

The Assembly met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRESENTING PETITIONS

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I have a petition to present on behalf of the residents of the community of Churchbridge. I'll read the prayer:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to cancel any severance payments to Jack Messer and to immediately call an independent public inquiry to find all the facts surrounding the Channel Lake fiasco.

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

I so present.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also have petitions to present today. The prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to cancel any severance payments to Jack Messer and to immediately call an independent public inquiry to find all the facts surrounding the Channel Lake fiasco.

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

These signatures come from my home town, Mr. Speaker, of Alida.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To present petitions as well. Reading the prayer:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to cancel any severance payments to Jack Messer and to immediately call an independent public inquiry to find all the facts surrounding the Channel Lake fiasco.

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

And this petition is signed by people from the Melfort, Star City area. I so present.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also have a petition to present. The prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to cancel any severance payments to Jack Messer and to immediately call an independent public inquiry to find all the facts surrounding the Channel Lake fiasco.

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

The communities involved, Mr. Speaker, are Milestone, Regina, Hague, and Lang. I so present.

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too rise to present a petition, and I read the prayer:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to cancel any severance payments to Jack Messer and to immediately call an independent public inquiry to find all the facts surrounding the Channel Lake fiasco.

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

And these are signed by the good people from Estevan.

Mr. Gantfoer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise as well to present a petition on behalf of people of Saskatchewan. The prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to cancel any severance payments to Jack Messer and to immediately call an independent public inquiry to find all the facts surrounding the Channel Lake fiasco.

Signatures on this petition, Mr. Speaker, are from Redvers and Alida.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also have a petition to present today:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to cancel any severance payments to Jack Messer and to immediately call an independent public inquiry to find all the facts surrounding the Channel Lake fiasco.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

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

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I as well have a petition to present to the House this morning with regard to the Jack Messer-Channel Lake fiasco. People from around Saskatchewan, as you know, Mr. Speaker, have en masse signed this petition and we are pleased to present on their behalf. These petitioners come from the Kelvington area of Saskatchewan. And I'm pleased to present on their behalf.

Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition I'm presenting on behalf of the good citizens of Coronach. And the prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to save the Plains Health Centre by enacting legislation to prevent the closure, and by providing adequate funding to the Regina Health District so that the essential services provided at the Plains may be continued.

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

I so present.

Mr. Aldridge: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too rise to present petitions of concerned citizens with respect to the Plains Health Centre. And the prayer reads as follows, Mr. Speaker:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to save the Plains Health Centre by enacting legislation to prevent the closure, and by providing adequate funding to the Regina Health District so that the essential services provided at the Plains may be continued.

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

Those who've signed these petitions are from across southern Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker. I so present.

Mr. Goohsen: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to present on this fine Friday morning another petition from south-west Saskatchewan:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to reach necessary agreements with other levels of government to fund the twinning of the Trans-Canada Highway in Saskatchewan so work can begin in 1998, and to set out a time frame for the ultimate completion of the project with or without federal assistance.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

And these folks are coming from the town of Consul and the community, and as well from Swift Current, Mr. Speaker, and I'm happy to present them today.

READING AND RECEIVING PETITIONS

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

Of citizens of the province petitioning the Assembly regarding the twinning of the Trans-Canada Highway; acting to save the Plains Health Centre; and cancellation of severance payments to Jack Messer.

NOTICES OF MOTIONS AND QUESTIONS

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I give notice that I shall on Tuesday next move:

That this Legislative Assembly urge the government to share the concerns of Saskatchewan citizens about the impact of the multilateral agreement on investment in our province, which agreement is scheduled for ratification in May of 1998; and about which many citizens and organizations are raising legitimate concerns about the impact that this investment treaty will have on Saskatchewan's economic, social, and environmental well-being; with fears being expressed about corporate power superseding that of democratically elected governments.

Mr. Goohsen: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I give

notice that I shall on day 20 ask the government the following question:

Of the Minister of Highways and Transportation: in the matter of rail-line abandonment, do you have any plans to buy abandoned rail lines and place a moratorium on the removal of these lines; what plans do you have to assist farmers and farms groups to set up short-line companies and to operate these lines; how much financing are you making available for this project and; have you researched alternate uses for rail lines that could make them economical?

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Hon. Ms. Bradley: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege to introduce through you and to you to all the members of the legislature, a group that is visiting here today from Weyburn from the South East Regional College. And they're seated in your gallery, Mr. Speaker.

There's 10 students here and they're accompanied today by their teachers, Shanna Kosier and Robin Williams. And I look forward to meeting with them after question period and after their tour for questions and answers, and for, I think drinks, and for a photo. I would like everyone to join me today in welcoming the group from South East Regional College.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Draude: — To you and through you to the Assembly, I'd like to introduce a gentleman from my constituency, Peter Voldeng. He's from Naicam and he's the manager of Fairway Farms. He got his engineering degree at the U of S (University of Saskatchewan) and he came in today . . . he's talking to us; he's running as president of the Saskatchewan Party. He knows any hope for the future of this province lies in the hands of this party here.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Johnson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I have two guests in your gallery, Clarence Fineday and Jackie Tipewan. They're down here on business. They are working for the TLE (treaty land entitlements) for the Witchekan band. And I'd like the members to welcome them here today.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Scott: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly, 12 students. These are fourth-year interdisciplinary class students from the University of Saskatchewan and they are specializing in sustainability and environmental impact assessment.

They are accompanied by their teacher, John Gillies. And it is great to see these young people concerned about the environment and will be certainly environmental leaders in the years ahead. And I would ask all members to join in welcoming them here today. Thank you.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Saskatchewan Party Membership

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, today is a very important day for the Saskatchewan Party. Today over 4,500 ballots will go in the mail to be sent out to Saskatchewan Party members and they will choose the new leader of the Saskatchewan Party.

Mr. Speaker, earlier this week when I announced the Saskatchewan Party had sold 4,579 memberships, the other parties tried to downplay that achievement. And in fact the Liberal leader said that during the Liberal leadership race in 1996 there were over 13,500 Liberal members.

That didn't sound quite right to me, Mr. Speaker, so I went home and I checked my records. And it turns out the Liberal leader was a little off. Actually he was off by 9,000 members. In 1996, at the height of the Liberal leadership race, the Liberal Party had 4,222 current members. I have the records to prove it.

I doubt that the Liberal membership today is even half that number, given all of the former Liberal members who are switching over to the Saskatchewan Party.

Mr. Speaker, I'm not raising this point to try to embarrass the Liberal leader — well, actually I am. But the main point is in six short months the Saskatchewan Party has sold over 4,500 memberships, and over the next two weeks those people will be electing the new leader of our party. And those are real members, not imaginary ones like some other parties seem to have on their membership list.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Good News Headlines

Ms. Stanger: — Mr. Speaker, I want to read into the record five . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order.

Ms. Stanger: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to read into the record five good news headlines in Saskatchewan weekly newspapers: (1) North's Grain Handling . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. Order, order. Order. Now the Chair is having difficulty being able to hear the member make her statement to the House, and I will ask the cooperation of all hon. members to allow the member to be heard when making a statement to the House.

Ms. Stanger: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to read into the record five good news stories from Saskatchewan weekly newspapers: for instance, "North's Grain Handling Mecca — Tisdale To Become Home of Four High-throughput Terminals," the *Tisdale Recorder*; "Local REDA helped create 187 new jobs," *The Eston Press* review, January 13, '98; "Building Boom in Melville," the *Melville Advance*, January 14, '98; "New Government Policy Good News for Potashville," the *Esterhazy Miner Journal*, February 10, '98; "Southwest Saskatchewan Economy on the Upswing," the *Shaunavon*

Standard, February 17, '98.

These headlines have two things in common, Mr. Speaker: (1) They each introduce a story of economic development in our province in areas outside the major cities; (2) Each story occurs in opposition members' constituencies. Opposition members, as you have heard in this Assembly the last few days, are so busy telling us that the sky is falling that they ignore what is happening in their own front yard. I'm happy to help them recognize the hard and successful work of Saskatchewan people. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Compensation for Hepatitis C Victims

Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Health is in Toronto this morning announcing a long-awaited compensation package for hepatitis C victims. Many will be pleased that after many years, the government will compensate victims who contracted the diseases between 1986 and 1990. But what about those who contracted this serious disease, hepatitis C, prior to 1986?

We may have heard this in the House previously, Mr. Speaker, but I believe it's important enough to reiterate. Richard Dupont of Welwyn contacted the Liberal opposition recently to express concern that because he contracted the disease before the arbitrary time lines established for compensation, he will not receive a dime. He tells us he is very disappointed and bitterly disillusioned by the NDP (New Democratic Party) government's stance on this issue. He writes:

I've always voted NDP and although it pains me to turn my back on the party I have no choice. I can't relate to a government that is so insensitive to all the sufferings of its citizens. Obviously the NDP has lost its way and turned into Tories.

That, Mr. Speaker, is the ultimate insult and says it all. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Religion is a Journey

Ms. Murray: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I once read an interesting statement which originally puzzled me, but which I now think I understand. It goes, "Religion is a journey, not a destination."

When I heard recently that Howard Thornton, our local CBC (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation) weather guru, is leaving the mother corporation to study for the ministry, my immediate reaction was that here is a person for whom this quotation was coined.

Too many of us, I fear, keep our beliefs and our behaviour in separate pockets.

Howard Thornton I believe is one who, as they say, has no side. He is what he appears to be — a decent, honourable man of good humour and good works. And I, like viewers across the

province, will be sorry to see him leave our screens.

His manner of departure speaks well of him. For the past three days he has undertaken a one-man bike-athon to Saskatoon, raising money for food banks. The amount, which is bound to be substantial, will be announced this evening.

Mr. Speaker, for 25 years Howard Thornton has given the weather to us. Since this is, as we all know, the best province in the best country in the world, he must have had something to do with this fact. He must have a direct connection to the real weather man — or should that be weather person? It is fitting then that he pursue this connection through the ministry.

I know we all wish him and his family well in the next stage of his journey. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Compensation for Hepatitis C Victims

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well it does not look like today's announcement by the Minister of Health is going to be a good news announcement for tens of thousands of innocent victims of hepatitis C, infected by tainted blood.

Although many questions remain officially unanswered, it is becoming increasingly clear that the package will not include people infected before 1986, nor will it include the partners and children infected by victims of the blood supply.

Mr. Speaker, our concern and the concern of so many is that this government will throw out a bone and hope that the general public will believe they have done enough. They are hoping that after their announcement today the issue will die. They are hoping that if they wait long enough to do the right thing by all the victims, there will be no victims around to fight the battle.

Mr. Speaker, it is clear time is on their side. Many of these victims have little time left, and as you can imagine, Mr. Speaker, their energy is low.

But, Mr. Speaker, I have great confidence in the strength of the human spirit. Rest assured if the government fails to do the right thing today, victims and their loved ones will keep on fighting, and so will we.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Interest Paid on Public Debt

Mr. Johnson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A constituent of mine called yesterday asking for the total amount of interest paid on the public debt since we have become the government. We all, I think, have a vague idea of the amount and it is high. I will pass it on to the Assembly today and remind everyone just how much the people of Saskatchewan have done to reduce the debt.

According to Public Accounts, in 1992-93 we paid 740 million in interest on the debt; in 1993-94, 873 million; in 1994-95, 881 million; in 1995-96, 794 million. Mr. Speaker, the projected costs for '97-98 was 756 million, and an additional 725 million

in the year '98-99.

Mr. Speaker, we have paid nearly 5.7 billion in interest payments on the previous government's debt. This year the entire budget was 5.2 billion. Mr. Speaker, that's a lot of roads, home care workers, and classrooms lost, thanks to the Tory debt. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Health Care Crisis in Regina

Mr. Aldridge: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the past two weeks the Liberal opposition has raised a number of concerns about the state of health care in Regina. We've pointed out how on occasion there's not a single hospital bed available in the entire city. We've talked about stretchers lining the hallways of our hospitals and we've revealed that the Regina District Health Board faces a \$5 million funding shortfall. And what has the government response been? Deny, deny, deny.

Well, Mr. Speaker, today there's more evidence that there is a health care crisis in this city. The president of the medical staff with the Regina district says the health care system in the city has reached the breaking point. Dr. E. Abd-Elmessih says the district needs an immediate injection of cash, more hospital beds, and medical staff.

The Liberal opposition has raised concerns on behalf of the people of Regina and southern Saskatchewan, nurses, doctors, ambulance operators, all of whom know there is a serious problem. But the question remains: why isn't this government listening?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

First Nations Waterways Project

Mr. Flavel: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, in recent years we have seen many partnerships forged and deep inroads made in native economic development.

First nations is proposing a waterways project which will focus on developing tourism opportunities within Saskatchewan and Manitoba to attract European, Asian, and U.S. (United States) visitors. The initiative will see a number of primary and supplementary cultural attractions along two of the major waterways in Saskatchewan and Manitoba.

The Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations has a partnership with Tourism Saskatchewan, the Canadian Tourism Commission, and the four Manitoba tribal councils in this project to development tourism opportunities within the aboriginal communities of Saskatchewan and eventually in Manitoba.

The partners will contribute \$628,000 to the project. Phase 1 of the three-year project will be identifying sites to be developed along the Saskatchewan River corridor and the Qu'Appelle-Assiniboine River corridor. Phase 2 will involve project development of individual attractions, and phase 3 is the marketing phase to attract tourists.

Congratulations to the members of the FSIN (Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations) and the first nations waterways

project as you are taking yet another step towards self-determination.

All the best. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ORAL QUESTIONS

Inquiry into Channel Lake

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions this morning are for the Premier. Mr. Premier, for two weeks the Saskatchewan Party has been calling for a full, open, independent public inquiry to look into the Channel Lake scandal.

