could imagine a community that has taxi-cab service, for instance, closing on Sundays? Or communications — can you imagine this great province of Saskatchewan if we didn't have television on Sundays, news reports; the list goes on and on. I mean, you don't even have to think about how our hospitals are open, and the workers that go along with that. The tourism industry — how it flourishes, and they have to work on Sundays, and the like. And people grow up in these industries and they accept their work-load and they do what they have to do, but we've got this one little piece left, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that of retail store hours, and I believe that the time has come to let the market-place indeed decide that.

As part of the store hours legislation the entire package, I can assure the retailers of this province that steps will be taken to prevent owners of shopping malls from forcing their small-tenant businesses as a condition of their leases to remain open for an unreasonable number of hours.

We will also monitor closely the labour legislation to ensure that our retail workers are fairly dealt with. I've had considerable meetings with the large retail chains, and interestingly enough some there too want to open, some don't want to pen. And I firmly believe, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that if the people don't support those businesses, whether they're large or small — and I've had fears expressed by some members of the small-business community. They need not fear. They need not fear. If they supply the goods and services regularly and attentively, they will maintain their customer base. But the large retailers that I have talked to have indicated that they are prepared to play fairly with their employees, and I have every reason to believe that they will.

We're not breaking new ground in this, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Saskatchewan isn't the first jurisdiction in the world that would have Sunday shopping. My gosh, it's going on all over the world, and in all areas of jurisdiction. And we can see that the employees have been dealt with fairly. We can see that in fact there have been a lot of jobs created, and I don't particularly buy the notion that they are only part-time jobs, because a lot of part-time jobs, because of the extended hours, would necessarily be converted to full-time jobs.

But other jurisdictions, and other areas, have been open regularly and the small-business community has survived and is alive and is healthy and is vibrant and are doing well.

We've had considerable input from organizations and groups right across the province with respect to the store hours situation. I think just about everybody, I think, that have had suggestions, criticisms to offer, have made their points, and now it's decision time. I believe that you will see that the legislation that will be introduced, Mr. Deputy Speaker, will do a fair job of balancing the interests of municipalities and of retailers and of the consumers.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, on October 26 of this year voters in cities, towns, and villages throughout the province will be going to the polls to elect their local mayors and aldermen. In preparation for these municipal elections, I will be introducing a number of amendments to The Local Government Election Act to ensure these elections are conducted as fairly and as equitably as possible.

For example, one of the amendments will allow for a mobile poll to serve disabled people who have difficulty in using the standard polling place. And I believe that that is in keeping in step with the time. We have a lot of people in our Saskatchewan community that require assistance and are not able that mobile, and I believe that by bringing the poll to them they can exercise their franchise as they should, because they indeed do have a vested interest in their local municipal government.

Another amendment will close the loophole that currently exists that allows any number of non-resident land owners to vote in a municipality by virtue of owning a single parcel of land. This amendment will curtail an unfortunate incident of municipal voting by limiting the number of non-residents who may vote by ownership of a single piece of property. That's an old piece of legislation, Mr. Deputy Mayor, that's been on our books, and indeed exists in the books across this country and until recently has not been any problem. But recently we are familiar with a problem that occurred, and I suppose that Saskatchewan will probably have the distinction of being the first provincial government that will have to deal with that interesting little piece of legislation to solve the problem.

But perhaps the biggest change that could come about is for the municipalities that currently have the ward system in place. Now that isn't controlled under The Elections Act, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but rather under the urban affairs Act, and as everybody knows we are certainly looking at examining the ward system, and perhaps looking at and examining the ward system, and perhaps the return to the election "at large" system that operates in the other 500-plus urban municipalities.

The "at large" system is what had been in place in the province right up until 1973 when it was arbitrarily and just selectively imposed by the government of the day on our two major cities. And it was imposed by them in spite of the fact that prior plebiscites had indeed . . . the people of those cities had said no, they don't want the ward system. But in any event the government, for whatever

reason, chose to put the ward system in place.

