

The Assembly met at 1:30 p.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRESENTING PETITIONS

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I have a petition to present on behalf of residents 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.

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

Mr. Speaker, the signatures to this come from the communities of Melfort and Tisdale.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also have a petition 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 petitions come from Regina and Candle Lake; Nipawin also. I so present, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To present petitions as well and, Mr. Speaker, this petition deals with the Jack Messer severance and the Channel Lake fiasco. And the petitioners who signed this petition are from the community of Nipawin.

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, Mr. Speaker, involved, are the community of Francis.

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too rise to present petitions and 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.

And these come from the good people at Leroy, St. Brieux, Melfort, and Tisdale.

Mr. Gantefoer: — Mr. Speaker, I too rise with petitions for people in 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 all from the community of Oxbow.

Ms. Draude: — 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.

Everyone that has signed this petition is from Melfort.

Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I present a petition on behalf of concerned citizens of Saskatchewan with respect to the closure of the Plains Health Centre:

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.

And the signatures on this petition are from Glenbain, Vanguard, Gravelbourg, and Swift Current. I so present.

Mr. Hillson: — Mr. Speaker, I also present a petition. The prayer of relief reads as follows:

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

Your petitioners, Mr. Speaker, come from Coronach. I so present.

Mr. McPherson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I join with my

colleagues and bring forward petitions in regards to closure of the Plains hospital. This will bring the amount to somewhere over 100,000 that have now been presented in this House. Prayer reads as follows:

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.

Mr. Speaker, the people who have signed the petition are from the Maple Creek, Frontier, Eastend, and Shaunavon areas of the province. I so present.

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too have a petition to present today on behalf of the people of Saskatchewan:

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 hospital may be continued.

Mr. Speaker, this petition has been signed by the good folks from Limerick, Assiniboia, Crane Valley, and Gravelbourg, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Goohsen: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With the new week we have even more important petitions from the south-west. I'll read the prayer:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to reach the necessary agreements with other levels of government to fund the twinning of the Trans-Canada Highway in Saskatchewan so that 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 humbly pray.

These, Mr. Speaker, all come from the Fox Valley and Swift Current communities, 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) they are hereby read and received.

Petitions from citizens of the province petitioning the government to provide the necessary funding for the twinning of the Trans-Canada Highway; to act to save the Plains Health Centre; and to cancel any severance payments to Jack Messer and to call an independent public inquiry.

NOTICES OF MOTIONS AND QUESTIONS

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I give notice that I shall on day no. 21 ask the government the following question:

Is there a freeze on the leasing of Crown lands in the area of the province north of Waskesiu; if so, why is this freeze in place; how long has this freeze been in place; and how long is it anticipated that the freeze will remain in place?

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure today when we have so many guests here, to introduce some guests who have come a long distance to Saskatchewan. In your gallery, Mr. Speaker, are four judges from the Ukraine, and I'll ask them to stand when I read their name.

The first is Chief Justice Fedoryshyn of the Supreme Court of the Ukraine. And then Chief Justice Tyutyunnyk from the Supreme Court. Chief Judge Stryzhak and Chief Judge Ischenko, and they're both from provincial courts of appeal. And accompanying them today is Alberta Court of Appeal Justice John Bracco, and Judge Senuik of our Provincial Court along with some of the guests.

They're part of an exchange of judges between Canada and the Ukraine, and they've made a special trip from Ottawa to Saskatchewan to discuss with us how our courts work. Let's all give them a warm welcome.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Kowalsky: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

(The hon. member spoke for a time in Ukrainian.)

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Stanger: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to the legislature a special guest here, an MLA (Member of the Legislative Assembly) from the House of New Brunswick.

The MLA is also the Leader of the NDP (New Democratic Party) in New Brunswick and her name is Elizabeth Weir. She represents the constituency of Saint John Harbour. She has been here for a women's conference that most of the women in our caucus and myself attended this weekend, and I'd like to very warmly invite everyone to clap for Elizabeth Weir. Please stand up.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

(The hon. member spoke for a time in Ukrainian.)

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to introduce to you and to all members of the legislature, two guests seated in the west gallery: Michael Millar who is presently the director of the Saskatoon Food Bank, along with his wife Betty Millar. Just for the information

of all assembled, Michael is a former member of Humphrey and the Dumptrucks, a well-known Saskatchewan group. And I'm pleased that he's now working as the head of the Food Bank in Saskatoon. And Betty Millar is working with the federal government and the province, trying to ensure that we have computers in our schools.