Mr. Premier, it's also clear that there is overwhelming support for a full public inquiry, but unfortunately the NDP is doing everything in its power to avoid a full public inquiry, because the last thing you want is for Saskatchewan people to find out what really happened at Channel Lake. Now in a desperate attempt to cover up the NDP corruption and wrongdoing, you've decided to turn over the Channel Lake investigation to an NDP-dominated committee, chaired by an NDP member.

Mr. Premier, I understand you've been summoned to appear before the Public Accounts Committee next week and you have been asked to bring along a long list of documents and information with you. Mr. Premier, Mr. Premier, if you won't call for a public inquiry, will you at least appear before the Public Accounts Committee on April 1?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — Mr. Speaker, I say this in a friendly way to my friend from Kindersley, but you've got to be joking. You've got to be joking after two weeks of saying you didn't want to go to the Public Accounts Committee. Your Chair of the committee said it was a kangaroo court. Now you're demanding us to come.

Mr. Speaker, you remember the member from Kindersley drawing the line in the sand. Remember that? — drew the line in the sand. Now he's looking behind him saying the line is back here. You've given up your right in many ways to have credibility, to have credibility in consultation with this Assembly to call this committee.

The Chair called the committee a kangaroo court, a kangaroo court. She didn't have the decency to advise the Vice-Chair of the committee even that she was going to call it. She wrote to her colleague and they had a debate.

I say to the members opposite, come to Crown Corporations Committee, that is legitimate, and let's get on with the business of this Assembly.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One would hope that all of Saskatchewan would see the kind of answers that are coming from this government because the arrogance is unbelievable.

For two weeks the Saskatchewan Party has been calling on the NDP to come clean on Channel Lake and all we get is non-answers and useless NDP rhetoric. Everyone in Saskatchewan is calling for a full public inquiry, except the NDP and their wholly owned subsidiary, the Liberals.

You arrogantly refuse to listen to overwhelming, the overwhelming majority of Saskatchewan people because they don't believe your story any longer. They don't believe you're telling the truth and they don't believe an NDP committee is going to get to the bottom of NDP corruption and wrongdoing.

Unfortunately, unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, that's what it looks like we're stuck with here in Saskatchewan. Even worse, it looks like we're going to be stuck with an NDP committee chaired by an NDP member.

Mr. Premier, if you won't 'fess up . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. Order, order, order. The hon. member has been extremely lengthy in his preamble and I'll ask him to go now directly to his question.

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Premier, if you won't 'fess up in front of a Public Accounts Committee, will you at least, will you at least screw up the courage to appear before the NDP's Crown Corporations Committee and will you bring all of the relevant documents surrounding Channel Lake so that we can ask the relevant questions?

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — Mr. Speaker, I want to say to the members opposite that they have shown total disrespect for the process of the Assembly. And I want to quote — these are not my words, they come from the *World Spectator*, Moosomin, Sask., Monday, March 23, 1998. A fellow by the name of Bruce Penton, and I want to quote, I want to quote. Here's what he says. "Ordinary, ordinary people in Saskatchewan . . ." And I quote:

When you consider the Sask Party is the official opposition almost under false pretence — not one solitary voter in Saskatchewan has ever cast a vote for a Saskatchewan Party candidate — its actions are galling. They're also a little scary. If this is how Sask MLAs act when they're in opposition, have no real power, what kind of stunts will they pull if the voters of this province ever put them in charge (if they ever put them in charge).

Well, Mr. Speaker, we know that in the 1980s we had the Conservatives in government. They followed no process and we ended up with 15 billion in debt.

The Speaker: — Order, order. Order, order, order. I want to ask for the cooperation of all the members of the House. The previous question and the answer both have been very lengthy and I'll ask the hon. members to respect the time.

Regina Hospital Bed Shortage

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's too bad that the government members have such selective reading

ability. Too bad they can't read contracts.

Mr. Speaker, my question is to the Minister of Health. We keep hearing that there's no bed shortage in Regina, but yesterday a young woman named Glennis Frith of Redvers had surgery at the Plains hospital to remove some large gallstones from her gall-bladder. This is a serious operation, Mr. Speaker, and one that takes a few days from which to recover.

And where did Glennis go to recover less than 12 hours after her surgery? The Howard Johnson Hotel. She spent the night at the Howard Johnson Hotel just a few hours after gall-bladder surgery because there wasn't a single bed available at the Plains hospital.

Mr. Minister, the Howard Johnson is a fine hotel but it's not a hospital. How can you continue to say there's no bed shortage when gall-bladder surgery patients have to go to the Howard Johnson for recovery?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Mr. Speaker, with respect to the matter the member is raising, at this point I don't have any knowledge about. And certainly I can undertake that the Minister of Health and the officials of the Department of Health will look into the matter to see if there is any merit to what the member is saying.

But I want to say to the member in the House, Mr. Speaker, without having any knowledge of what the member is raising, that I have every confidence that the Regina Health District, the medical doctors that work for the district, the surgeons and the nurses and so on, will deal with people that are in the hospital in Regina in a professional manner, Mr. Speaker, that is consistent with the health, well-being, and safety of every patient that comes into contact with the Regina health system, Mr. Speaker. We will look into the matter, but I'm quite confident that the matter would have been dealt with in a most professional way by the professional people that work for the health system here.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If the government isn't prepared to provide beds, perhaps they're prepared to pay for hotel rooms. Because, Mr. Minister, this is getting ridiculous; it would be funny if it wasn't so serious. This is the kind of bed shortage we have before the Plains hospital closes. What's going to happen after it closes? Not only will there be a shortage of hospital beds, but there's going to be a shortage of hotel beds because all the people will be recovering in a hotel room.

The newest NDP acute care facility, the Howard Johnson Hotel. Mr. Minister, what are you going to do about this dangerous situation, or does somebody have to die in a hotel bed before you do something?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Mr. Speaker, I want to inform the member of something that the member certainly isn't prepared to inform the House or others about, and that is the fact that most people from rural southern Saskatchewan today are served in the

Pasqua and General hospitals in the city of Regina, not in the Plains, Mr. Speaker.

And I want to further advise the member in the House, Mr. Speaker, that the Pasqua and General hospitals have been undergoing substantial rebuilding in the last number of years, as the member knows, and not one bed is going to be closed as a result of the consolidation into two health centres rather than three in Regina.

All of the people, services, and beds from the Plains, Mr. Speaker, are going to be consolidated into two locations for the better service to the people of southern Saskatchewan. And I want to quote from His Honour the Lieutenant Governor in the throne speech who said this on March 9:

In Regina, the consolidation of facilities into two strong, effective 21st century base hospitals will serve the people of southern Saskatchewan for decades . . . (featuring) a new MRI unit, and state-of-the-art neurology and cardiology departments.

That's what we're going to do, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I spoke to Glennis's mother and her husband this morning. I couldn't speak to Glennis because she was very ill. However her mother and her husband were both very worried about this dangerous situation and they wanted it brought to your attention and to the public's attention.

Mr. Minister, Glennis is still down at the Howard Johnson, with her husband, trying to recover from gall bladder surgery, and they're probably watching question period right now, And they want an answer from you, Mr. Minister. What are you going to do about the serious bed shortage in Regina? Or are you simply going to continue to deny that there is a serious problem?

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Mr. Speaker, I've already said to the member that the matter the member raises will be looked into. Whether or not what the member says is true I don't know. Things that have been raised by the opposition in the past have been found not to be quite the same as indicated when they have been looked into. This matter will be looked into.

But I want to say to this member that in the budget last week, Mr. Speaker, that was introduced on March 19, an increase of over \$8 million in cash will be going to the Regina Health District this year — \$8 million more than last year, Mr. Speaker.

We, unlike other governments and unlike the federal government, Mr. Speaker, we are putting more money into health care, including more money going to the Regina Health District. And I have every confidence that the management and staff of the Regina Health District, with the increased resources they are receiving each and every year, can do the job that it is their job to do and can do it well and can manage the situation, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Lanigan Hospital Closure

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my questions are to the Minister of Health as well, or his designate.

First of all, Mr. Minister, to say that people from south-east Saskatchewan aren't in the Plains Health Centre, if you were to visit there as often as I visit it, you would find that there are many people that have been sent to the Plains Health Centre. And that the calls to my office certainly have brought forward the concerns about its closure.

But, Mr. Speaker, there are other closures taking place across this province. Last night over 400 people turned out to a public meeting in Lanigan to protest your government's decision to close the Lanigan hospital. People offered dozens of solutions and alternatives, but at the end of the evening I don't think you were listening.

In fact the MLA (Member of the Legislative Assembly) for the area — the MLA for Watrous — didn't even show up. He said it wasn't his problem; it's the board's problem. Mr. Minister, I know you like to send the boards out to do your dirty work, but this is your responsibility, the responsibility of your government. Will you reverse the decision to close the Lanigan hospital?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Mr. Speaker, this is typical of what the opposition does in this House.

The Speaker: — Order, order. Order, order. The hon. members will recognize that it is inappropriate in the House, and not acceptable, that members will state from their seats what they are not permitted by the rules to say — order — to say from the . . . on the record. And I will ask the Minister of Agriculture and Food to rise and withdraw the remark and apologize to the House . . . (inaudible) . . . I will ask the Minister of Agriculture and Food to rise and withdraw the remark and apologize to the House.

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — Oh, I'm sorry, I didn't hear you, Mr. Speaker. I apologize for saying that to the House, unequivocally.

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Mr. Speaker, when the member from Moosomin — the Conservative member — gets up and says the decision has been made to close the Lanigan hospital, Mr. Speaker, that is not true. No such decision has been made and the member should know that.

The health board in Living Sky has talked about several options that they are interested in pursuing to meet the health needs of people in that district, Mr. Speaker. Those options have been fully put out for public discussion and there's public discussion going on. There is no decision that has been made as this member says, Mr. Speaker, no decision at all. So what the member is saying is not true.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I think and I'm confident that health services are going to continue to be provided in Lanigan, Wynyard, Strasbourg, and Watrous — in all of those places,

Mr. Speaker. Which services? That decision will be made by the local health board, but services will be provided in all four of those places, Mr. Speaker, contrary to what that member says.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Plains Health Centre Closure

Mr. Aldridge: — Mr. Speaker, the Liberal opposition has maintained that the decision to close the Plains hospital was made long before this government put a gun to the head of the Regina District Health Board in January of 1996.

But the current Minister of Health and his predecessor have on several occasions maintained that the decision was made in January of 1996. However, on at least two occasions in the past week the Minister of Health has indicated in this House that the decision to close the Plains hospital was made five years ago.

Mr. Premier, I believe your minister has made a slip of the tongue. Are you now willing to admit that the decision to close the Plains hospital was made by your government three years before it ever went before the Regina District Board?

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Mr. Speaker, the board of the Regina Health District has had the opportunity to look at this issue on several occasions. They have always come to the conclusion that the right decision is to consolidate services in two hospitals in Regina rather than three.

And I want to say, Mr. Speaker, that we've listened to the Liberals and the Conservatives say that the sky is falling, and try to scare people, for a long time. But what it is, Mr. Speaker, is fearmongering. Because the reality is, Mr. Speaker, that people provide health services. Buildings do not provide health services; people do.

And the services that are provided in the Plains hospital today, the people that provide those services are going to be providing the same services out of two locations. Except, Mr. Speaker, they're going to have a new centre for MRI (magnetic resonance imaging) in southern Saskatchewan, which we haven't had before. They're going to have a centre of excellence for urology and for cardiology to better serve the people of southern Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Aldridge: — Mr. Speaker, there's many reasons that the Plains hospital should not be closed by the government in 218 days from now, most notably because it provides a very valuable service for the people of Regina and southern Saskatchewan.

Now to this point the government has not indicated what use the facility will have if the government gets its way. But we've learned that negotiations have been taking place with SIAST (Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology), and the administrative offices for SIAST will be located at the Plains on November 1.

Mr. Premier, how serious are these talks? Has any final

agreement been reached?

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Mr. Speaker, I want to advise the member and the House that in due course an announcement will be made with respect to the use of the facility now occupied as a hospital at the Plains Health Centre.

All of the services at the Plains, as I said, will be provided in other facilities which are being rebuilt and have been being rebuilt, in the process of being rebuilt as state-of-the-art facilities, for quite some time.

And I want to say to that member that those two new hospitals that are being built in Regina will be put to appropriate use — better use — providing better services. And the facility that now is occupied at the Plains will also be used to provide appropriate services to the people of Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Aldridge: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That sounds about as close to an acknowledgement as I'll get out of the minister here today. One has to seriously question the priorities of a government that places offices above the health care needs of its people. There's a bed crisis in the city of Regina. The people of southern Saskatchewan need a trauma centre, yet you believe it's more important that the Plains hospital be used for office space.

Mr. Premier, it's not too late for you to come to your senses. Try and remember what it was like to care — to care about health care, to care about the needs and the concerns of the people you're supposed to represent. Open your eyes. Recognize that our health care system is in critical condition.

You maintain you can't afford to keep the Plains open. What is it going to take to prove that you can't afford not to keep the Plains open?

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, thank you very much. I want to begin by answering the member by reminding the member that it was my party, our party, the CCF (Co-operative Commonwealth Federation) that invented medicare for Canada and has made it our gift to Canada in 1962. And I might say we did so over the opposition of the Liberals and the Tories and the Keep Our Doctors committee.

I want to tell the member opposite that we funded medicare \$1 for every dollar, out of provincial taxpayers for five years. And then when Ottawa came in, to Ottawa's credit, 50 cents was given to help us fund medicare.