Well, I don't know what we're going to do yet, but we're examining it. As we heard today in question period, there were a few questions came out about it. But we indeed believe that the ward system is an inefficient and ineffective way of dealing with a government at the municipal level. And the ward system has been in place in Regina and Saskatoon since '73; Prince Albert since 1985; Moose Jaw, who had the option of going into the ward system, never chose to use the ward system. They do elect their council at large and they don't have any problem with that. They don't have any outcries of how expensive it is to run as a candidate, at large. They don't have anybody coming out and complaining about what we hear the opposition — and certainly, unfortunately, the aldermen that exist in the wards — complaining about today.

I firmly believe that if an alderman that is elected presently under the ward system has been doing his job, his or her job, properly — and they may very well have been — they should not fear an election "at large" process. If anything, as an incumbent, they would indeed have a distinct advantage, in my mind.

(1615)

The people . . . I give our taxpayers, Mr. Deputy Speaker, an awful lot of credit for intelligence. They will make themselves familiar with the issue; they will study who indeed will be running. And I believe that they want to vote for everybody in their community, not just one little person, and take out — carve out their little section of their own community and say, listen, by golly, this neck of the woods is more important than the city at large, because their taxes aren't based that way, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Their taxes are based on the operation of the city at large. And I believe that that should be the prime concern and prime function of the aldermen that are elected.

Over the period of time that the ward system has been in place — and we have to remember that it was put in place simply to be a trial. I mean, after all, it had never been tried in Saskatchewan; it was "at large" elections until it was imposed on our cities. And it's fair to say that it would be put in as a trial system.

And yes, there have been some plebiscites since, and whether the plebiscites were correctly worded or not, and whether indeed the people thought about it, time has a way of making people just feel that, you know, everything is going fine and that there is no problem and why change.

But it's my responsibility to indeed try to assist municipalities as best I can, and if part of that assistance is by providing them with a better way in which to operate, I believe that that's my responsibility. And so we're having a look at that, because over the period of time that the wards have existed we can see . . . I can see and I hear that it has worked, in my mind, against the greater good of the cities that have been involved in it.

And unfortunately, I believe that the city of Regina is a

good example of the worst effects of the ward system. I have lived in Regina for a long, long time now — almost half a century I've lived in this city. I've seen the "at large" system, have voted in the "at large" system. I've seen the ward system; voted in the ward system.

But unfortunately, I think that the city of Regina . . . I have seen particularly recently a good example of the worst effects of the ward system and how it brings additional burden and additional costs to the taxpayers. Week after week I have seen one councillor pitted against another, defending the narrow interests of his or her segment of the city, and all the while defeating a project that might be for the greater good of the city as a whole.

I think about the recent city council debate over the rail line relocation. I think of how in my other portfolio of housing we were prepared to put in some public housing in Transcona area, only to see that project stalled, and I believe because of the ward system.

You know, when three levels of government truly believe that a project as worthy as a housing project should go together, I believe that it would go together in the best interests of all the city as a whole, including the residents of that particular subdivision. And it's really unfortunate when you see a major project like that be opposed to, particularly when we've got the critical housing needs that we do have in our cities and towns.

I think that there's a good deal of evidence around that supports the idea that the ward system does have increased civic expenditures. I read in the Regina Leader-Post, just a week or two ago, that since the ward system came into effect, civic expenditures in Regina have increased some 383 per cent. And, Mr. Speaker, I think that in view of our tight economic times, we can no longer afford the luxury of the ward system.

As we enter into discussion and guesswork about what our government chooses to do with the ward system, it's interesting to see the various flags that are raised. It's interesting to read the various editorial comments, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and to some degree, along with being interesting, it's sad.

I see the editorial section of the Star-Phoenix, one of the major publications in our province, changing position. They were against the ward system in editorial comments in 1983 and they're against the "at large" system in 1988. And that proves my point, that times indeed change.