So welcome to both of you. I know you haven't been here before, and I thought it important that you be introduced. So if you could stand so that we would know who you are. Welcome to the legislature.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Recycling Program

Mr. Trew: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As you are aware, this government has identified environmental concerns, then acted to systematically deal with those environmental problems. The people of Saskatchewan have responded with the same conscientious enthusiasm.

Joanne Fedyk, executive director of the Saskatchewan Waste Reduction Council, says: if you have a program, people will use it. Well, Mr. Speaker, environmentally sound, cost-effective programs are springing up all over the province.

I would like to inform the House of just one such program. The Regional Authority of Carlton Trail, or REACT, have recently been recognized by the council for its environmentally friendly waste management program. REACT is a Humboldt-based program which united 26 municipalities under one system.

In less than a year, REACT has been able to close 23 landfills through the use of 19 recycling centres, seven waste transfer stations, and a composting program. There are now only two landfills in use in the entire region. There has been an astounding 60 per cent reduction in the amount of waste going to the landfills.

Mr. Speaker, similar projects are under way across the province. We are proud to support them and congratulate everyone in the REACT area.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

National Award to Member for Athabasca

Mr. Hillson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On this important awards day it gives me great pleasure to rise to honour one of my colleagues, close friend and colleague, the member for Athabasca, who will be in Montreal this week receiving a prestigious national award.

There were over 220 nominations made from coast to coast. He was successfully chosen as the Saskatchewan region role model by the national native role model program.

The member from Athabasca has continually worked toward the betterment of communities in northern Saskatchewan. He's a great individual and a credit to the North and an asset to our

party. He sums up his own philosophy of life in the words: "If we were not put on this earth to help one another out in time of need, then what are we here for?"

The Liberal member for Athabasca has worked as a newspaper reporter and editor, as a programmer and a producer for a broadcasting corporation, and is president of his own communications company, Belanger Inc.

He has dedicated countless hours to volunteering in the North and is a renowned athlete. But he has to be most proud of the fact that he was three times chosen by the people of Ile-a-la-Crosse as their mayor and later as their MLA. During his time as mayor he successfully utilized his energies and skills to develop one of the best role models for community development in northern Saskatchewan. It is an honour to work with such a man. I would ask all members of this Assembly to join with me in congratulating him.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Television Episode Filming in Lumsden

Ms. Murray: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. *Sesame Park*, which is the Canadian version of *Sesame Street*, recently shot an episode in Lumsden, which is a friendly town in the beautiful Qu'Appelle Valley in my constituency.

Roadhouse Pictures, the company that produces *Sesame Park*, was in Lumsden filming in February. A number of local soon-to-be stars showcased their talent. Jody and Shelby Clemens were filmed teaching proper horse care. In the second shoot, Gord Eberts, his nephew Mickey, and niece Chelsey did a scene with talking horses.

Trevor Grant, the director and producer of *Sesame Park*, said: "We decided to film in the Lumsden area because it is a gorgeous setting." The friendly, helpful people of the Lumsden area were happy to oblige. Grant also added:

We like to go into small towns, meet the children, and then film the ones that want to be in the forefront. The thing that I enjoy most about my job is working with children. They are spontaneous, funny, and make us laugh all the time, and we like watching the joy they get out of doing it.

The young Lumsden stars are slated to appear on CBC (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation) in October and I'll advise the House of a more precise date when I have one.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Proposed Use of Plains Health Centre

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the Liberal opposition revealed on Friday that negotiations are taking place with SIAST (Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology) to relocate its administrative offices to the current site of the Plains hospital. The Minister of Finance certainly didn't deny Friday that a deal was close at hand. This government is undoubtedly hoping that this news

will dampen efforts to save the Plains. To the contrary, our members were contacted by dozens of people over the weekend who are very upset that this government places a greater priority on office furniture than hospital beds.

With 215 days left until this government plans on closing the Plains hospital, it certainly hasn't heard the last of this issue. Mr. Speaker, a good government is one that listens. At some point before October 31 we hope they will hear the thousands of people who are speaking loud and clear.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Gladmar Students Provincial Mixed Curling Champs

Hon. Ms. Bradley: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is one thing to win at the Olympics and we're all justifiably proud that Saskatchewan's sport of curling was introduced to the world at the Olympics by Sandra Schmirler. But we know that the reason competition is so keen in Saskatchewan is that we have so many excellent curlers, some established and some breathing down the necks of the establishment.