Today under the Liberals in Ottawa they have reduced their portion of health care from 50 cents to under 13 cents to our province and to each and every province in Canada.

And notwithstanding that, Mr. Speaker, we have back-filled every penny lost by Ottawa and added to the base, and are providing the best health care system that this country has, consistent with our history and our philosophy and our beliefs.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Rural Health Care

Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to hear we're going to have the best health care than any other place in this country. However, I'm pleased to hear that promise made by the Premier, because the Leader of the Liberal Party and I were also in Lanigan last evening, where there were well over 400 people to attend an emergency. The Living Sky Health District faces a one and a half million dollar deficit and the people in the district face substantial bed closures or cuts to front-line staff.

Unlike a government that doesn't care and the Tories who would privatize health care, the Liberal opposition believes that proper health care services are essential in urban and rural Saskatchewan. This meeting took place only three days after the Minister of Health told the media that further bed closures would be, and in his words, "inappropriate."

Mr. Premier, to the Premier, Mr. Speaker: what are you doing to, what are you going to do to honour this promise? And why, if you are spending \$1.7 billion on health care, does the system continue to crumble, particularly rural Saskatchewan?

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Well, Mr. Speaker, as I already indicated in response to a question from the Conservative opposition, the Living Sky Health District has not made any decisions with respect to changes to their health care facilities in the area. They're out there talking to the public, as they should be. They're putting options out to the people about where they could go, as they should be. They haven't made any decisions as of this time.

And what they're going to do, Mr. Speaker, is make some decisions with respect to the most appropriate way to meet the health care needs of the people in the communities that they serve. And that's what they should do, Mr. Speaker. They should make choices that are appropriate to the needs of the people that live in those communities, Mr. Speaker. And that is what they will do. That is their job, Mr. Speaker.

They will not be assisted in that job by the fearmongering that comes from the Liberals and the Conservatives in this House, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Osika: — Mr. Speaker, if members of the government and the government members who represent those areas would be present to hear people pleading, they would know it's not fearmongering. For more than two hours we heard presentations by people, by nurses; and the member who represents the area was not there.

We heard more horror stories, the kind the Liberal opposition have been raising daily, on a daily basis in this House. We heard about the lack of beds; patients being shuttled around because of this bed crisis. This not only happening in Regina, but in Saskatoon. People were pleading with their local health care system because they know there are no extra beds in the cities should they require care.

Mr. Speaker, to the Premier today, I am pleading on behalf of

the people in the Living Sky Health District and in other districts who see their health care system continuing to be gutted. Step in; demonstrate there is still some compassion left in your government. The patient is critical, sir. What are you going to do to stop the bleeding?

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, I don't know to which patients the Acting Leader of the Liberal Party refers, whether it's the Liberal Party being in critical position and bleeding or whether he refers it to more . . . other specific examples.

An Hon. Member: — Health care.

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — The member opposite shouts across the floor at me that he talks about health care. I say that in Saskatchewan we have committed \$1.7 billion, the highest . . .

An Hon. Member: — Where is it? Where is it going?

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Listen. The highest expenditure to health care in the history of the province of Saskatchewan.

What's happening at Living Sky is, Living Sky directors of that health district board are in public consultation with the communities as to how best allocating their budget for their region. This is what they should be properly doing.

I repeat again, as I said to the hon. member previous, to his partner asking the previous question, we have done this in Saskatchewan even though we have suffered a reduction in federal funds for health care from 50 cents to 13 cents. We back-filled on that dollar, every penny, and we've added to the base. We are as compassionate. We don't need lessons from you, with the greatest respect, about compassion.

We were on the side of medicare; you were against it. You're still against it. The desk mate behind you wants two-tier, he wants private hospitals for profit. And your leader, Dr. Melenchuk . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. Order. Next question.

Lanigan Hospital Closure

Mr. Toth: — Mr. Speaker, a further question to the minister, the Acting Minister of Health. Mr. Minister, in yesterday's paper, both the Saskatoon *Star-Phoenix* and the *Leader-Post*, the administrator of the town of Lanigan talked about the effect of the closures of 12 acute care beds in Lanigan and Watrous and 17 long-term beds. He said, ". . . under both options, the Lanigan hospital would close and observation beds would be created." And that was brought forward last night.

Mr. Minister, a lot of solutions, positive solutions, were brought forward as well. People didn't just criticize, they presented alternatives. Mr. Minister, one real alternative that would allow local boards to operate is to give them block funding rather than tying the hands of district boards.

Mr. Minister, will you now move forward and allow for block funding so district boards can channel the funds into the areas that they see specific needs of in their districts? Will you do that?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Well to again point out the absurdity of what the member says, Mr. Speaker. He quotes the administrator as saying that the hospital would be closed and left with observation beds. Well if the hospital closed, Mr. Speaker, who would be there to observe the beds that would be observation beds? It's patently absurd.

As I've indicated before, Mr. Speaker, the facilities are not going to close down. The district health board is engaged in the process of deciding what services should be provided in those facilities.

But I want to say to the member, if the member's asking for block funding to the health districts, I just want to say I hope it doesn't turn out to be the same as the block funding from the federal government for health care, Mr. Speaker, because when that came in we went down to 13 cents on the dollar funding for health care, Mr. Speaker. So if that's what the member's suggesting, more Liberal and Conservative cut-backs to health care, I don't think that's the answer, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 742 — The Protection of Children Involved in Prostitution Act

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I move the first reading of Bill No. 742, The Protection of Children Involved in Prostitution Act be read for the first time.

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

The Speaker: — I recognize the hon. member from Saltcoats.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker I rise pursuant to rule 46 to move a motion of urgent necessity.

The Speaker: — The hon. member for Saltcoats wishes to introduce a motion under rule 46. I'll ask him very briefly to describe why he feels it appropriate for the House to set aside its order of business, its ordinary business, on this matter of urgent and pressing necessity and to advise the House very briefly of the motion he wishes to introduce.

MOTION UNDER RULE 46

Public Broadcast of Crown Corporations Committee

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a very short and simple motion. It would be easier just to read it:

That this Assembly authorize the use of photography, audio and video recordings and broadcasting without restriction of the Standing Committee of Crown Corporations review of the circumstance surrounding the purchase of sale of Channel Lakes Petroleum Ltd.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Leave not granted.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

MOTIONS FOR RETURNS (Not Debatable)

The Speaker: — Order, order, order. Order. I will . . . Order, order. Now the . . . Order. I will ask all hon. members from both sides of the House to come to order. Order.

Mr. Kowalsky: — . . . that the motion be converted to motions for returns (debatable).

The Speaker: — Converted to motions for returns (debatable).

MOTION

Referral of the Estimates and Supplementary Estimates to the Committee of Finance

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Premier:

That His Honour's message . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. Now the Chair is unable to hear the motion being put by the Minister of Finance, and I will ask for the House to provide order so the Minister of Finance can be heard moving his motion.

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I was saying, I move, seconded by the Premier:

That His Honour's message, the estimates and supplementary estimates be referred to the Committee of Finance.

The Speaker: — Order. Order. Order. Order. I will ask all hon. members to come to order and permit the House to proceed with its business.

Mr. Gantefer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it's indeed a pleasure to be part of the budget debate. It certainly has been a trying time to try to get the NDP government to finally allow us to look at the whole issue surrounding Channel Lake and the Crown corporations. And unfortunately it looks like we're not going to be able to do that to the satisfaction of Saskatchewan taxpayers.

The Speaker: — Is the Assembly ready for the question? The House may want to come to order so then it understands the procedure that is before us. I suspect that the hon. members will find the proceedings much easier to follow if they can hear what's happening. And so I . . .

Motion agreed to.

MOTION FOR COMMITTEE OF FINANCE (BUDGET DEBATE)

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Premier:

That this Assembly now resolve itself into the Committee of Finance.

The Speaker: — Order. Order. Order.

Mr. Gantefer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I do apologize for being anxious to get at this. It seemed that after a week of having the NDP trying to avoid going to a full public inquiry, that it seemed like such an appropriate thing to get up and get at this budget debate.

Mr. Speaker, we did have the opportunity to speak briefly about the budget last week when it was introduced by way of a ministerial statement. And so, Mr. Speaker, I will only add some comments to that, and my colleagues will focus more specifically on their critic areas and do a much more in-depth analysis of their areas of responsibility.

But, Mr. Speaker, I think it's very appropriate that we set an overview of what really has gone on in this budget and really focus on the impact it's going to likely have in Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, I'm mindful of one of the headings out of the *Leader-Post* on March 20 that said that Saskatchewan is number two. And you know, Mr. Speaker, I would probably be very happy with that if that had been referring to how well we had fared in our score testing on mathematical tests across Canada, where instead of finishing number two we finished dead last — 10 out of 10 — in this province. But that isn't the kind of number that we're looking at here. What we're looking at is saying Saskatchewan's income tax is number two in Canada.

And you know, Mr. Speaker, last year we were number one, so we really did have some reason to be proud, because we were collecting more income tax from Saskatchewan people than any province in Canada. And this year we missed it from the province of Newfoundland by some \$38. And so, Mr. Speaker, we finished second only because Newfoundland is collecting \$38 more income tax from their people than we are here in Saskatchewan.

And that really is the whole problem that we're facing in Saskatchewan, is that we are being taxed to death.

You know, Mr. Speaker, one of the wonderful opportunities . . .

(1100)

The Speaker: — Order, order. Now I recognize that it's Friday. But I also recognize that this is the beginning of a number of series of days that will be available to debate the budget and that members need not shout their comments across the floor. They'll have plenty of opportunity to put them on the record formally and officially.

And the Chair would appreciate the cooperation of the House so that members would put their comments on the record so that they can be heard and understood by those who follow the proceedings of debates of this House. I'll ask for the cooperation of all members.

Mr. Gantefer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, as I

was saying, this simple fact is what underlies one of the greatest problems that this province has, and under this government is going to continue to have, and that being that we are simply so taxed that people do not want to come to Saskatchewan, they don't want to build businesses and opportunities in Saskatchewan, and indeed, Mr. Speaker, they don't stay in Saskatchewan.

People across this province are saying to us day after day, when is it going to change so that the taxation levels in this province, the attitude about people making a good living and be able to retain some of that income to be able to spend on their family and on their futures, when is that going to happen in Saskatchewan?

And, Mr. Speaker, it may be easier to get away with it if we were on the east coast where the competition is Newfoundland next door who actually provides \$38 more tax gouging from their people a year than we do here.

But that isn't the case, Mr. Speaker, we're next to Alberta and Manitoba. Two provinces that are beginning . . . Manitoba beginning to really move forward aggressively, and Alberta who has left us in the dust a good number of years ago. And we're desperately trying to keep even, never mind close the gap.

Mr. Speaker, every holiday season we see the results of that. Every holiday season when we go home to celebrate with our families — and Easter is coming up fairly soon — I challenge the members opposite to go to their communities and go for a walk in the evening. And you'll notice a lot of cars of our kids and our friends and relatives that are home for the holidays. And I challenge them to go and do a tally in their community across this province and keep track of where the licence plates are from, from those new cars in town.

In Melfort, Saskatchewan, and Tisdale, Saskatchewan, and all across Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, the overwhelming answer to that challenge is, the licence plates are from Alberta. And there's a reason for it. There's a reason, Mr. Speaker, because we have failed to address the fundamental challenge of competing with our neighbour province who have got their act together a long time ago when we were too busy privatizing and nationalizing and all the rest of it. The NDP had to nationalize the potash industry. Why? The potash industry is thriving under its independence today because it didn't have to have that done.

So often we've gotten so wrapped up with socialists ideology that we could not find our way out of the dilemma of finding no other way to balance the books but taxing the devil out of Saskatchewan people. And so, Mr. Speaker, we're losing our children, we're losing our retirees.

I met an individual three or four weeks ago who was retiring from a pretty good job in Regina. And he's the kind of individual I think, he didn't . . . He introduced himself but he didn't . . . I don't recall his name specifically. But he seemed to be the kind of meticulous sort of a fellow that would look at things and analyse them pretty carefully.

And he and his wife were deciding where they were going to retire. And he went through the whole exercise of saying what income would he have and where would it have to be spent. He

analysed what his health care premiums would be in Saskatchewan as compared to Alberta. He analysed what the impact was going to be on having no PST (provincial sales tax) in Alberta as compared to 7 per cent in Saskatchewan. He analysed the cost of licence plates. He analysed the cost of rent and utility charges and all of the things that were going to affect his situation. He analysed the situation of health care premiums.

He put everything into the basket and he had to make a determination, he told me, about where would it be best for him and his wife to live — Regina or Medicine Hat. And he said that in the whole basket of all of the things taken cumulatively, he was going to be better off to retire in Alberta by something approaching \$800 a month, Mr. Speaker.

So guess where he's living? He's living in Medicine Hat and I don't blame him. How could anybody blame him when you make that kind of a comparison? And I respect the individual's commitment that he did that fairly and openly and honestly because he's living there. If it wasn't true why would he move there? Because he was living here.

And so, Mr. Speaker, those are the kind of issues that are facing our people — that are facing the people of Saskatchewan, and we simply have to address it.

In an article from the *Leader-Post*, Bruce Johnstone makes some comparisons, and he said that the Alberta advantage is getting bigger. And everyone knows about the Alberta advantage and he quotes some statistics, for example. And I quote:

In a single income family with two children earning \$30,000 a year, provincial income taxes in red neck Alberta will be a mere \$470. In socialist Saskatchewan the bill for the same family comes close to a whopping \$1900.

I mean these are the kind of things that people see and people are concerned about, and they are leaving our province.

And so we end up with a situation that even the provincial appointed public Action Committee on the Economy, PACE, points out — the offsetting effect of lower household charges diminishes as income increases. This higher income tax load creates a perceived and an actual problem for Saskatchewan since higher skilled and higher cost employees are less likely to move in or remain in Saskatchewan, the PACE report commented.