And the editorials, you know, why do they change their position and they kind of catch it right on. When you make a change as significant as that, people have a tendency to forget and to accept and say, oh well. And I suppose that maybe even this editorial comment reflects that. The headline reads — and I don't know if it's against the rules of the Assembly to use my own name — I can't refer to others by name — but the headline reads, Klein may be stepping in the wrong direction, or words to that effect. I asked them is that fair? You know, when in the same paper, the editorial stance being changed, they carry an article by an expert, a professor in Saskatoon — and I don't know this gentleman, Mr. Deputy Speaker — that goes on to say quite a few things.

He is a political science professor and he is an expert in municipal government, and he says that the resulting council would probably make wiser decisions, spend less money, and have better qualified councillors. He's a specialist of municipal government.

The ward system, he says, has also made for myopic representations with short-sighted councillors focusing on ward approval rather than what's best for the city at whole. Once the new council has been elected, he foresees the non-partisan politicians would be more efficient in their decisions in spending.

Losers . . . losers at the "at large" system, according to this expert, would be sophisticated community or business groups — or business groups, and I'll accept that — who leaned on their ward representative for political clout in fighting for specific interests or projects.

On the flip side, and I have recognized this, the conscientious voter must do his homework before going to the polls. They will have to mull over a ballot listing candidates for the entire city.

So I think that until we see if our government is in a position to make a change in that, we will have to wait, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We do recognize that if a change will be made, it should be made in plenty of time to allow the voters, the taxpayers, time to reflect on the change, as well as those people that may choose to run for municipal office.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in his budget address a year ago, my colleague from Qu'Appelle-Lumsden announced the amalgamation of three regulatory functions under a single board to provide more efficient operation. In this session, we will be introducing legislation to amalgamate the responsibilities of the Saskatchewan Assessment Appeal Board, the Provincial Planning Appeal board, and the Local government Board. A new body, it will be called the Saskatchewan municipal board. It will be built on the foundations of the existing Local Government Board.

One of the benefits, Mr. Deputy Speaker, of the new municipal board is a greater flexibility in appeal hearings and, there it goes again, in service to the public. Because that's what we're concerned with on the government side, to be of service to the public, and we really believe that this new board will function in that capacity.

The combination of the different backgrounds, and types of expertise that the board members and staff can offer will ensure a comprehensive approach to today's local government issues. Other provinces such as Ontario and Alberta have already moved in this direction and have established similar boards. So we're ready to take on the same challenge; we believe that it will be the best that we can offer for our taxpayers.

Turning for a moment now to another area that we know will be coming, a matter of dangerous dogs. And I quote unfortunately from *Hansard*, "And there go the NDP laughing again." Mr. Deputy Speaker, I don't know what I can do to impress on the members opposite that this is a very, very serious situation, and they just sit there

and giggle. They seem to get some delight, I guess, in seeing a picture of a maimed child in the paper that has been attacked by a vicious dog, a little girl that may be scared for life. Do you see humour in that? Do you see humour in a vicious dog attacking an elderly person that may be . . . Now listen. There they go yelling again, Mr. Deputy Speaker, there they go yelling again. I'll explain . . . But you know when I have to quote out of *Hansard*, I quote a Speech from the Throne which concentrates on the problem of made dogs travelling through the wherever in roaming packs through the cities of Saskatchewan. I mean, what kind of nonsense is that? What kind of tripe, what kind of garbage are we talking about in this Assembly?

I've been working on this piece of legislation for over a year, Mr. Deputy Speaker, trying to advance the betterment and the quality of life for our urban people, trying to protect the unprotected against this kind of an attack, being serious about it, being responsible about it, and I read in *Hansard* a Speech from the Throne which concentrates on the problem of mad dogs travelling . . . roaming packs through the cities of Saskatchewan. Well my gosh, what kind of diatribe is that?

And if that's the best that the Leader of the Opposition can talk about, then he shouldn't be your leader. Why don't you people grow up and recognize that what we're talking about here is indeed serious, and is indeed of concern to our citizens. You should be ashamed of yourselves for the attitude you take on an important issue like that.