A case in point can be found in the town of Gladmar in my constituency. The mixed rink of Cody Morrisette, a grade 11 student at Gladmar, recently won the Saskatchewan High School Provincial Championship in Wadena, by defeating in the semi-final and final, teams from Watrous and Yorkton. My apologies to the ministers of Agriculture and Health.

Cody's rink consists of Karen Buettner, Jess Melte, and Michelle Bloor, all grade 11 or grade 10 students. So they, like the Schmirler rink, have the possibility of repeating next year and establishing their own dynasty.

I want to congratulate Cody and his rink for their victory and for upholding the athletic reputation of the southern part of the province. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Evesham Farmer Donates Use of Land to Canadian Foodgrains Bank

Ms. Murrell: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Gary Beaumont, a farmer in the Evesham area of my constituency, has donated the use of 225 cultivated acres for a Canadian Foodgrains Bank project. Once harvested, the production from this land will be donated to the Foodgrain Bank for food and development projects.

The local project is to be named the Cotswold Growing Project. This project is expected to produce 225 tonnes of food grain. To put this in perspective, one tonne of food grain feeds 2,500 people for one day. Thus, 225 tonnes will feed 562,500 people for one day. The Canadian International Development association matches most donations in a 4:1 ratio. This means the crop from the Cotswold Growing Project will generate enough food grains to feed nearly 3 million people for one day.

The Cotswold Growing Project will cost about \$12,000. This means the more donations of cash, products, inputs and services made, the more successful the project will be.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to acknowledge the generosity of Gary and Marj Beaumont and wish everyone involved in this project a bountiful harvest.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ORAL QUESTIONS

Inquiry Into Channel Lake

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Premier. Mr. Premier, for two weeks the Saskatchewan Party has been calling on your government to cancel Jack Messer's obscene severance package and fire the minister responsible for this mess. Well a poll came out today. And what are Saskatchewan people saying? Cancel Jack Messer's severance and fire the minister responsible for this mess.

Mr. Premier, if you won't listen to the Saskatchewan Party, will you at least listen to the Saskatchewan people? Will you cancel Jack Messer's obscene severance package and will you fire the minister responsible for this mess?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — Mr. Speaker, I say to the members opposite as it relates to the severance for Mr. Messer, we have indicated clearly that we did not expect this to be a politically popular thing to do. And that is not why Mr. Milt Fair, with legal counsel, decided that the severance should be paid. They made the decision without any advice or any control from government to pay severance because Mr. Milt Fair, the former CEO of the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool, now the Vice-Chair of the SaskPower Corporation, came to this conclusion because it was the legally right thing to do.

Now I understand why you want him to turn it into a big political issue, but I can say at the end of the day, at the end of the day, doing the right legal procedure will in turn be the right political decision as well when the results are all in.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear

Mr. Krawetz: — Mr. Speaker, last Thursday we saw quite a display from the NDP (New Democratic Party). They found a way to keep the Channel Lake cover-up going. It was like watching some sort of bizarre NDP yoga class. All those NDP members patting themselves on the back with one hand and covering themselves with the other.

Well, Mr. Premier, Saskatchewan people see right through your little charade. They know you're hiding something. They know the Crown Corporations Committee is going to be an NDP whitewash. They know Jack Messer doesn't deserve one dime of severance. And the former minister responsible should be fired.

Mr. Premier, Saskatchewan people know you're hiding something. When are you going to come clean by calling a full public inquiry into the millions you lost in Channel Lake?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — Mr. Speaker, I say to the member opposite, and clearly, on the front page of the *Leader-Post* today, there's the issue of Channel Lake and the issue of polls and the procedures that were followed in terms of Channel Lake. And I just want to say that what interests me very much was that there was 15 or 16 per cent of the population satisfied with paying Messer severance.

I was surprised by that. I was surprised. Because on a political basis we knew this was not a popular political thing to do. It's a legal issue.

Now you may argue that if you were here you would make the political decision and not the right legal one. I understand that. Because when you were part of the Devine administration — one, two, three, four — part of the Devine party, that's how you operated. That's how you operated.