Mr. Speaker, if you talk to business people in Saskatchewan who have to hire professionals for their businesses, if it's in the oil and gas industry, or the forestry industry, or agricultural research, or the medical professions, or education professions, they tell us is that they have a very difficult time recruiting and getting people to move to Saskatchewan. How are we going to build an economic base if that continues to be true?

Businesses tell us they have to pay a premium. If the going rate to hire somebody is \$50,000 generally, they have to pay as much as a 30 to 35 per cent premium so the people will come and do the job in Saskatchewan, because it's not what you gross that counts, it's what you net. It's what you get to take home in your pay packet to spend on your family and on your priorities.

And so our Saskatchewan companies are telling us that they're operating under substantial disadvantage compared to Alberta companies. And so we hear of companies that are leaving to locate their head office in Alberta so that they don't face that. And that's a great tragedy — that's a great tragedy, Mr. Speaker, because what's happening is we're having a reallocation of individuals and resources out of this province because this government will not deal with meaningful tax relief for the people of this province.

Mr. Speaker, you know what happens is, we end up with a situation when we look at the budget, we look at a very, very tenuous situation. What we have is a situation is where we have dramatically backslid again into a have-not province. Last year there was so much expectation and hope that maybe we were going to get things together. The government had reduced the provincial sales tax by two percentage points and in the mid-term report it was indicated that we were moving in a very substantial way to actually becoming a have province. And what happened? The government's policies have been such that we're so vulnerable that we've now moved back so that we're back on pogy from Ottawa to the tune of over \$300 million, Mr. Speaker. That's what it is; there's no other way around it. We're back into the have-not category big time.

And so here we are instead of finding ways of growing our economy, of reducing the overhead costs to our businesses and our families and our workers by having some meaningful tax relief, we've backslid again big time, Mr. Speaker, and it's difficult to see anything in this budget that shows a clear way forward in terms of changing that around and turning it around.

Mr. Speaker, a number of years ago, the former Finance minister made the comment that she was very afraid of lowering tax because it would mean that we would lose equalization payments. Well, Mr. Speaker, it seems that we've got our way. We're not removing tax in a substantial way and we're back on the equalization welfare cheques. And I guess if that's economic development in terms of this government, we're going to have to live with that reality for a long time. Mr. Speaker . . .

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

Mr. Toth: — Mr. Speaker, with leave, to introduce guests.

Leave granted.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, as I just noted just after question period a couple have joined us in your gallery, happen to be the parents one of the pages, Angela Smalley. So I would invite the members to welcome Mr. Eric Smalley and his wife Mary Anne to the Assembly this morning.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Why is the minister on his feet?

Hon. Mr. Scott: — With leave, to introduce guests.

Leave granted.

Hon. Mr. Scott: — Mr. Speaker, I too would like to welcome Eric and Mary Anne here today. Mary Anne grew up at Indian Head. Her mother and my mother live across the street from each other and it's nice to see them and welcome them here. And they do have a very capable daughter here, working here, and we really appreciate the good job she's doing. Thank you.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

MOTION FOR COMMITTEE OF FINANCE (BUDGET DEBATE)

Mr. Gantfoer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, when you look at what the government did last year in reducing the PST two points, they said that each of these tax points was going to be approximately \$60 million. And so, Mr. Speaker, the government took a leap of faith if you like, because I don't think that they planned it very well ahead of time, but they took a leap of faith and saying, we need to reduce the PST in a meaningful way 2 percentage points, and they did that. And they potentially had to forego up to 120 to \$140 million in tax revenue.

But, Mr. Speaker, when you look at what happened, in the final analysis if you look at what happened on that single move, which was probably the only decent thing that happened in that budget, when you look at what happened, Mr. Speaker, the actual reduction in tax revenue overall is something in the order of \$30 million — less than \$15 million per tax point.

And the reason for that, Mr. Speaker, is because the economy responded to that incentive and there was a lot more transactions happening; people were buying purchases that they'd put off from. And indeed I believe people were buying things in Saskatchewan where they had formerly been going to Alberta to purchase those things.

So, Mr. Speaker, when we called for meaningful tax reduction across the board in PST of one or possibly two further percentage points this year, there was absolutely nothing there — nothing at all, Mr. Speaker. And instead what we got is two points off the income tax.

Now two points off the income tax sounds very good, but for this year it's going to be about 60 bucks for families; \$60 for families in Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, will not even come close to making up the increased charges for natural gas, for telephones, for electricity, and everything else that's gone up in the province. So there really has been no net benefit to Saskatchewan people.

So where is the stimulation going to come from? Where is the economic activity going to come from, Mr. Speaker? It simply is not. It's going to come from the fact we are now going to be content to sit there as a have-not province and complain that Ottawa's cheque isn't in the mail on a timely basis.

And, Mr. Speaker, that is not what Saskatchewan people and Saskatchewan businesses need. What we need, Mr. Speaker, is meaningful tax relief, and we need it as soon as possible. And we need it with this budget, not with one somewhere in the future that the NDP is going to think about down the road.

(1115)

Mr. Speaker, the other area that is absolutely obvious, that needs a major change in focus is the whole issue of where 40 per cent of the economic activity in this province comes from. And I speak about the Crown corporation sector, the CIC (Crown Investments Corporation of Saskatchewan) sector.

Mr. Speaker, for years the Provincial Auditor has said, if the province is going to look at its resources, it has to look at them in their entirety. And what we have now is a government that is totally fixated on looking at the General Revenue Fund and using the Crown corporations to be the exclusive playground of patronage and inefficiency and bungled adventures that they want to undertake with very little accountability to the people of this province.

Mr. Speaker, the Provincial Auditor has been saying for years that that is totally unacceptable. And we have introduced a private members' Bill that calls for the kind of scrutiny and accountability across the piece that the Provincial Auditor has been talking about — we call it An Act respecting Government Accountability. And what it demands is that the government looks at the entire activity of government and does the planning in its entirety.

What we see in the budget is an arbitrary use of the CIC side of things to either hedge or fudge or whatever the numbers as the government sees fit. We see in the numbers that were tabled in this budget, that they have arbitrarily decided, instead of taking \$50 million out of the Crowns, they're going to take a hundred million dollars this year. No explanation of why except that's what we need. There's no planning, there's no logic, no sorts of long-term commitments to it.

We also see them taking a special dividend out of the sale of the Husky shares of another hundred million dollars. We see them taking \$375 million out of Liquor and Gaming, Mr. Speaker. But there's no long-term planning in that. It's just an arbitrary number that seems to fit the bill and no one knows why or where or what kind of long-term plan that we have.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Gantfoer: — If you can do it so arbitrarily just to balance the books, why can't you do it to provide some meaningful tax relief? If you're going to use it, why not make a plan so that the people of this province who do not only have to deal with government departments, who do not only have to deal with the fact that they have to pay tax, but also have to deal with the Crown corporations . . . They have to deal with the Crown corporations because there is no choice. Competition and deregulation is only beginning to have an effect for people in Saskatchewan. People are forced to buy power from SaskPower. There is no option.

A number of years ago they invited co-generation proposals. A lot of individuals went through the exercise, paid a deposit to do the co-generation proposals, and they ended up with a slap in the face and were totally being ignored about any of those sorts of things.

And so, Mr. Speaker, I think it's important that this government

accountability legislation that we've proposed is passed. Because if we're going to truly look at the total financial picture of Saskatchewan and its people, you simply cannot continue to arbitrarily have these two pools that are running separate from each other except at the whim of the government.

Mr. Speaker, while I'm talking about the accountability of Crowns, I think I have to go a little further. Mr. Speaker, we end up with a situation in Saskatchewan, and it's really the only jurisdiction in North America that has such a phoney sham of a rate review process. Mr. Speaker, everyone in this province understands that the review process that's been put in place by this government is simply a joke.

And so what the Crowns are able to do and get rubber-stamped by the cabinet is to charge whatever they see fit because there is going to be no true accountability. There's going to be no true way that the people of Saskatchewan can question and see to it that their Crowns are doing the job that they should.

And so, Mr. Speaker, we introduced a Bill called An Act respecting the rate review imposed by certain Crown corporations. And the whole thrust of that is to make sure that there's a proper rate review commission, representative of the people of the province and the private sector, for the oversight of rate increases or rate changes.

We also said it has to ensure that there is quality Crown corporation services and facilities that are there for the residents. They're there to scrutinize the impact of Crown corporation investments and they're there to review long-range plans and to make sure about the cost-effectiveness of service delivery. Those are the kinds of things that we need to put in place to build an economic climate where businesses are going to want to come to Saskatchewan. And if we don't do it, it simply is not going to work.

Mr. Speaker, in addition to that, since the Crown corporations represent 40 per cent of the activity of government and that money can be transferred from these Crown corporations in an arbitrary way to the General Revenue Fund, we said that we also have to make sure that these Crown corporations operate within parameters that do not allow them to invest arbitrarily in investments outside of Canada.

We simply cannot have this government wasting \$1.4 million deciding not to invest in Guyana. Everybody in this Assembly and everybody in Saskatchewan should have been able to tell them that for a loonie. We could have saved a million and a half dollars on that one, simple decision-making process if we had listened to the people of the province.

But no, it's got to be another adventure that this government is prepared to undertake and head off on and only to find after much debate and a \$1.4 million expenditure, that we simply shouldn't have done it in the first time.

And the reason cited? Because of political instability. Well it was political instability, Mr. Speaker. But not in Guyana — right here in Saskatchewan is why the Premier pulled the plug on that deal.

So, Mr. Speaker, we need to have this private members' Bill

passed — An Act to amend The Crown Corporations Act, prohibiting foreign investments.

And, Mr. Speaker, the final part of the piece that we've put in, in terms of private members' Bills, is for Crowns to disclose when they've lost losses in excess of \$100,000 within 60 days, and then we wouldn't have had the mess that we're now going through with the whole Channel Lake or the NST debacle; so that they've got to be much more transparent, much more accountable for what's going on.

And there has to be a mechanism to ensure that the people that are appointed to those positions, the patronage guys like Jack Messer, follow the terms and conditions of the board of directors and do not operate out of those terms of references, because, Mr. Speaker, that's where this all goes off the rails.

And finally, Mr. Speaker, I firmly believe that what we have to do is get rid of the blatant political appointments on the Crown corporations. And it's not just the Jack Messers or the Chings of the world, or the Nystuens— the guys right at the top. That's blatantly wrong. But we've got to make sure that it isn't happening at all the tiers of management, because that also is equally wrong and equally as troublesome.

How can you be a career person working in any of the Crowns and you know that down the hallway is someone else that is there solely because of their political credentials, or there solely because of the fact of a political favour, who are earning equal or more money than you are and who are likely going to mess up any proper decision that you make.

What does that do to the spirit of a corporation. What does that do to a professional civil service or people that actually believe that they're doing a good job within their respective Crowns? It demoralizes them. It absolutely loses their reason for wanting to do the job properly.

So, Mr. Speaker, I said certainly, I said certainly, Mr. Speaker, that it's important that what we do is look at our Crowns, who operate 40 per cent of our economy, and we have to operate and look at what we're doing about meaningful tax relief, Mr. Speaker, because we're not doing it. And I think if we looked at it honestly and effectively, we could.

Mr. Speaker, the budget takes a great deal of pride at saying that it's going to spend \$1.72 billion in health care. And, Mr. Speaker, for anybody, anywhere, that is an awful lot of money. And, Mr. Speaker, it's a third, it's approximately a third of our total budget.

The question is, Mr. Speaker, are we spending it wisely? Are we spending it effectively? Is the result of putting more money at the problem going to result in lower waiting-lists. Is it going to result in more nurses to look after patients on the wards. Is it going to take the workload and the fear that nurses are feeling about mistakes are going to be made because they're so overworked and there are so few of them to do the job . . .

Is it going to address the issues of people having to stay in a Howard Johnson hotel in order to recover from surgery. Is it going to address the concerns of people having to be lined up in hospital corridors on gurneys in order to wait for a bed. Is it

going to address the waiting-lists that are growing larger in Saskatchewan?

Is it going to address any of those fundamental issues?

Well the answer is, Mr. Speaker, no one knows. And no one can say to the people of Saskatchewan with any certainty that putting more money and more money and more money at health care is going to make the situation better. There seems to be this panic that says we've got to do something, we've got to do something. And the only way we can look at it is to just throw more money at it.

Well, Mr. Speaker, if you talk to the people that are elected on health boards, they say they've got a real problem because they've got a two-tiered health board system with appointed and elected people. Where is the mandate, where is the accountability, and where is the responsibility? To the people that elected them in the local communities? Or to the minister who appoints them?

So you end up with health boards who are at odds just by the fundamental structure of the way they are brought to that decision-making process. And once they get there, what happens then? Well the Department of Health and all the bureaucrats fire volumes of paper at them to fill out. And you can take money from this pool and you can put it there but you can't take it from that pool, can't put it the other place.

And so all of the decisions that this split local health board is supposed to make in good faith are destroyed because, number one, they don't have a clear mandate and a clear understanding who they're answerable to. And number two, because of the way the funding is channelled and directed from the government, they can't make decisions.

And so the health district that now is faced, in Wynyard, in Lanigan, in that whole area, about what are they going to do, they don't have the tools or the mandate to deal with it, and the minister stands up in this House and pretends it's their responsibility. Well that's nonsense. And the result is, we're spending more and more money in a greater and a greater inefficient way. And the health care service to people of this province is not improving.