Control of dangerous dogs, Mr. Deputy Speaker, has become a big concern throughout the North America, and we've had a number of requests from towns and cities to update and strengthen municipal powers to control dogs. Some people see this issue only in the terms of the pit bull terrier. They say, ban the pit bull and you've solved the problem. Well it's not that simple. It goes beyond the matter of pit bull; it goes beyond the matter of any breed.

What's the solution? Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I think that it's a combination of tougher laws and responsible pet ownership. We don't want to destroy the family pet and the warmth of a family — my gosh, we've all had dogs and pets in our families and we're not out to destroy that — but we do know that we need responsible pet ownership. And based on input that we've received, indeed, from urban municipalities, we will present to the legislature this spring what I think will be the most comprehensive legislation to control dangerous dogs in all of Canada.

An Hon. Member: World class, eh, Jack?

Hon. Mr. Klein: As the member speaking from his chair, the member for Saskatoon Westmount indicates — world class. Yes. Yes, Mr. Member, it will be world class, and when that legislation is introduced, don't you dare giggle. Don't you dare laugh as you are now, because your people in Saskatoon Westmount, they will be concerned with this legislation, and they would be disappointed in you to hear you laughing about a situation such as that right now.

Mr. Speaker, it was just four and a half years ago that The Northern Municipalities Act was passed, establishing our northern municipalities and giving them the framework for local government and for local decision making.

(1630)

An Hon. Member: Why are you filibustering this debate?

Hon. Mr. Klein: Now I'm being accused of making a filibuster. Mr. Speaker, I think that I've been talking about topical issues. I think that I've been outlining the Speech from the Throne. I think I've been saying it's an encompassing document that dictates what our government is going to do. Now they're accusing me of a filibuster. I guess I just can't help it if I happen to have some major issues on my plate right now, albeit they seem to think that some of them are humorous, but I take my work seriously.

After all, my people in Regina South take me seriously. They've elected me to do the job, and I think they think I'm doing it properly. The members from the North bring up issues which comes under my jurisdiction, so why do you say I'm filibustering, or why do you laugh about the northern problems? I'm trying to deal with something here, Mr. Speaker, that it seems that they're not concerned with.

But as I was saying, it was about four and a half years ago that The Northern Municipalities Act was passed, establishing our northern municipalities and giving them the framework for local government and local decision making — again autonomy that they wanted, that they looked for, and that we believed that they were prepared and able to handle. It was a milestone in the development of our northern communities because it put the responsibility for local decisions where it belongs, with the local community leaders. And I commend our northern community leaders for having taken up the challenges of local government.

And I'm indeed very proud, Mr. Speaker, of the job that those leader shave done. And I'm just pleased to say that I'm fortunate enough to seem to have worked for and gained their respect. I admire them. I work well with them, or try to, and I think they recognize that this government is on the right track with them, and we certainly recognize their ability and their hard work, particularly in the interests that they show of the further development of their communities.

Many of these leaders have told us of the need to have ready access to additional land within local municipal boundaries. These requests have been supported by the Northern Development Advisory Council and recently by SUMA at its annual convention. And in conjunction with my colleagues, the ministers of Parks, Recreation and Culture, and the minister responsible for the Northern Affairs Secretariat, we recommended to cabinet the transfer of full ownership and control of unoccupied Crown land within municipal boundaries to northern municipalities.

And I'm pleased to say that work is now under way to

implement this transfer, and this decision really truly does demonstrate our government's confidence in northern local governments to manage and to develop their own communities. It's a concrete example of our government's commitment to working in partnership with our northern communities to help them develop their economic future, Mr. Speaker, and they're very, very excited about that prospect. This is something that they've been waiting for, for a long, long time, and now they finally have access to that so that they can do some planning, so that if they try to get commercial ventures, if they try to get into some small forms of economic development, to try to create some badly needed jobs in our northern communities, I believe that this, Mr. Speaker, will truly get them off and started on the right foot. They will now have their own land base to work with. They will now be able to approach the federal government with housing developments to satisfy the needs of their community and the like, and all done by these hard working, young leaders in these northern municipalities that are so vitally interested and so vitally concerned with their communities.