Forget the legal options; look at the political one. But I tell you at the end of the day, that's why we owe \$15 billion in this province after the eight or nine years of your administration.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Deputy Premier, there was an interesting column on the financial page of Saturday's *Leader-Post*. It said NDP corruption and mismanagement is turning Saskatchewan into a banana republic, or Arkansas North.

It asked, and I quote:

So which bogus review process is better? The NDP-dominated Crown corporation committee, or the NDP-dominated public accounts committee?

Either way, the government will be investigating itself, rather than the full, independent inquiry called for by the Saskatchewan Party, Jack Messer, and a large number of Saskatchewan taxpayers.

Mr. Deputy Premier, your little Crown Corporations review is as phoney as a \$3 bill. You know it and I know it and the Saskatchewan people know it. When are you going to do the right thing, end this NDP whitewash, and hold a public inquiry?

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — Mr. Speaker, the Chair of Public Accounts called a committee of the legislature a kangaroo court. Today the leader of the Conservative Party says that it's a whitewash. I say to you, you do a great disservice to yourself, to other members of the legislature, to members of government, talking about your credibility; because it's your credibility you talk about when you talk that way about a committee of the legislature, a committee dominated by all members who are elected to come here by their peers, their neighbours, their friends, to create laws and to work in committees.

And I say if that's your opinion of the legislature — if that's your opinion of the legislature — you should resign, recall yourself, and go back to the farm or wherever you came from because you're not worthy of the job that people sent you here to do.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is also for the Premier. And I know from what happened last week, he seems to be getting a little feeble-minded in his old age. But he should be able to remember stepping in to save his good friend, Jack Messer, from being fired.

Mr. Premier, we have learned that you stepped in to save Jack Messer from being fired back in '94. The member for North Battleford indicated it happened again in 1996. That's probably why you sent poor old Doug Anguish packing to the Northwest Territories.

Mr. Premier, has your memory come back over the weekend? Can you confirm that you stepped in, in the past, to keep Jack Messer from being fired?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, I can assure that my memory is every bit as good as the hon. member, who obviously has forgotten in only just a few short, short months ago he was sitting as a Conservative, now sits as a Sask Party member. So I think I don't need to worry about my memory compared to his memory.

But unlike my memory and your memory, the people of Saskatchewan will never forget the fact that you made this dead of a deal ... dead-of-the-night deal with the Liberal-Saskatchewan party.

Now, Mr. Speaker, to the main question. In June of 1994, the Crown Investments Corporation asked the board of directors of every Crown corporation to evaluate their CEO. Standard procedure.

I'm informed that the SaskPower board held several in-camera meetings, and that many members of the board concluded they had some serious issues with the personality and the management style of Mr. Messer. In July of 1994 this was told to me by Doug Anguish when he was the minister in charge and wanted to report and ask my advice on this. I think it's well known that Mr. Messer has had an ability to attract some controversy.

After considering all the matters, I indicated to the minister that Mr. Messer was doing a good job in terms of debt reduction; reorganizing — although it was difficult with respect to the unions and others; the corporation was in the black — in a profit position; and that the minister should go out and try to work out the differences between the board and the CEO in order to make sure that the corporation functions and continues to function in that direction.

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well it's good to see the Premier's memory has improved a lot since last weekend. I would suggest he should sharpen his memory a bit more and remember what happened at a past election when the people from his constituency caught up with him, as they will do again.

When the Premier says he is stepping in to save Jack Messer, it

usually has nothing to do with Channel Lake. Well it has everything to do with it rather than sound business principles. If you had done the right thing and fired Jack Messer years ago, you wouldn't be in the jackpot you are in today. And taxpayers wouldn't be out millions of dollars thanks to Jack Messer and NDP incompetence in the Crowns.

Mr. Premier, you said you would check your records to see if you stepped in on Jack Messer's behalf. Have you done that, Mr. Premier, and will you be bringing those records along when you are called to testify at the Crown Corporation hearings on Channel Lake?

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, there are no records. But what I did do, after the scrum on Friday, is to ask of some of my officials the circumstances surrounding the matter back in July of 1994, as I reported in the previous question to the member opposite.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Funding for Prince Albert Women's Shelter

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my question is also for the Premier. Mr. Premier, the emergency shelter for abused women in North Battleford may be forced to close its doors next month because of a funding shortage.

Last year this centre helped about 150 women and 220 children escape from an abusive situation.

An Hon. Member: — Prince Albert, not North Battleford.