And so, Mr. Speaker, I think that what needs to be done is you have to talk to the people. We have to talk to the nurses; we have to talk to the doctors; we have to talk to the people who are on the waiting-lists. And we have to talk to the local health boards and say, how can the system be made better. How can the \$1.72 billion be spent in such a way that we have better services, better efficiency, and lower waiting-lists for our people.

That's the question that needs to be asked and it isn't being asked. Instead, let's just throw more money at it and in the meantime Plains hospital goes down, the Lanigan hospital is going down. Hospitals right across Saskatchewan have been closed and there is no apparent improvement in the health care delivery system to Saskatchewan, despite the fact we're now spending a third of our budget on health care. That just doesn't make sense, Mr. Speaker, and everyone in this province knows that.

The problem for people is, is that they're sitting there and they are wondering what is the future going to hold for them. And so we have not only an economic uncertainty occurring for a lot of our people, we now have a service uncertainty.

And so if you're one of those people that is due for retirement and you're making decisions about where you're going to retire in terms of the cost of things, now you've also got to ask yourself, where do I go so I have some faint hope of assurance that I'm going to have the health services that I'm going to need as I grow older, and it's likely that I am becoming more dependent on the system, in order to make sure they're there in my moment of need.

And so what happens? What's that going to do to rural Saskatchewan? What's that going to do to a community like Lanigan? What's it's going to do to a community like Wynyard who has an active business community with Plains Poultry there? What does it do to their ability to attract people to that community if a real cornerstone of services are in jeopardy — health care services. And it happens all across Saskatchewan.

And so because of the fact that we're not dealing with these issues, we are seeing a disproportionate erosion of people from rural Saskatchewan to Alberta; and it's also happening from the urban centres, but more of the people are coming increasingly from those communities who see themselves vulnerable and at risk.

Mr. Speaker, it also happens in education. It happens in municipal funding. It happens in agriculture. It's happening across the piece, Mr. Speaker, and I want to leave the opportunities for my colleagues to speak to those details for themselves. Because I think, Mr. Speaker, the objective of what I've tried to say today, is to set the overview; to look at why this whole picture is not in focus; to understand, to have people understand, that unless we come together in a policy of true belief of dealing with the issues fundamentally, not out of the position of some ideology that's 30 or 40 years old, but a pragmatic common sense approach to the challenges that face Saskatchewan into the 21st century, we are not going to survive. We are not going only keep up to our neighbours, we're not, certainly not, going to get ahead.

Mr. Speaker, we have to. The government takes a great deal of pride about saying, oh gosh, we had maybe a thousand more people come into the province last year compared to the years before. Well, Mr. Speaker, I recall in one of the tours we had around this building, when they built it, and they built it so large and magnificent was because they believed in that time and place that Saskatchewan was going to become the dominant province in western Canada. They believed that we were going to be over 3 million people.

But where are we? 1930 or thereabouts we had a million people. And here we are in 1998 and we still got a million people. That's not progress, Mr. Speaker, it's simply not progress, and the people of Saskatchewan increasingly are saying it's simply not good enough.

And so, Mr. Speaker, I would like to move an amendment to the motion that's before us, seconded by my colleague, the member from Cannington, that reads as follows:

That all words after "Assembly" be deleted and the following substituted:

regrets the continuing high taxation rates in the province; further regrets the damage done by these taxes on the economy in the province and the quality of life of its residents; further regrets that the budget offers no meaningful relief from this burden for ordinary taxpayers; also regrets the increased property taxes that will result from the government's failure to extend grants in lieu of taxes to municipalities; and further regrets that, in the absence of tax relief, this budget offers no substantive plan for improvements in health care, highways, or justice enforcement.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

(1130)

Mr. Van Mulligen: — Well, Mr. Speaker, it sounds like the members are ready to rumble.

Mr. Speaker, at the outset of my remarks, I want to extend my greetings to you and to all of those who serve us in the Legislative Assembly and to wish you well in your important role that you have in this Assembly, and extend that to the Deputy Speakers, the Clerks at the Table, the Sergeant-at-Arms, the pages, and the *Hansard* staff who are here to serve us, and all those outside the Chamber who also help us in our deliberations, Mr. Speaker.

I also want to, as other members have done, is to congratulate you on the school outreach program that you have undertaken. I think that this is important, not only that the children of Saskatchewan gain an understanding of how it is that this institution works, but I think even more importantly, that the children of Saskatchewan and the future citizens of Saskatchewan understand the importance of civilized, orderly, parliamentary debate and that we always look for words as the means to resolve our differences and that we don't look for other means to do that.

Whatever opinions it is that people might have of this Assembly and how we conduct our affairs — and some might have some misgivings having seen what has taken place here in the last few days — nevertheless we do have a peaceful means to resolve our differences. We do, as, I think it was the former Clerk of the House of Commons in London who visited us here one day, he said that parliament is in a sense the sublimation of civil war.

And so we use words to resolve our differences, and so I want to commend you on the task that you have undertaken to explain this to the children of Saskatchewan because I think that it's just so vital, so important, for our form of government. So thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Van Mulligen: — Mr. Speaker, I haven't run across you yet in any of the classrooms in my constituency — and this is something that I'm sure will happen — but I would be remiss if I didn't explain to the Assembly that I did run into Mr. Speaker

at the Globe Theatre here in Regina one evening.

And in particular there was the . . . I ran into him at the Globe production of a play called *Speak*. Now this production features a Saskatchewan MLA as the main character. And this MLA gets to speak whenever he wants, and this MLA gets to say whatever he wants. Now obviously this is not an MLA, Mr. Speaker, who has ever heard of a whip. This is not an MLA, Mr. Speaker, that has ever heard of a speaking order.

But, Mr. Speaker, after seeing the performance at the Globe, I have concluded that perhaps we should go to visit the Globe Theatre as well. Because after seeing the production at the Globe, I say that there is much that we could tell the Globe Theatre about parliamentary procedure. But given some of the dramatic performances that we've seen here in this Chamber, and especially in question period, Mr. Speaker, I don't know that there is very much that they could tell us about drama or acting, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I also want to just take a couple of minutes, as other members have done, to say how proud I was — as all people in Saskatchewan and all people in Canada were — of the performances by . . . especially by some Saskatchewan athletes in the recent winter Olympics. The two gold medal winners stand out, or the two gold medal winning efforts stand out, by Catriona Le May Doan of Saskatoon and of course the Sandra Schmirler rink of Regina. I was one of those who stayed up until late at night to watch their performance. I thought it was just terrific.

Mr. Speaker, also before beginning the material part of my remarks, I want to, if it's permissible, to just go back to a previous debate that we had in this Chamber, not to dwell on the debate as such, but simply to make mention of two very excellent speeches that I saw.

And I refer in particular to the speech by the member for Wascana Plains in moving adoption of the Speech from the Throne. I thought hers was an excellent contribution. I thought significantly, Mr. Speaker, she did something that we rarely do in this Chamber, and that is to talk about the values that she brings to this job in this Chamber. Rather than simply talking about issues, she talked about her values.

And I think that's so important, because it's the values, Mr. Speaker, that will see us in good stead and that will serve us well in the years to come. And it's the values that will always tell where it is that people are coming from. I thought hers was an excellent contribution.

And also the member for Estevan, his contribution I think also shows his experience in municipal government. I thought it was also a very excellent and credible contribution, Mr. Speaker.

Now, Mr. Speaker, what a year it's been. When we last left here last spring at the conclusion of that session — and although we did have a brief session here in the fall, or a continuation of that session, to deal with the Calgary accord, which I'm happy to see that all members supported — but when we left here at the conclusion of the session last spring, the Liberals had 11 members and they were the official opposition, Mr. Speaker. The PCs, the Tories, had five members, although I think one

had been kicked out of their caucus — I'm not really clear if he had been kicked out of their caucus to that point — because of some legal difficulties. So whether it was four or five members officially at that point, nevertheless they were what we call the third party in this Chamber, Mr. Speaker.

The official leader of the opposition, and that is the Leader of the Official Opposition, was the member for Canora-Pelly, as the Liberal leader in the House, as opposed to the official Liberal leader, who is Dr. Melenchuk, and as opposed to the . . . well, never mind, Mr. Speaker. I don't want to get into that. We have a lot of Liberal leaders in and around this Legislative Assembly, Mr. Speaker, so I don't want to get into that, except to say that the member for Canora-Pelly was the official Leader of the Opposition under the Liberals, and now he is still the official Leader of the Opposition under a different arrangement. I don't think I've ever seen that before in parliamentary government. Now I stand to be corrected on that, and my education is probably not as complete as some of the members in this Chamber, but I would venture to say, Mr. Speaker, that never before in parliamentary government have we seen anything of that nature where a person one day is the official Leader of the Opposition and the next day is again the official Leader of the Opposition but under a different arrangement, under a different party name.

And now he's the official Leader of the Opposition as opposed to the member for Kindersley, who was the official Leader of the Third Party. Not that the member for Kindersley looks particularly unhappy about this state of affairs. On the contrary, Mr. Speaker, the member for Kindersley looks very happy these days with the new arrangement in the House. And wouldn't you be happy, Mr. Speaker? Wouldn't you be happy?

Picture him a year ago. Although you've managed to stave off elimination as a political party, and which was a concern given the record of the previous Devine Tory-PC (Progressive Conservative) administration which . . . well I don't know, the best way to characterize that would probably be to refer members to a line in *The Globe and Mail* which said that the Devine administration arguably — arguably — was the worst government ever in Canada — ever; of any province, the worst government ever. So although he's managed to stave off elimination as a political party, he continued to be rocked, dogged by a succession of political scandals as Tory after Tory after Tory after Tory after Tory after Tory paraded before the courts, Mr. Speaker, dealing with a number of, as we all know, fraud cases.

And then finally another Tory, one of his members, has to leave their caucus and sit as an independent because of his legal difficulties. So this was the Tory leader a year ago; the Tory leader last year was not a happy leader, Mr. Speaker, reduced to a rural, right-wing rump and losing yet another member.

The prospects for growth and renewal on the part of that Tory Party were nil, Mr. Speaker, with the public memories of fraud being fresh in the minds of the public, Mr. Speaker. And it couldn't be any bleaker for him at that point, pushed to the brink of extinction by fraud and criminality.

(1145)

Now one year later, the former Tory leader is all smiles — all smiles, Mr. Speaker. And he's not the only one who's all smiles, Mr. Speaker. I note that the president of the youth association of the PC Party also was all smiles. In fact he said — and this is Rob Moss, the president for the youth association of the PC Party quoted in August of last year in the *Observer* — and he had this to say: "We are totally enthused. This is the new set of shoes that will take us places." So we have a happy Tory leader now and we have a very enthusiastic and happy leader of the PC youth, Mr. Speaker.

Now we all know why there's smiles all around, Mr. Speaker. With the simple expedient of changing their name, the Tories have in one stroke eliminated their past and have been able to attract new MLAs to their party. One year ago, four or five members and slipping badly; one year later, a change of name and attracting new MLAs to their party. Now they have, they say, a little wind in their sails. A new name, no more past to hold them back, Mr. Speaker.

Now the public might well ask, well hey, what about all those Tory guys in court? And the Saskatchewan Party will say, well it's not us. And it's almost like when you mention, in certain situations you mention PC or Tory or Progressive Conservative or Conservative, it's kind of like a film comes over their eyes. It's like there's a collective amnesia.

Tories? Who's that? That's not us. You know, the Devine administration. Hey, that's not us; that's somebody else. You know, we're a different party, they say. We're a new party. We have nothing to do with those guys. You know, we're the Saskatchewan Party.

Although I might say that there have been occasions in this Chamber, Mr. Speaker, when we note that they become very defensive about the Tory record of the '80s. And that if you do mention Tories, they begin to speak from their seats and to try and shout you down; but I'll have more to say about that later, Mr. Speaker. But publicly they say, not only are we new, we're bigger and bigger because MLAs, some other MLAs, decided to join them.

Now we all know that four MLAs who were elected as Liberals decided to leave the Liberal Party and joined up with the Tories under this new Saskatchewan Tory Party name. Now as I understand it, these MLAs, based on their public utterances, have only one political goal — one political goal only — and that is to defeat the NDP.

And when it looked like, after '91, when the PC administration, the Devine administration, had been totally discredited and the Tories were sliding in public opinion in Saskatchewan and the Liberals were on the rise as the right in Saskatchewan, look for some other credible alternative that they might support, those people — those four Liberal MLAs — joined the Liberals and got themselves elected as Liberals, Mr. Speaker.

But after '91, after being elected as Liberals, when the Liberals in this House started to stumble — and which they did, major — you will all remember one of their first things they did was to get rid of the leader who had helped sort of elevate them to the status of official opposition in the House, they then joined the Tories, as soon as the Liberals started to stumble. That much

is clear, Mr. Speaker. That much is very clear. What is also very clear, Mr. Speaker, that these are not people to be trusted.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Van Mulligen: — For them the end will always justify the means. For them it's enough to be committed to the defeat of the NDP. That end will always justify expediency, that end will always justify breaking an oath of loyalty, and that end will always justify figuratively stabbing your colleagues in the back, Mr. Speaker.

Remember, these are people who signed an oath of loyalty — loyalty to the Liberal Party — and then broke that oath. How can Saskatchewan people ever believe anything they say? They're prepared to sign an oath of loyalty and then break that.

Well here's what they had to say when the first reports of a merger surfaced in 1996, Mr. Speaker. The member for Melfort-Tisdale, who is now seeking the leadership of this new Saskatchewan Tory party, he said no, absolutely no; not with the Tory Party or any other party; I am a Liberal member of the legislature from Melfort-Tisdale and that is what I will stay. That's what the member from Melfort-Tisdale said.