Mr. Speaker, I want to talk for a moment, too, about another area that our department in Urban Affairs will be working on, too, and that is, to encourage municipalities at all levels, in the northern areas and in the southern areas, to review their own internal operations with a view to identifying areas that might be more efficiently run by the private sector in their own communities.

I know that a lot of municipalities have already begun that process years and years ago, and so if you want to attach the word privatization to it, there's nothing new. Municipalities throughout the province, I've discovered — and we're compiling this now — they have contracted out their garbage collection in many, many communities to the private sector. They have contracted out street cleaning. Indeed, some communities have contracted out the maintenance of parks, the watering of the grass and the cutting of the grass and the like, in their communities. And to those communities that have done that, I have to send them bouquets because they are leading the attack on how to really reduce expenditures at the municipal level and are doing a major service to their taxpayers when it relates to holding the line on expenditures.

Ideally, Mr. Speaker, privatization of municipal services will provide that double benefit to a community. I think that the increased efficiency should result in a cost saving for that municipality. And secondly, and this is where the members on the benches opposite really miss out in their new-found ally of small business — as they maintain — but as those municipalities put that privatization section in effect, it will provide an economic opportunity for enterprising local business people.

Maybe indeed we would find that municipal public servants and the leaders . . . the leaders of those public servants are now putting me under attack, Mr. Speaker — the union leaders — for whatever reason, and they seem to think that they've got an argument with me. But yet their membership, their membership, Mr. Speaker, could very well have a major opportunity presented to them by a local government if a local government would choose to privatize some small section of their operation. That

could be a tremendous opportunity for the employees to undertake, Mr. Speaker.

So then it would make me question the union leaders. Are they against, you know, the betterment of these public employees bettering themselves? It really makes you wonder the underlying reason why the labour leaders of the public unions would attack me in my role. But I guess that's what I've learned to expect.

Interestingly enough, Mr. Speaker, the privatization movement that seems to be the buzz-word now around all levels of government.

An Hon. Member: Piratization.

Hon. Mr. Klein: There they go, they attach their name to it, speaking from their seat again. I don't know, they seem to think that this whole . . . you know, every time somebody says anything, they seem to come up with some, what they think, is a humorous line, a joke. Do they really believe, Mr. Speaker, that this whole system is a joke? That I am part of a joke? That they are part of a joke? I mean, it's a bad joke, as far as I'm concerned.

But in any event. Privatization, Mr. Speaker, has been led in Britain by the federal government. And we're all aware of the massive success that privatization has been. Union people, just delighted with the process of privatization in the United States. People in Britain owning their own homes — homes that the government owned, now in Britain they can be their own personal little home owner, the way it should be, the way we know it here in Canada. So that was led by the federal government in Britain, Mr. Speaker.

In Canada, privatization is led by the provinces — all provinces are into it. And all opposition, of which the NDP seems to be these days, and will be again at the end of next month, in another opposition role, they seem to be against privatization, so . . . and it makes you wonder, if you kind of hook it together with their labour leader friends, you know. And their leader, their leader, Mr. Speaker, their leader that took a personal attack against me on small business and privatization and was accusing shadow cabinets in existence, you know, and naming people, and the like. I ask them the question: who is their leader federally? Is it really Mr. Broadbent, or is it somebody by the name of Bob White?

Now let's find out the real underlying reason why they don't like privatization. And, Mr. Speaker, in the United States of America, our great neighbours to the south, privatization is indeed led by municipalities, and they are privatizing in all areas of municipal government. And I ask you why?