Ms. Draude: — I'm sorry, it is Prince Albert. Do you know what their annual budget is? About \$300,000, Mr. Premier — the same amount that was just given to Jack Messer.

Mr. Premier, there is something very seriously wrong with a government that has \$300,000 for a buddy but not enough money to help women and children that are being in an abusive situation. What are you doing to save this shelter in Prince Albert?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Speaker, just to be clear so there's no misunderstanding. I believe when the member stood up, she indicated the shelter in question was in North Battleford. It is not, Mr. Speaker. The shelter in question is in Prince Albert.

I want to report to the House that I have just returned from Prince Albert just this morning. I have met with my officials in Prince Albert; we have discussed the situation facing the women's shelter there. I want to report to the House and assure members and the general public that that shelter will continue to operate. It will be open May 1, receiving women in difficulty, as it has been.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Plains Health Centre Closure

Mr. McPherson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker,

when the NDP decided it wanted to close the Plains hospital, the people of Saskatchewan were told that the cost of consolidating services would total about \$83 million. Soon afterward the cost was going to be up around \$95 million, and at last word the estimated cost of consolidation was \$108 million. That's \$25 million more than first projected.

Will the Minister of Health explain what the total cost of shutting down the Plains hospital will be to the taxpayers?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to answer the question this afternoon, to indicate to the member that as the development of the Plains Health Centre and the restructuring of the two other facilities in Regina to serve southern Saskatchewan has been under way, the last information that I have is that we are currently around the \$95 million on the development of the new facility, which is of the General Hospital and of the Pasqua Hospital.

The current numbers I don't have the full knowledge of yet, Mr. Speaker, because the project isn't intended to finish its work until the fall of 1998. And when we have that work completely done in the province, then I'll be able to provide to the member opposite what the actual accounting and the cost of that facility are.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McPherson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Minister, today we're releasing some of those costs that you should have already had. We're getting them from your department, Mr. Minister. You should be on top of that.

Mr. Speaker, in spite of this massive overrun at taxpayers' expense, a waste of valuable health care dollars, we have yet to hear any explanations or apologies from this government. The former minister of Health certainly wasn't willing to admit he had a runaway project on his hands. In fact he suggested 33 times during one media scrum that the project was on time and on budget. And I think he remembers that.

Mr. Minister, the project is at least \$25 million over budget now. Is this because your government is inept or did you simply mislead the public?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Speaker, I think what's important is to carefully examine the wordage of the member opposite in terms of how he describes the investment in health care in Regina and to southern Saskatchewan.

If in fact the member opposite suggests that this government is wasting money — and that's his word — that we're wasting money today in investing in health care for people who live in Regina and southern Saskatchewan by adding a brand-new MRI (magnetic resonance imaging) which is going to serve the people of Regina and southern Saskatchewan; by adding an additional CT (computerized axial tomography) scanner that will provide the first and the most efficient diagnostic services to people in southern Saskatchewan and in Regina; if in fact we have a new, and will have a new cardiac area that will be serving cardiac patients in the state-of-the-art fashion; if the

member opposite suggests for a moment that that's a waste of taxpayers' money, then I expect, Mr. Member, you are not serving the people in your constituency well, you're not serving the people of Saskatchewan very well in opposition, and I say to you, you need to examine the wordage when you say that we're wasting money as we invest it in health care for the people of Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McPherson: — Well, Mr. Speaker, it's interesting to note that on budget day that government stood up and tried to take credit for the MRI coming to the Regina area — that was raised from private funds. What role did you play? You didn't even play a role. You're not even aware of your own budget documents coming out here.

Mr. Minister, we know there have been delays in construction because the General Hospital sits on bog land. The district is in the process of constructing a building for doctors' offices on the site of the General Hospital now.

We also know there are discussions to purchase land in the vicinity of the General to turn it into a parking lot. What are these items going to run up that price tag to be?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Well, Mr. Speaker, I have been on my feet now three or four times in response to the members opposite in respect to, how are we going to accommodate people from outside of Regina when they come to visit the General Hospital for a variety of different reasons. And we've said that the district health board is working at establishing appropriate parking and appropriate emergency services so that as the ambulatory services come in that we can provide them the comprehensive fashion.