The member for Canora-Pelly, who's now their leader and was the leader of the Liberal Party but is now the leader of the Saskatchewan Tory party, and I guess won't be the leader any more, but he might be some other kind of leader, I don't know, he said, when asked about crossing the floor, he said, it's totally false and nothing but an attempt by the Tories to grab media attention; we have a signed document from all members and I can say unequivocally there is no truth to it. Well how can you trust the words of a person like that.

And again when the member from Melfort-Tisdale said that, and he used his word absolutely again — I absolutely can say I have never, ever considered, never mind participating in any discussions across the floor. It's almost too ridiculous to imagine. I was elected in Melfort-Tisdale as a Liberal and will continue to represent Melfort-Tisdale as a Liberal. None of our members have initiated or participated in any discussions with any party. Well you might ask the question, if you've never participated in any discussions, how is it that you managed to cross the floor to these people?

The member for Saltcoats, another one who was elected as a Liberal and then jumped to this new Saskatchewan Tory party said, as ludicrous as these reports are, I want to assure you, the people of the Saltcoats constituency, that I remain committed to you, the Liberal Party, and my caucus colleagues. As a further sign of my loyalty and that of my colleagues, we have each signed a document in which we unequivocally deny any intentions of joining any other party.

Now here's something here. He says that, I remain committed to you, speaking to the people of Saltcoats constituency, and he says, I remain committed to the Liberal Party and caucus colleagues, all in one breath. The people of Saltcoats constituency might well ask that if you've broken your oath of loyalty and if the Liberal Party can't trust you, how is it that we are able to trust you, Mr. Speaker.

And finally there is the fourth member of the group of Liberals to jump to the Saskatchewan Tory Party, the member for Kelvington-Wadena, who says, I would like to inform the people of Saskatchewan, and particularly those in the Liberal constituencies, that we are continuing our loyalty and support to the cause of the Liberal Saskatchewan Party, the official opposition caucus, and to the people of Saskatchewan. We have not approached the Conservative Party or any other party with intention of crossing the floor.

Well you know, we might sort of criticize the media a little bit for not being a little bit more specific in your questions. Perhaps the question ought not to have been, are you thinking of crossing the floor? Maybe the question should have been, are you thinking of crossing the aisle? That just goes to show you that the media have got to ask the right questions to get the right answers, Mr. Speaker.

But how can Saskatchewan people ever again believe a word they say? Now I expect their constituents will answer that question in the next election and send those four members packing, Mr. Speaker. That's what I think will happen.

Now there may well be a lot of people in those constituencies who share their commitment to the defeat of the NDP. There will always be right-wingers who will want to vote against the NDP, but I suspect, Mr. Speaker, that in the next election they will find that in addition to those people there will even be more people in those constituencies for whom trust is a more important commitment, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, speaking of trust, one of the things that I've observed about the seating arrangement in this Assembly is that I'm not sure that the former Tories — now the Saskatchewan Tories if we can use that kind of description, former Tories and former Liberals, now all Saskatchewan Tories — that whether the former Tories really have a lot of trust in the former Liberals. Because if you look at the seating arrangement that they have in the Assembly, it kind of goes Liberal, Tory, Liberal, Tory, Liberal, Tory, Liberal, Tory. It's almost like they want to make sure that these people don't sit together and cook up some other palace coup, Mr. Speaker. So I say to the former Tories, you are wise in your seating arrangements, Mr. Speaker.

And I say to the former Liberals, Mr. Speaker, that I think that you will be defeated in the next election; that the people in your constituencies will say that we can't trust you.

But having said that, I don't want you to think of that defeat as the end of the world — the political world maybe —but your defeat could also be an opportunity for you to tell your story, perhaps to write a book about your experiences. I as one person who reads, Mr. Speaker, I've always been . . . always favoured in fiction. I've always favoured the spy genre which is a genre in fiction, in literature, which has gone out of favour with the fall of the Soviet Union. And so we have writers like John LeCarré and others, Len Deighton, who are casting about for other subject material.

And I say to those former Liberals, that you know you might want to write about your experiences because the spy genre had some of the following characteristics: the end always justifies the means; the public face belies the truth within; there are

always wheels within wheels; secrecy is the modus operandi, Mr. Speaker.

And surely those former Liberal members can relate to all of that, Mr. Speaker. Think of your rich experiences saying one thing and doing another. Meeting in clandestine ways with the Tories while publicly professing solidarity with your Liberal team-mates; moving around in the middle of the night from hotel room to hotel room, skulking.

How did you do it? Did you wear, sort of, Groucho Marx glasses and mustaches to hide your identities? Did you slip yourself notes in the cafeteria line-up? How did you do it?

Mr. Speaker, what a story they must have to tell, Mr. Speaker. I tell you after your defeat, write the story. I'll be the first one to buy your book, Mr. Speaker, because a rich book it will be.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to deal for a minute here with the question of the change of name and the question of funding for the Saskatchewan Party as official opposition. And I want to explain to those who are watching us today what's at stake here. The people in the Legislative Assembly know what's at stake, but the people outside may not know.

In our system of parliamentary government, the largest group in the Assembly forms the government, is asked by the . . . after an election the largest group is asked by Lieutenant Government to form the government. The largest group in opposition becomes the official opposition party, and then if there are other parties with members, they then become the third party or in some cases there might be independents and so on.

Now to be recognized as the official opposition also means that you receive increased funding from the Legislative Assembly to be able to conduct your role as official opposition. And there's some prestige that goes with the title of official opposition leader as opposed to being the Leader of the Third Party.

(1200)

There's also I believe some perks. I believe the Leader of the Opposition also receives the same pay as a cabinet minister, for example. The Leader of the Opposition also has a vehicle, the same as cabinet ministers do. So these are no small things — increased fundings and the stature and the prestige that goes with the job, Mr. Speaker.

So it meant when the Liberals, those four Liberals, moved over, it meant the official Liberal opposition was then the smallest party in the House and that the new Saskatchewan Tory party was then the largest arrangement in the opposition benches. And there was quite a bit of public debate at that time, Mr. Speaker, about whether or not there should be funding for the Saskatchewan Party. And some advocated that the Saskatchewan Party should not receive funding and be recognized as the official opposition.

Personally, my question would be, what's all the fuss about? Just what is all the fuss about? What we've seen here is a simple change of name. It was a simple change of name. That's all it was. Nothing else has really changed.

In fact I note, Mr. Speaker, that the very first press release issued by the Saskatchewan Party — and this will be of interest to the members here, Mr. Speaker — that the very first press release issued by the Saskatchewan Party . . . and it's entitled, "Saskatchewan Party caucus chooses interim leader," which we all know is the member for Canora-Pelly, who was the former leader of the opposition, or the House Leader for the opposition. And it says in this press release, Saskatchewan Party caucus chooses interim leader, and it goes on to explain what's happened here. It says, on the bottom here it says, for further information . . . for further information, it says, contact the Saskatchewan Party caucus office, Regina, 787-5302 — 787-5302.

And when I looked in the government telephone directory, Mr. Speaker, it said that that number, 787-5302, was the number for the PC caucus office. So I say, Mr. Speaker, what's the fuss? New name, same old number, Mr. Speaker.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I say what is the fuss. People change their names all the time. It is still not uncommon. In fact I think it is still the practice for women to change their name to that of the husband when they get married. Although there are people now where the husbands will hyphenate their names and they both share the same name.

Where else do people change their name? The member for North Battleford I thought made a very good point about the witness protection program and that people change their name on the witness protection programs. Even criminals on the lam, Mr. Speaker — and I don't advocate this — will change their name to suit their purposes.

The point is, Mr. Speaker, we had a simple change of name. Some Tories change their names but not their principles. Some Liberals change their names but not their limited principles, Mr. Speaker. Sure they're elected as Liberals, but their switch won't be much of a surprise to their supporters.

I was in the town of Canora not too long ago and I talked to some people there about, well what do you think about your member sort of crossing the floor or going to this new party? They say, well we're not really surprised because we remember in '82 and '86 he was there working for Grant Devine who was the Conservative, the Tory premier.

So obviously his principles were such that he worked for the Conservatives in '82 and '86. And in '91, when the Conservatives were no longer in good order, no longer in favour he decided, well I'll just change my name and I'll go over to the Liberal Party. I'll get elected as a Liberal. But the fact that he's changed his name and is now sitting with the Tories really doesn't come as much of a surprise to the people in his constituency, at least the ones that I talked to.

I think the member for Saltcoats always has taken a position that, well I've worked for the Tories in the past and my primary objective is to defeat the NDP. And it's not to sit as a Liberal or anything but it's to be here to defeat the NDP. So, that he would make the switch from the Liberals to the Tories really came as no surprise to me, and I would suspect didn't come as much of a surprise for his constituents. The member for Kelvington-Wadena, her switch is no surprise.

You know last year, last year during the session when we were listening to people speaking in response to the Speech from the Throne, the member for Kelvington-Wadena was speaking, and I closed my eyes. I closed my eyes because I wanted to concentrate on what it is that she was saying and I didn't want to be distracted, because it seemed to me that as I listened to her I kept hearing Grant Devine. As I listened to the way her mind worked, at least as it exhibited itself in what she said in this Assembly, when I listened to her about how it is that government should be operating and running, I said, that's Grant Devine.

And I opened my eyes, and of course it wasn't Grant Devine, it was the Liberal member — or at that time the Liberal member from Kelvington-Wadena. But I thought I heard Grant Devine. And I'm not making this up. I want the member for Saskatchewan rivers to know, and he's looking very sceptical, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that I'm making this up. Because I said as much last year. I said last year in March, the Liberal member for Kelvington-Wadena reminds me firmly of Grant Devine. So much so that if she would make the jump from the Liberal Party to this new Tory Party is absolutely no surprise to me, Mr. Speaker, that she would make that switch.

So a simple change of name, in my opinion, Mr. Speaker, should not result in some differential treatment and a treatment other than that which we would normally do in this Legislative Assembly when it comes to recognition of parties, Mr. Speaker.

And I'm pleased to see, and I'm pleased to see that we didn't do a differential treatment in this regard, and I see that as a sign of the strength of our democracy. And I see that as a testament to the strength of our institution, Mr. Speaker, that we would take, that we would take the inheritors — the inheritors, the Tories, the leftover Tories — from the worst provincial administration ever in Canada, take them and add to them a group of people of extremely dubious loyalty and give them public funding, give them the public funding to carry on to put forward their points of view in this Chamber and to represent, I suppose, a body of opinion in Saskatchewan.

So I say it was simply a change of name and that we strengthen our democracy by funding this group of people who are the inheritors of the worst administration that we've ever seen in Canada, ever, and a group of people of extremely dubious loyalty, Mr. Speaker.

Now, Mr. Speaker, speaking of a change of name, a lot of people I talked to seemed quite upset that these people have appropriated the name Saskatchewan for their party. They say, well how can it be that these Tories, who we dislike so much because of what they did to Saskatchewan, would then take the Saskatchewan flag and wrap themselves in that Saskatchewan flag. And we don't think that it's right that they should take that party name, Mr. Speaker.

And I say it's . . . Well they have the right to do that, I suppose. They're not sort of setting up, you know, some kind of a honey-wagon service or something where I guess you're prevented from using the name Saskatchewan. They're setting up a political party; they should have the right to do that, although I don't think it's particularly original. They might have, Mr. Speaker, they might have gone to a more functional

or descriptive name like the Saskatchewan knee-jerk party or something like that.

But be that as it may, personally, Mr. Speaker, I am more concerned about a trend in Canada toward factionalism, regionalism. Mr. Speaker, a trend that seems to say that the most important thing is to represent our own narrow interests at the level that we represent; that we should not worry about the good of the nation.

Mr. Speaker, most notably of course we see the Parti Québécois who promote separation as I think probably the only other party in Canada that bears the name of the provincial jurisdiction in which they're located. So there we have the Parti Québécois who promote separation. They have a provincial name. And here we have the party Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, or the Saskatchewan Party.

Now I don't say that they promote separation but I am somewhat concerned that we have political parties forming in provinces throughout this country. And their primary objective, their only objective is, their only objective because they don't have national ties — their number one goal is simply to promote provincial rights but never worry about what might be the best for the country as a whole, Mr. Speaker, you know.

And our Saskatchewan Party with no national ties, Mr. Speaker, also in a sense promoting regionalism and provincialism. Is this good for Canada? And where will this lead, Mr. Speaker?

Now, Mr. Speaker, it has been a momentous year. And I would like to ask myself, how will history record moments? And so I ask myself, how will history record what has happened here this last year with respect to the Saskatchewan Party? And I suspect the historians will say the Progressive Conservative Party, also known as the PCs or Tories, was pushed to the brink of extinction by a legacy of an extremely poor government while in power, and ongoing revelations of fraud and criminality.

In a desperate bid to stave off extinction, they changed their name and thereby succeeding in attracting a group of disgruntled Liberals to join them under their new name. This, Mr. Speaker, came to be known as the great turncoat turnaround of '97.

Of course this is not the first time, Mr. Speaker, when the Liberals were down, in the 1970s after the Blakeney government was elected in 1971, I believe it was. And we have members of this House who will remember that. The Liberals went down in public opinion and there were Liberals at that point who were jumping ship to the Conservative Party, led at that point, I think, by the esteemed Dick Collver. And we won't speak of his legal difficulties or his peculiar notions about Canada, Mr. Speaker.

But there were two Liberals who come to mind who jumped ship. One was Gary Lane and one was Colin Thatcher. They were quite a pair. Here we had the author of the greatest whopper ever in Saskatchewan history, and a person who came to be known, I say internationally known, for his criminal act, Mr. Speaker. But those people too were Liberals at that point and jumped over to the Conservative Party. So this is not something that's new, what we're seeing here today.