And again, it's nothing new. This is not brand-new territory, brand-new swaths that they're cutting out to see how it works or playing games with or the like, but actual proof of where areas and municipal areas in the United States have privatized and have done those two things that I've referred to, Mr. Speaker — created opportunities for small business and, indeed, employees of the public service, and have saved literally, in the United States of America, hundreds of millions of dollars in tax payments

by the citizens as the privatization has occurred right across the country of the United States.

Another item that I seem to have on my platter, Mr. Speaker. There's been much talk lately about the business tax. This tax is controversial, to say the least.

I bring up all of these issues, Mr. Speaker, because in spite of the fact . . . I had my first question today in question period, but I have a lot of major issues that they seem to be avoiding in question period, so I believe that if they won't bring my problems to me, that I will bring the problems to them and put them. I'm not afraid to talk about these issues.

The business tax. There's been much talk lately about the business tax, and it's a very controversial tax, to say the least, Mr. Speaker. Some people say, get rid of the tax completely. Others say, keep it; it's a fair tax; it's a just tax. Still others say, reduce it by taking off the education portion of the tax. Some people have said, at least make the tax fairer by providing a level playing field with consistent assessment policies.

Each of these options, Mr. Speaker, have their own supporters — some are pretty vocal, and some unfortunately are simply refusing to pay this tax. And I say unfortunately because we in Saskatchewan are a law-abiding group of citizens, Mr. Speaker, and it's really unfortunate when separate interest groups kind of takes the law in their own hands and say, well the heck with you. That's no answer, Mr. Speaker, there's other ways to handle that problem. I've never encouraged these people to not pay their taxes; none of us, I'm sure, enjoy paying taxes. It would be foolish if we enjoyed it.

But in any event, it's the tax structure that indeed operates the governments, and that's the way the system works. If we can do something to reduce taxes, that's the key, and that's what we should do; but to withhold taxes is only creating another problem for the governments, particularly at the municipal level, to spend more money on. So why? To have to do . . . The recourse is there in the existing legislation. Municipal governments don't like using the recourse that are available.

So I plead, I plead with the members of the business community that simply are not paying their taxes to pay their business tax. We will try to find the solution; we will work desperately to find the solution with them and with SUMA and with the other interested people that come into play in this. But ease everybody's burden: confrontation gets you nowhere, Mr. Speaker, consultation does.

But this tax is nothing new. This tax has been in effect for about 50 years. But because our government does listen and does consult with business people, listens and consults with community leaders, lives and consults with municipal leaders, we are now working in consulting with businesses and municipalities to try to resolve the very issue of business tax.

(1645)

The Local Government Finance Commission, Mr.

Speaker, dealt with that issue and couldn't come up with what they considered to be a proper solution. Well we didn't throw our hand up in the air and say, gee, that was wasted time and effort. The local government report took a long time to compile, Mr. Speaker. There was an awful lot of good people, an awful lot of time and talent and energy went into that report. And at the end of the day when that report was done, measured, studied, and looked at, and they couldn't find solutions, it didn't tell me that the report was no darned good. I suppose it was wishful thinking if we were all anticipating that they would have found every solution to every problem.

But what it told me was, Mr. Speaker, that this is such a problem, such a deep, "enwinding," encompassing problem, that they weren't quite sure how to deal with it. So it told me that we must continue the process of consulting and listening and talking and discussing to try to work to an end to achieve this.

In most respects the business tax is a municipal issue, but if this government can be a part of the solution, we would like to be that part of the solution. Most communities value their local autonomy, and as I previously indicated in my comments on store hours, I support that principle completely, Mr. Speaker.

The Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association, at their provincial convention this past winter, took the position that the education portion of the business tax should be eliminated, with the provincial government making up the \$20 million loss to the school system. Well it's nice and easy passing resolutions like that at conventions, but it's not quite as easy to find the \$20 million that would be required to make that possible.

And yet, Mr. Speaker, no sooner had the municipalities passed that resolution than the Saskatchewan School Trustees Association let it be known that they wouldn't support that proposal, that they did not want provincial government grants to replace the funds collected by municipalities for schools and public libraries because they feel that it would weaken their autonomy on local school boards.