Today the member stands up and says, why is it that you're wasting money on how the public are going to access this facility? Now how does the member want it? Does the member want us to ensure that we supply a broad range of health care services to people from Regina, across the province, a state-of-the-art services? Or is he saying that what we should be doing is we should be abandoning our responsibilities, which is what he and his government, what he and his party would do if he was ever . . . had the opportunity, Mr. Speaker, to serve. Because they don't believe in universal medicare; they don't believe . . . they believe in privatization. They don't believe in the democratic process of the board system. They don't believe in medicare, Mr. Speaker. They don't believe in serving people as we do.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Inquiry into Channel Lake

Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the Crown Corporations Committee investigation into Channel Lake fiasco will discover one of two things — either gross incompetence, out-and-out fraud, or both. Reports filed with the House on March 10 indicate that the lawyers retained by SaskPower did not fulfil their retainer agreement with regards to the sale of Channel Lake. They did not supply copies of documents to SaskPower officials as required. This failure to

supply SaskPower with certain crucial documents cost taxpayers of this province \$5.2 million.

My question to the Minister of CIC (Crown Investments Corporations of Saskatchewan) is, will he agree to investigate the apparent professional negligence and pursue the possibility of a claim against these lawyers.

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — Mr. Speaker, I think the member has raised exactly the kind of questions that should be raised in the committee, and I'm sure will be raised starting tomorrow when the committee meets for the first time. And I want to say again that this is a committee of the legislature with many powers to get people to come. We have said that if people need to be subpoenaed they will be subpoenaed. People will be required to answer all and any questions put. The lawyers involved will also be asked to come and answer questions. And I think the questions you're asking here will be very appropriately put at the committee meeting starting tomorrow morning.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Osika: — A supplementary question to the minister, Mr. Speaker. Has the minister received a legal opinion on the possibility of suing the Calgary law firm for professional negligence and recouping the \$5.2 million the taxpayers lost over the bungled sale of Channel Lake? And if not, why not, and would you not have the best interests of Saskatchewan people in heart and look into the possibility that may exist.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — I say to the member opposite again, that is in the mandate of the committee. Mr. Wright, Mr. John Wright, the CEO of Crown Investments Corporation, will be there. Other individuals who will be able to answer this and other questions will be present. I say as well, members of the media, the public, it's an open meeting, an open process, and I say to members opposite from the Conservative Party who are cynical about the process, they should be there, attend, and they will find that these kind of questions are in order and answers will be provided.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Review Rights for Parents of Special Needs Children

Ms. Haverstock: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My questions this afternoon are for the Minister of Education. The Education Act, section 148, allows for a process by which parents of all students can have immediate access to procedures of investigation and mediation of any differences or conflicts within a school. However an amendment to the appeal process for special education students sets out different rules of appeal for their parents. Should these parents disagree with the school, they are sent through the very same internal procedure that they just went through which resulted in the very decision that they are appealing.

Madam Minister, does your government actually believe that this procedure is fair and in the best interests of children with special needs?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I would just like to say to the member that she may not recall this but there was a time when parents of children of special needs had no right to a . . . no right to a review. And what we did last year was to give parents a right to review decisions of school boards with the exception of two points.

Parents could not ask for a review if they were concerned about the actual location of the placement of their child and they could not ask for a review if they had already taken their concern to the Human Rights Commission.

So I would say that parents are in a much better position now because they now do have a right to a review when they didn't in the past.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Haverstock: — Mr. Speaker, Madam Minister. When this amendment was introduced, the Saskatchewan Association for Community Living and the Children's Advocate spoke out against it, so obvious was its ineffectiveness. And based on the list of exemptions to the appeal process that are listed in The Education Act and the regulations being put forward by your government, there is no conceivable situation in which one would be successful having an appeal.

Madam Minister, would you please commit to reviewing this piece of legislation, and especially the offensive regulations — with which I had met with you last week — that go with it?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I said before, prior to 1997 parents did not have a right to a review of school board decisions. We had a situation in the province where a parent had to take their case to the Human Rights Commission. What I thought we were doing with the regulations and the legislation was allowing parents to ask for a review of their child's circumstances, particularly in the area of special education.

One of the things that school boards were concerned about was the notion that they would not be able to place children where they thought it appropriate. Parents have a right to review their child's educational programs; they don't have a right to review the placement of their child in a program.

The second point is that they don't have a right to ask for a review if they've already taken their concern to the Human Rights Commission. I can tell the member, I will look at this again to see if we didn't get it right. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Haverstock: — Mr. Speaker, Madam Minister, you know both of us spent a lot of years not just working with but working for children with special needs. And you've stated on many, many occasions that integration should be the norm. In fact I have some quotations from you.