We saw it at the federal scene too. Jean Charest who was the Progressive Conservative leader in Ottawa now making the jump to the Liberal Party in Quebec. And what is that old refrain, Mr. Speaker? Tory Liberal, Liberal Tory, same old story, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I want to just deal with some of the specifics of the budget speech. The theme is investing in people, building on momentum. I say that there is momentum in Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker. I think the government has got it right that there is momentum in Saskatchewan. I think people all around will tell you that there's momentum. People all around are expressing hope and optimism about their future in Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker. More people than ever before are employed in Saskatchewan people You can't go down the streets and roads of Saskatchewan and not be hopeful and optimistic about what is happening in Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker.

There has been a significant turnaround from 10 years ago. Ten years ago, in 1988, we had the most massive out-migration that we have ever seen from Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, with the possible exception of the 1930s under the Conservative administration of that time. We had what might charitably be called a depressed economy. The government of that day seemed totally incapable of dealing with the issues before us. A government that couldn't govern.

Which I guess if you look at sort of their philosophy of government shouldn't be surprising because these are people always espouse less government or no government. Well how someone who espouses less or no government can take on the job of governing has always a bit of a mystery to me, Mr. Speaker.

This budget accomplishes three main things: one, there is a cut in taxes, Mr. Speaker. And that should be no surprise to anyone. I admit that this administration raised taxes in the early years of . . . when we were first elected; I think it was in 1992, early in its mandate. There was an increase in the provincial sales tax from 7 to 9 per cent. We put on what was called a debt surtax. And why did we do that and why did we also cut spending at that time?

We did that to get our affairs in order, Mr. Speaker. We were spending more than we were bringing in. And I supported the government then and I continue to support the initiatives that we took at that point in terms of curtailing our spending, in terms of increasing taxes as a means of putting an end to the deficits that we had been seeing throughout the '80s, Mr. Speaker.

Since then, Mr. Speaker, since that time we have cut the sales tax again. It's gone back from 9 to 7 per cent, Mr. Speaker. We have cut the debt surtax, Mr. Speaker. And now we've cut the income tax. And there have been other tax cuts over the years, Mr. Speaker.

I want to remind the public, and I want to remind especially the members opposite, that the first act of government, the first act of this government in 1991 when it was elected was to do away with the harmonization of the provincial sales tax with the goods and services tax in Ottawa.

There may be a few who will remember. There may be some who will remember that in 1991, after April 1, 1991 and until we were elected in the fall of that year, that when you went to a restaurant, when you went to a restaurant, you just didn't pay the GST (goods and services tax) on your restaurant meal anymore at that point, you also started to pay the provincial sales tax on a restaurant meal at that point, Mr. Speaker.

And our first act of government was to do away with that and a number of other areas where the provincial sales tax had been foisted on the people of Saskatchewan. Foisted on the people of Saskatchewan because that Tory administration thought it was in the best interests of Saskatchewan to harmonize our provincial sales tax with the federal goods and services tax. So our first act of government was to do away with that and to stop gouging the Saskatchewan public as the Tories were doing at that time, Mr. Speaker.

So I say, Mr. Speaker, on balance we are moving in the right direction and we can be hopeful and optimistic that we will continue to move in that direction, Mr. Speaker.

Secondly, the budget, importantly in my point of view, pays down debt. And now we have to ask ourselves where did this debt come from. You have to remember that in 1982 the total debt in the province was about \$3 billion. And all of that was debt incurred by Crown corporations — debt that they might have incurred to improve telephone lines; debt that they might have had to pay for expansion of power facilities; debt that they might have had to bring in new telephone sets, I don't know — but debts incurred by Crown corporations, as any sort of corporation might do as a means of upgrading and improving, and debt that would then be paid for by those who take advantage of the service of that corporation — people who buy power; people who purchase telephone services, Mr. Speaker. It was what you call in business a self-liquidating debt. Is that what that is? It's a debt that is paid for by the people who use the service.

But there was no debt that had been run up by the taxpayers of Saskatchewan — none whatsoever. There was no line in the provincial budget that said payment or government's portion of the public debt, and to make payments on that. There wasn't any — none whatsoever. And that one went from zero to 8.6 or almost \$9 billion, Mr. Speaker. From zero to about \$9 billion during the course of the Devine administration, Mr. Speaker.

And incidentally the one on Crowns — and these are people that said, we don't want Crowns, we don't believe in Crown corporations, we shouldn't be putting money into Crown corporations — the Crown corporation debt also jumped from \$3 billion to \$5 billion. And of course we had other debt in terms of liabilities that we took on, Mr. Speaker, giving us a total of about \$15 billion.

And I was interested to hear the previous Tory speaker, the member for Melfort-Tisdale. The member from Melfort-Tisdale, the would-be leader of the Saskatchewan Tory party, the former leader of the . . . or the former member of the Saskatchewan Liberal Party, and he's going on and complaining about tax loads and everything in Saskatchewan and making these comparisons to Newfoundland.

I'd like to make just one other little comparison to Newfoundland and Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, if I might. And that is that in 1991 when the NDP was elected, we discovered that the per capita debt in Saskatchewan — per capita debt as a result of Tory mismanagement, as a result of Tory bungling — the per capita debt in Saskatchewan was higher than that of Newfoundland, Mr. Speaker. This is something that he didn't mention in his speech, Mr. Speaker.

We all know that deficits are deferred taxes. Yes, you can borrow today, but at some point you have to pay back for that borrowing, Mr. Speaker. Is it any surprise, Mr. Speaker, that we are still paying for that debt today and we will pay for that debt for many, many years, if not decades to come, Mr. Speaker.

Now why should we concern ourselves about paying down the debt? And I might ask, are your children . . . are your children in a better position to pay that debt than you are? Should our children pay because we did not face up to the tough decisions in the 1980s? In the '80s we borrowed to make ends meet. Should future generations pay for that? So when people ask why is it that the government is paying down the debt, they should ask themselves those questions as well, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, how are we paying down the debt? Well significantly, this will be done because of our sale of the interest in the Bi-Provincial upgrader, which we just sold, Mr. Speaker.

And I might point out that if we had listened to the opposition, if we had listened to the opposition . . . Because the public might remember, might remember, that shortly after we took office we were faced with this interest in the Bi-Provincial upgrader in Lloydminster. And at about that time the Tory government in Alberta and the Liberal government of Jean Chrétien shortly thereafter in 1993-94 said that we don't want any more part, we don't any more part of this upgrader, and we're going to sell our share in that upgrader.

But the Saskatchewan government said no, we're not going to do that. We are hopeful. We are optimistic. We've checked our books. We think that this upgrader will continue to appreciate in value, that this upgrader will begin to turn profits on its operations, that this upgrader will become more valuable in the years to come.

But what did the opposition say? They said oh no, you should do what Alberta has done. You should do what the federal Liberals have done. You should sell your share now. Get out while the going is good. Sell out, sell out, sell out at 10 cents on the dollar — get out while you can.

And we said no, we're going to stick with this. We had some faith. We had some optimism. More importantly, we've checked our numbers. Not that necessarily we want to own an upgrader, Mr. Speaker — obviously, we don't; we just sold our share in it — not that we wanted to own an upgrader. But neither, Mr. Speaker, were we blinkered, blinkered like an old horse with blinkers on so he can't see beside him. We weren't blinkered like the Tories and Liberals were about the importance of maintaining and supporting public investment, Mr. Speaker.

These people said, we don't believe in it, sell it. Even if you lose your shirt, sell it. Well aren't we sort of . . . What kind of position would we have been in today? Would we have the money to pay down in debt in this budget if we had listened to them? No, Mr. Speaker, wouldn't have.

Theirs is a privatization at any cost mentality. We saw this with respect to the Potash Corporation of Saskatchewan — privatization at any cost — and we saw it with the upgrader, Mr. Speaker. It's a good thing we didn't listen because now we have some money to pay down on the debt, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the third aspect of our budget that I just want to touch on is the question of programs. This budget continues to support important public priorities.

And on the right, Saskatchewan Party and people in Saskatchewan are doing a lot of hand-wringing about oh, you're putting money into services and programs. We shouldn't be putting more money into services and programs. We hear the song here today from the Saskatchewan Party — oh, we don't know if we should be putting any more money into health care. We think we should have a review of the health care system. But the message is, we don't want to spend more on health care, Mr. Speaker.

Let me just say this about that. Budgets are about more than simply cutting taxes. Budgets are about supporting important public priorities. Saskatchewan has among the lowest, if not the lowest expenditure per capita when it comes to government in Canada — the lowest, Mr. Speaker.

When you look at it and when you look at Saskatchewan and how unique it is in its rural character, you would say to yourself that given sort of the rural nature of Saskatchewan, we should probably have among the highest expenditures in Canada. Because it stands to reason that in a rural province like Saskatchewan, you can't enjoy some of the economies of scale that people in other provinces enjoy, Mr. Speaker; so that those per capita expenditures should be higher.

To have effective public services, there must be public commitment and public support, Mr. Speaker. It is a legitimate debate to question how much money goes in to support our public priorities, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, this budget, in a very important way, supports public priorities, Mr. Speaker. It supports investments in children and families; it doubles the funding for the Saskatchewan action plan for children; more money for improvements in day cares; measures to assist victims of child prostitutions and family violence; extends health benefits to children of low income working families; implementation of a Saskatchewan Child Benefit; implementation of a Saskatchewan employment supplement to provide low income working families with additional support to help them remain in the workforce.

In the area of education and training, we've seen the federal Liberal government pull out of education and training in a massive way. We have responded to that. We have increased our investment in skills training and employment programs. We have increased our operating grants to universities and federated

colleges, up \$9 million. We have increased our capital investment. We have implemented a new Saskatchewan bursary plan, and that's something, Mr. Speaker, I'm particularly proud of.

(1230)

As an immigrant to Canada, and immigrant parents who had limited opportunity to help their children, that in Canada I could find the opportunity to go to university, and in my particular case it was because I was able to live at home and my parents were able to support me. But that isn't always the possibility. I think it is just so important that we provide support for young people who want to carry on and to get a university education, Mr. Speaker, as opposed to simply saying that that should be a function of the market-place.

Also, Mr. Speaker, we are importantly . . . And I think that this is something that, although it's not significant by itself, what we saw this year was that there was \$384 million in operating grants for kindergarten to grade 12 education — up \$21 million from the previous year. Now that doesn't seem like a lot of money but what is significant, Mr. Speaker, is that is a turnaround, that is a turnaround in something we're seeing, and I think we can be hopeful and optimistic about continued provincial support for education and training in the future.

And you might ask these right-wingers that do all this hand-wringing about should we be putting more money into government just what it is that they propose to do. Where would money come from, if not from the taxpayers of the province, to support important public priorities? Private schools and only private schools — is that the answer?

Mr. Speaker, also importantly, we've invested in health. There's an increase of \$88 million in this budget over last year's budget for health care. Our \$1.7 billion health care budget is the largest health care budget in our history. There's increased funding to help districts, there's increased funding for capital expenditures, for construction and renovation of health facilities, operating funding for diagnostic tools such as a new MRI in Regina and CT (computerized tomography) scanner in Prince Albert.

Mr. Speaker, are there stresses and strains in our health care system? Yes, there are. Are we responding to those stresses and strains, Mr. Speaker? Yes, we are. Will we do more, Mr. Speaker? Yes, you bet we will, Mr. Speaker.

Health has been and will continue to be a very important public priority. And I might underline that word "public," Mr. Speaker. And I want to underline it again so that the members of the opposition can hear that — a public priority. Not a private priority, not a private expenditure, but a public priority, Mr. Speaker. We will not go the road that you advocate for Saskatchewan. We will not go the road of private health clinics. We will not go the American style of health care system that you advocate for us. That's not the road we will go. We will continue to support health care because for us health care is an important public priority, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, significantly we are continuing to carry through on our commitment to spend significant funds in the area of

highways and transportation, to do the important work of making the repairs to those roads in Saskatchewan that are being chewed up by increased economic activity and also increased grain transportation because there are fewer railways, Mr. Speaker, and there are now fewer grain elevators, and so therefore more and more trucking is done. And also to support twinning of the Trans-Canada Highway, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, in the areas of jobs and economic growth, we are not content to simply say that we've done everything that can be done. We are continuing to provide support; we are doubling our support for the regional economic development authorities. We're implementing tax incentives in the areas of research and development. There is a tax credit in the area of film production. There's a tax rebate in the area of livestock and horticultural facilities. And there's increased investment in agricultural research and development, Mr. Speaker. We are not standing still in the area of jobs and employment; we are continuing to support those important public priorities, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to say a further word about investment in jobs and that we are continuing with the approach we have taken, which is selected, strategic tax cuts to support important public priorities, which are strategic partnerships like with the regional economic development authorities. An approach which I might say — and this will come as a real shocker, this will come as a real shocker for the members of the Legislative Assembly — this is an approach that even the media has conceded is working.

Now I know this comes as a very, very great shock. The media never says the government is doing something right because that wouldn't be news. The only thing that's news is when the government does something wrong. The media would never say the government is doing something right, but in this particular instance even the media is conceding that the government's plan is working.

An Hon. Member: — I don't believe it.

Mr. Van Mulligen: — Well the member for Churchill Downs says, Regina Churchill Downs, says he doesn't believe it. Well I believe it, Mr. Speaker, and why do I believe it? Because I read it, Mr. Speaker, in the Regina *Leader-Post* on Wednesday. And I just want to let the member for Churchill Downs know that it is true.

I read this on Wednesday, January 14, 1998. Now maybe it was a New Year's resolution because of being January 14, and maybe it was his first column of the year. This is the Murray Mandryk column in the *Leader-Post*, Mr. Speaker. Maybe it was a New Year's resolution to say, and the title is, "May I take this time to admit that I was wrong."