So that's the position that senior government soften find themselves locked into, Mr. Speaker. Here we are trying to resolve an issue which is really a municipal problem, and two major organizations can't agree on a proposed solution put forth by one of them.

At the community level, the lost revenues would have to be made up through higher residential taxation or through reductions in the cost of operating local governments. The cost cutting could conceivably be undertaken, Mr. Speaker, in a lot of communities, but it could be more difficult, I must admit, in others where they simply don't have the room to cut.

Some municipalities have done a very good job of holding the line on expenditures, but we still feel that more can be done. Although we share provincial revenues, and they're declining and nobody can say they aren't because of the sharp drop in prices for our agricultural and resource products — although we share those as best we can with the municipalities of this

province, we really have no way of controlling the expenditure level, Mr. Speaker, of these local municipalities, no way of controlling the goods that they purchase or the services that they render, no way of controlling the personnel that they hire or the wage rates that they pay, and the like. So on one hand, although we share the revenues on the revenue side, we don't have any control at all on the expenditure side.

So I believe that municipalities, too, must be prepared to contribute somehow, somewhat, to the solution, and despite the problems, hopefully a solution can be found to resolve the business tax issue.

And interestingly enough, Mr. Speaker, the business community that seemed to indicate, as SUMA did, that, you know, let the government take over the education tax portion, I don't believe, Mr. Speaker, that that really and truly is the solution. It affects the local autonomy of the school boards, it would eventually lead perhaps to the government funding schools 100 per cent. We all know that that wouldn't be a good solution.

But interestingly enough, I caught a show on television the other day, and I don't watch too much television, but in this show that I saw it showed a manufacturing plant down East, a good small business that employed some 200 people, and they were really concerned about their employees, and in particular, what sparked this whole thing was an employee, a long-time, faithful employee who had been in their service for 14 years, who time after time after time, although trying to get a promotion, couldn't get a promotion. So they found out why, and they found out that this employee only had a grade 3 education and was illiterate.

Now that sparked an interest in this firm and they conducted a survey amongst their employees and they discovered to their amazement that half of the employees in their employ were also considered illiterate. So this company, in order to have people within their own ranks being able to be promoted within their own ranks, decided to upgrade their employees to provide them with the opportunity of advancement, and they had to pay for that education.

So that led me to do something a little bit different then, Mr. Speaker. I grabbed a copy of our paper, the Leader-Post, and I went through the want ad columns. That's where ail the jobs are, small business. Governments don't create jobs, government can't create a job, small businesses do. So I looked in the want ads for the jobs. One of the first questions that is asked by small business: what is your education? Another important issue. Then as you get through into the high-profile, high-sector jobs, they needed people that were educators — they need chartered accountants, they needed lawyers, they needed scientists — all people that were dependent, Mr. Speaker, on the education system.

So I started doing a little bit of thinking about it and since then I've been talking to my friends in the business community. And the very day that I was criticized by the Leader of the Opposition of not doing my job and not being out there and not going and talking to the business community, I saw, Mr. Speaker, more people from the

business community within two days of that remark than he probably conversed with in two months.

The night before those remarks that he cast on me, the very evening before, I was speaking at a chamber of commerce meeting in a community in northern Saskatchewan. He made those remarks. At lunch time that day I had another meeting in Moose Jaw chamber of commerce and that night I was meeting with another business interest group — while he chastises me.

I mean — but anyhow, I came to the conclusion, and I've been talking to my business friends about this, Mr. Speaker: I believe that the business community is looking for some measure of tax relief. And I don't believe that it's the matter of whether it goes to the education portion tax or wherever it goes, I think that they're just simply saying to all levels of government: we're pretty heavily taxed right now; we need some help in the business sector; can you do something to assist us? And if our government, indeed, can assist the small-business community, Mr. Speaker, we will certainly do that.