The restrictions as to the use of appeals make it virtually useless to parents with children with disabilities.

And it isn't me who's raising this, Madam Minister. The Saskatchewan Association for Community Living has been very articulate and very adamant about the implications of this particular regulation.

I pose this question to you from them today. Is integrated education the norm or not in our province?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — What I will say to the member is educational integration is definitely the norm. What I can also say to the member is that there are occasions when it is not necessarily in the best interest of the child, educationally, to be integrated. And so here comes the dilemma between what's educationally appropriate and what is a concern on the part of the parent to have their child integrated.

I guess from my point of view, what I would say, that what we have to do is ensure that each child has access to an education that is appropriate and is going to help them educationally, not merely access to a classroom where they may not get the best education available to them in the province.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Haverstock: — Madam Minister, we are in agreement that not all children can be integrated. However integration is stated as the norm by you as the Minister of Education. And I think that . . . I'm grateful that you've indicated that what you're going to do is review this regulation, because this new regulation affecting students with disabilities contains some truly frightening statements. And I'm going to give a quote:

The right to a review does not apply where the disagreement with respect to placement of the child is based on . . .

And I'm just as worried about (a) through (e) by the way, but I'm going to cite (f), which is:

. . . an allegation of discrimination pursuant to the Human Rights Code or the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Now, Madam Minister, are you suggesting that the education system in this province with respect to students with disabilities need not be inconvenienced by the Human Rights Code or, heavens, the Charter of Rights and Freedoms?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Mr. Speaker, as I understand it, the review process is set out in the Act. It's intended to be a review by one or more individuals with experience and expertise in matters relating to educational or related services for special needs students. These individuals aren't equipped to deal with formal allegations of discrimination under the law, and the appropriate avenue or venue for those kinds of allegations needs to be the Human Rights Commission or the judicial system.

Parents will still have access to mechanisms in the normal way. The regulation in question does not in any way limit existing parent rights. It just says that if you believe that you're being discriminated against what you need to do is go to the Human Rights Commission.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Establishment of Serious Crime Task Force

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, this morning I was pleased to join the police chiefs of the cities of Regina and Saskatoon and the chief superintendent of the RCMP (Royal Canadian Mounted Police) to announce the establishment of a serious crime task force.

Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to tell this House that the Government of Saskatchewan will invest \$1 million over two years to establish police-based, serious crime units which will operate out of Regina and Saskatoon and will focus on organized criminal activity. We will work together to put gangs out of business in this province.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, organized crime takes many forms. It may involve two or more individuals conspiring to commit robberies or break-ins; it may also involve large groups operating a network for the distribution and sale of illegal drugs, or including and moving prostitutes around the province and the country. It may also involve Internet crime, money laundering, and the distribution of child pornography.

Mr. Speaker, each serious crime unit will be staffed by senior, experienced city police working with a designated prosecutor and in cooperation with the RCMP. The establishment of the serious crime unit means that police officers will be dedicated to investigating specific crimes, developing specialized skills and contacts.

Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan's police services have tremendous capacity to gather information within the communities they police. And as well, the RCMP have the ability to gather information at the national and international level. They also have a broad range of specialized and technical resources.

By using the latest methods and technology to gather criminal intelligence and by working together in cohesive units, much more will be accomplished than would be by each agency working on its own.

Designated prosecutors will assist law enforcement personnel within each unit to assess the kind and amount of evidence necessary to successfully prosecute complex cases involving criminal conspiracies. The task force units will also be working with the new, RCMP integrated proceeds of crime units. Property or cash acquired through criminal activity will be seized and becomes the property of the government.

Mr. Speaker, organized criminal activities cross municipal, provincial, and national borders. Investigations require dedicated, specialized police officers, coordination between police forces, and sustained efforts often over long periods of time.

Mr. Speaker, the people of Saskatchewan are fair-minded and responsible. They believe people should be held accountable for their actions and they want us to deal swiftly and effectively with those who do not respect the law.

Safe communities are one of this government's top priorities. Working with police and prosecutors to make this province inhospitable to criminal gangs is a key piece of this strategy. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think the listing of directions that were just indicated are laudable. I don't think there's anyone in Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, that would have any opposition to that. I think those are some of the areas that have been of key concern to people throughout Saskatchewan.