And he goes on to say: "As painful as this is for me to admit . . . the NDP government's job creation strategy is working, after all." And then he goes on, you know, in his usual smarmy way to question and to talk about, well, you can't rely on this and do that. And basically he criticizes even while he's admitting that we're right. "What indisputable evidence could bring on this unprecedented repentance, you ask?" He says you can "forget (about) the barrage of employment statistics . . ." And

"percentage of unemployment . . ." because these things are "meaningless". You can forget about the "increase or decrease in the number of people working for last month?" He says this is "meaningless." He says:

Increase or decrease of working people from the same month a year ago? . . . (that's) just a monthly statistic and doesn't offer much prospective.

No, the only two numbers free of political manipulation are the ones telling us what our workforce averaged for the year and the other telling us how much more or less that average was than the year before.

Well he might have mentioned that there's one other little bit of indisputable evidence that he might have looked at, Mr. Speaker, which also came from the same paper, but came much before the article about Murray Mandryk, where he's saying that he's wrong, that the government is right and the government is doing the job that it said that it had been doing.

And this was in *The Leader-Post*, Mr. Speaker. I noticed that every Saturday now, *The Leader-Post* publishes a special section called "Career Opportunities." I have never seen that before. I've never seen that before, Mr. Speaker, up until this last year. Now all of a sudden we've got a special section on career opportunities. Doesn't that tell you something about jobs? Doesn't that tell you something about employment? Doesn't that tell you something about the Saskatchewan economy, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Speaker, this just goes to show what we all know. If you really want to know what's going on in a community, never mind the editorial staff, never mind the writers, never mind the columnists, Mr. Speaker, talk to the people who know. Talk to the people in advertising at the local paper. If there's a trend in anything they'll know, and they'll know it much faster than Murray Mandryk, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, this government is sensitive to the priorities of Saskatchewan people. We will continue to reflect their priorities no matter what picture of doom and gloom the opposition may . . . Well I don't know if they can credibly say anything about doom and gloom. They really haven't questioned that, Mr. Speaker. Even they know that Saskatchewan is doing well.

Mr. Speaker, if you listen to the people of Saskatchewan there's a story of hope and optimism. There's a story of people working. There's a story of people planning their futures in Saskatchewan. It is perfect? No, it's not, Mr. Speaker. Is the government responding? Yes, it is.

You know, speaking about listening to people and speaking about being in touch, or being out of touch like the opposition are, I don't that there was anything more sorry in this Legislative Assembly, Mr. Speaker, than the attempts by at least two opposition members to rewrite history. And these were the member for Moosomin and a member for Cypress Hills — both of them Tory members. Well except one is now called the Saskatchewan Tory and the other one is now called an independent, but they're both Tory members.

Both are trying to impress upon us the idea that although the

Devine administration of the '80s made some mistakes, we should concede the notion that the Devine administration also made many good decisions and that we should dwell on those good decisions, Mr. Speaker.

Now the member for Moosomin had this to say, "It's unfortunate that the member fails to acknowledge that the '80s certainly were a difficult period." I would like to ask him, if he was in government at that time, whether they would have been able to address a number of the questions any differently? Well yes, Mr. Speaker, if he's asking, yes, there's some things that we would have done very differently.

But he goes on to say, "Let's acknowledge that there were a number of issues, a number of decisions that were made, and a number of initiatives that the province is benefiting from." Well I mean the law of averages would have you say that yes, there had to be some things you had to do right, Mr. Speaker.

But even more interesting, even more interesting is a member for Cypress Hills and this is what he has to say:

And I think that we have come to a point of time, Mr. Speaker, when it's time to give some credit to the past administrations that did some good. I can think of some things I didn't like about Tommy Douglas, but the man did a lot of good as well. So let's remember the past as good things, Mr. Speaker.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I can certainly understand, Mr. Speaker, that those who are associated with the previous Devine administration would want us to forget, but I think that in forgetting that we might start with an admission that we also did some things wrong, Mr. Speaker.

You can't take the position that we should be looking or taking an extremely balanced view of the past if you're never prepared to admit that you've made major mistakes and mistakes that the people of Saskatchewan are still paying for, and will continue to pay for many decades to come, Mr. Speaker.

This government, this government, when it makes mistakes, it's prepared to admit its mistakes. Even the Liberal Party is prepared to admit that it made mistakes with respect to the handling of their former leader, Lynda Haverstock, Mr. Speaker. But will the Tories ever admit to any mistakes by the Devine administration? — no, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the reality is we cannot and must not forget. To forget is to risk making those mistakes again. And many philosophers have made that point much more eloquently than I, Mr. Speaker.

Some playwrights have also had some appropriate things to say about that, Mr. Speaker. Speaking of the Globe as we were earlier, those members might have gone to the Globe at one time. They might have listened to a Shakespeare play, in particular Julius Caesar, Mr. Speaker. And if I might paraphrase Shakespeare in Julius Caesar, Mr. Speaker, it might go something like this: Friends, Saskatchewanians, countrymen, lend me your ears. I come to bury the Devine Tories, not to praise them. The evil that men do lives after them; the good is oft interred with their bones. So let it be with the Devine Tories,

Mr. Speaker.

Now no one is suggesting that the Devine administration did not have some modest accomplishments. Again the balance is, Mr. Speaker, the law of averages is that they had to do some things right, Mr. Speaker. But, Mr. Speaker, it's a long bow as the Saskatchewan member from Cypress Hills did, to go on to say that the Devine administration should be favourably compared to the Tommy Douglas administration, Mr. Speaker. That is bit of a long bow, Mr. Speaker.

(1245)

Now, Mr. Speaker, again we cannot, we must not forget. To forget is to deny the past. Should we forget? No, Mr. Speaker. Should we forget nine years of deficit budgets, driving Saskatchewan near to bankruptcy, Mr. Speaker? Should we forget their attempt to sell off SaskPower and SaskEnergy, Mr. Speaker? Should we forget their attempts to avoid public accountability, Mr. Speaker? Should we forget their attempts to divide Saskatchewan people? Should we forget their legacy of criminality and corruption, Mr. Speaker?

Should we forget that the new Saskatchewan Party is the old Tory Party, Mr. Speaker? No, Mr. Speaker, we cannot. Whatever their names, whatever their name, can we ever again risk a Tory provincial government? No, Mr. Speaker. No, Tory members, we shall not forget. The people of Saskatchewan will not forget.

Mr. Speaker, I support the budget. I support the government's direction. I support the leadership of the member for Saskatoon Riversdale. I will not support the amendment before us, and I will support the main motion.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Scott: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to use this opportunity to say how pleased and privileged I am to rise and speak in support of a budget.

I'd also like to congratulate you, Mr. Speaker, for the fine job that you are doing, and also the staff . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. Now . . . Order!

Hon. Mr. Scott: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And I would like to also congratulate the staff, not only here in the Chamber but throughout the building — those who work at *Hansard* into the wee hours of the morning — for the fine job that they do to make this institution run as effectively as it is.

And I say that it is certainly an honour and pleasure to serve as a representative here in the Assembly and serve and work with the people of the Indian Head-Milestone constituency.

The Indian Head-Milestone constituency is a very diverse constituency — a long farming history, Mr. Speaker, lots of small businesses, manufacturing, tourism in areas such as the Qu'Appelle Valley, and many other opportunities for economic development in the constituency.

Many people volunteer in various capacities. In recent years, for an example, Mr. Speaker, dinner theatre performances occur in Milestone, Edgeley, Sintaluta, Creelman, McLean, to mention a few.

And I'd also like to mention that on April 18th weekend the Milestone rodeo will be performing again. I'm quite fortunate, at least the people in the Indian Head-Milestone constituency are fortunate, Mr. Speaker, in that there are three MLAs in the constituency. The member from Weyburn and also member from Melville live in Indian Head-Milestone constituency. I would like to remind the people in the constituency though that one MLA does most of the work for them.

As I say, I'm very pleased to support this budget, Mr. Speaker, and I would like to congratulate the Minister of Finance for delivering a very good first budget and a very effective budget as well.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Scott: — Also a special thanks to all of the people who work behind the scenes in the Department of Finance as well as throughout other government departments as they pull together these budgets involving about \$5 billion, certainly no small task. This is a fifth balanced budget that we have brought forward in a row, Mr. Speaker, another great accomplishment for the people of Saskatchewan.

This budget does not only represent balance financially but in many other respects as well. In our usual tradition, we are putting money towards paying down our debt, cutting taxes, and putting more money into priority areas such as health, roads, and education. There is something for everyone in this budget, Mr. Speaker.

I would like to touch on a few areas in no particular order here. One is the highways. We are very pleased to see a 10 per cent or a \$20 million increase in our Highways budget. We will repair or resurface 3,600 kilometres of roads and highways in our province in the coming year and to put this in perspective, it is a distance from the city of Saskatoon to Quebec City, which certainly is a large, long distance of roads which will be receiving much needed attention in the coming year.

We will also push ahead with work on the Trans-Canada Highway, Mr. Speaker, without federal support, but we are going ahead doing what we can on our own. This will include 27 kilometres of twinning the Trans-Canada Highway from Gull Lake to Tompkins, and another 21 kilometres from Indian Head to Wolseley.

Now this is very good news for the people of Saskatchewan, and again we are living up to our commitment of completing the twinning of the Trans-Canada Highway, unfortunately on our own without federal money even though this is a Trans-Canada Highway.

The cost of twinning their highway is roughly \$400,000 a kilometre, Mr. Speaker, and that is why this task is so momentous. It's just a horrendous task, but we are committed to completing this in the next few years.

We have more roads in Saskatchewan than any other province. We have 25 per cent of the roads in Canada are found in Saskatchewan. And if they were all put end to end, it would circle the planet Earth four and a half times. So roads are certainly important.

And again with deregulation of railways, railways abandonment, and such like, we are going to certainly see more stress on our roads. And roads are very important to everybody in this province and we are working together with municipalities and everyone else, the trucking industry as well, to try and accommodate the pressures on our roads and keep them up to par.

Another area, Mr. Speaker, is taxes. Nobody likes taxes but they are a fact of life. And again, as in the past number of years, we are reducing the taxes that people pay. This year we will be reducing the Saskatchewan personal income tax rate by 2 per cent, lowering it from 50 to 48 per cent of the basic federal tax. This will put about \$58 million into the pockets of Saskatchewan people, and again something that we are very proud to do and we are committed to do as trying to reduce our taxes as we bring in each particular budget.

As I mentioned, this is the fifth balanced budget in a row and there's many good things happening in Saskatchewan. Last year there was 13,000 new jobs in our province. We have a record number of people working. And we are also focusing attention on our young people in many ways — certainly through education. Job opportunities are very important.

And we are also dealing, Mr. Speaker, with a fraction of a percentage of our young people who have got in trouble with the law for various reasons, and we certainly do not believe that throwing these young people, who got off the right track, into institutions and locking them up, throwing away the key. These are our young people. These are our future. We will be doing what we can to help these people as we want to help all young people. And we look forward to some major achievements in this during the coming year.

Debt reduction is also very important to people. I know that people like my mother certainly doesn't like to have any debt around, and this applies to many of our older people who scrimp and save to build this province into the great province that it is. And they did not do it by spending foolishly as has happened during the 1980s. But we are committed to reducing our debt.

Last year we cut our debt by \$700 million. We will be cutting our debt by another \$500 million this year. And our debt is going down. In 1995, Mr. Speaker, our debt was about \$15 billion. We were paying \$880 million in interest. About 19 cents of every dollar that we took in went towards interest. Now, Mr. Speaker, this year our debt is down to \$12 billion and our interest costs have been reduced to \$725 million or 14 cents of every dollar that we take in. This is still far, far too much interest to be paying — \$725 million. Our whole Highways budget is only \$225 million. Just think what we could do in this province if we did not have our interest and our debt to deal with.

One of the most important areas to everybody in this province,

Mr. Speaker, is our health. And I am very pleased to see that again, as we have consistently done, we are increasing money in health care. Another \$88 million will be spent in health care this coming year. A total of \$1.7 billion or 38 per cent of our total operating budget is going to Health, and health is very important.

And what we are doing with this, we will see the replacing or upgrading of 10 new health facilities including in communities such as Shaunavon, the Shaunavon Hospital, the Balcarres Health Centre, the Fort Qu'Appelle Indian Hospital, and the Regina General and Pasqua hospitals, Athabasca Health Centre, Davidson Health Centre, Meadow Lake Hospital, Saskatoon Sherbrooke Long-term Care Centre, and the Unity hospital all will be getting new money, new facilities, or certainly major improvements on their facilities.

We assume and trust there will be other capital expenditures announced in the coming year on additional health facilities. We have an MRI machine coming to Regina; we are recruiting more doctors for rural Saskatchewan, with financial incentives; and we have increased the funding for health care districts by \$35 million. And every health care district in the province will be getting a portion of this \$35 million.

So as you can see, Mr. Speaker, health care is a priority. And we will continue to make health care a priority. Can we use more money? We always can use more money. But we are doing what we can.

We can assure the people of Saskatchewan that we will continue to provide additional money for health care as at the same time the federal government keeps cutting back health care dollars. At one time when medicare was brought in, 50 per cent of the health care dollar came from the federal government. That has dropped to 13 per cent. Who picked up the other 37 per cent? We did, the people of Saskatchewan. And I guess we will have to continue to do that as long as Ottawa does not view health care as an important issue.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I have a number of other things that I would like to comment on, but in light of the time, I would like to at this time move adjournment of debate and continue on in the next sitting.

Thank you very much.

Debate adjourned.

The Assembly adjourned at 12:56 p.m.

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