I'll just talk for a moment, Mr. Speaker, on another issue . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Few programs . . . you know, there they go, talking out of their chairs again. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to think that I've something important to talk about. I think that my constituents in Regina South are interested in hearing what their member has to say, and, if they like, I could continue speaking from now until 10 o'clock tonight without any problem.

I've got a lot of material here that I'd like to point out to them, and if they don't ask me questions in question period and give me the opportunity to express myself, how else can I do it than from a Speech from the Throne where I have the opportunity to talk about the major issues that I believe, number one, my constituents would like to listen to; number two, the taxpayers of this province would like to listen to; and, number three, the people in the business community would like to hear about.

Mr. Speaker, few programs . . . and you hear them knocking this one and yet they don't ever question me in question period — this will probably get a little static from them too — but few programs ever introduced in our province have had the public appeal and, at the same time, generated the tremendous amount of economic activity for business and industry as the home improvement program.

Up to the end of January in this year the value of home improvements have made under the matching grant program — and the reason that they're not going to be too noisy is because I know, Mr. Speaker, which one of those have used the program, so don't knock it.

An Hon. Member: How do you know?

Hon. Mr. Klein: But up to the end of January . . . because some of your members, indeed, asked me to help them complete their applications.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, up to the end of January of this year, Mr. Speaker, the value of home improvements made under the matching grant program reached the hefty total of \$625 million, including contributions by both the home owner and grant commitments from the government. And when you combine this with the home improvements made under the loan program, it means that we're closing in on a billion dollars worth of economic activity for small business and industries in this province. And they knock it, and they tell me that they're friends of small business — balderdash!

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Klein: And, Mr. Speaker, all of this business generated by one program of the provincial government. We estimate that this economic activity has resulted in either the maintenance or creation of some 16,000 jobs for the people of this province. It has helped to keep our unemployment rate among the lowest in Canada, even during a time of stress in the provincial economy. Every month, when the unemployment figures come out, Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan is still right there, either one, two or three. We have been since 1982 and this program goes a long way in doing just that, and that's helping to protect our jobs.

And I have to confess, Mr. Speaker, that I'm sick and tired of the criticism emanating from the opposition benches concerning this program. And the member from Saskatoon south should be just pleased as punch with this program, because I know that a lot of people in his constituency have taken advantage of that program and will continue to. And it's about time that we started spreading some of the good news about that program.

And you know I honestly have to ask them, Mr. Speaker, are they against creating jobs for the people of this province? My gosh, that's what . . . this program has helped to keep an awful lot of our business sector alive and well, particularly when the economy has been hit by a severe decline in world oil prices for our agricultural and resource products. And I guess even after six years, they're still against small business. After six years in opposition, they're still trying to win over the friends, and they're never going to do it.

We're encouraging home owners to take full advantage of the program as well, Mr. Speaker, to improve one of the most important investments that they'll ever make. And that, Mr. Speaker, namely their own homes — pride of ownership.

The continued economic activity for small business and industry that this program generates will help keep Saskatchewan working this spring. The home renovation industry, Mr. Speaker, is indeed one of the fastest growing industries in our province today. The revenues from this . . .

Mr. Speaker: Order. Order, please. Order.

Hon. Mr. Klein: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm getting a little bit dry from having to yell this information.

The revenues from this industry continue to grow because people, young and old alike, are putting money into their homes to protect that tall-important investment. The Saskatchewan home program has been a very, very successful housing program. We've received thousands of applications for renovation work, and the average expenditure is much, much more than the \$3,000 that you think that it might create.

Mr. Speaker, the diversification of the home building industry is not unlike the challenges faced here in Saskatchewan today. And I'd like to speak for a long time yet on diversification and what we're trying to do and what we're trying to accomplish.

Mr. Speaker, I see that the time is nearing 5 o'clock, and I have much more to say as I switch topics momentarily, and at this time I beg leave to adjourn . . . I'm sorry. Being near 5 o'clock, I would ask that I be allowed to continue my remarks this evening.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Assembly recessed until 7 p.m.