And the first one that's listed is dealing with drug and sex trade, and I think that's been a concern that's been ongoing for a long time. The criminal gang one has been one that's been in the media more recently, and moving into the central part of Canada and Saskatchewan. I think that's a definite concern that's here as well, as well as some newer types of crime dealing with the Internet.

So I think to the extent that those are listed and there's effort, money, put into that, I think that's very laudable and deserves the support of everyone in Saskatchewan.

However we've seen other efforts and directions in the past that have become very misguided and gone off the tracks very seriously. And I would hope that as these efforts are made, that will be more successful than in some other things. And I recall very recently, if you look at the newspaper where you had a series of cars burned, tires slashed, that's a gang activity. Those people end up in some of these other gangs.

If we can't control the beginnings of that, how are we going to control the end of it. And so I have some concerns there.

We recall not that long ago when we had the Oldsmobile gang situation and the government side just said, park your cars in some other city where it isn't quite as serious. I hope the answers to this are a little bit more successful and we don't just tell a biker gang, well go from one city to another one. That's not good enough.

But as far as the direction and the concern, I think everyone in Saskatchewan shares that concern and supports your direction.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hillson: — Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would also like to briefly congratulate the Minister of Justice. I have said on many occasions that maintenance of public confidence in our system of justice is one of the top priorities of our province and we know that that public confidence in our justice system has been shaken in this province over the last few years for a number of reasons.

I think that the feeling of security and safety by law-abiding citizens is paramount to restoring that sense of confidence.

We also know, Mr. Speaker, that modern technology can be both a blessing and a threat to our society. We know that modern technology unfortunately opens up new avenues for criminal activity, and I'm glad to see that that's being

addressed.

We know that the resources and expertise for dealing with some of these new forms of criminal activity will not necessarily be available to the average police detachment in our province, so the establishment of two specialized units within Regina and Saskatoon is the obvious way to try and handle that problem, to make sure that the expertise and resources are available on a centralized basis.

We have been concerned of late with the repeated stories about the intention of criminal gangs from outside our province to establish branches in Saskatchewan. And I think that the public of Saskatchewan will be pleased that the government takes this threat seriously and is determined to address it. Thank you.

MOTIONS

Distinguished Volunteer Medal Recipients

Mr. Kowalsky: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In order that we may proceed to the presentation of the Saskatchewan Volunteer Medals at this time and by leave of the Assembly, I would move, seconded by the member from Moosomin:

That this Assembly do now recess to honour the distinguished Volunteer Medal recipients.

Leave granted.

Motion agreed to.

The Speaker: — Before recessing the House, if I can just give some very, very, very brief direction. As soon as the House recesses, I'll ask all those who are participants in the ceremony themselves, the recipients and the leaders of the caucuses, to assemble outside the main door to the Assembly, and the ceremony will begin as soon as we can do that.

Therefore I would encourage all hon. members as well as guests to just remain seated and we'll begin the Volunteer Medal ceremonies as soon as we can. This House will stand recessed until 4 and I'll ask that the bell be rung at 5 minutes to 4 to summons the members to return to the House to begin proceedings with introduction of Bills at that time.

The Assembly recessed until 4 p.m.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

WRITTEN QUESTIONS

Mr. Kowalsky: — Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the government I'm pleased to present the House with a written answer to question no. 11, and by leave of the House, also the answers to written questions no. 12, 13, 14, and 15.

The Speaker: — The answers are tabled, and does the House grant leave to simultaneously provide the answers to questions 12 through 15? Is leave granted? Leave is granted and questions are provided for questions no. 12 through 15.

SPECIAL ORDER

ADJOURNED DEBATES

MOTION FOR COMMITTEE OF FINANCE (BUDGET DEBATE)

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Cline that the Assembly resolve itself into the Committee of Finance, and the proposed amendment thereto moved by Mr. Gantefoer.

Hon. Mr. Scott: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to resume my comments which I started last Friday, and I won't certainly repeat everything here.

I would like to though again mention the many people behind the scenes who make this government operate and bring in the budget together, certainly the people in Finance and the people in all the other departments that make this institution operate. The people in *Hansard* who work into the wee hours of the morning sometimes. Their efforts and work are certainly greatly appreciated.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Scott: — On Friday, Mr. Speaker, I commented about the good news in Highways. Some of the other highlights — like fifth balanced budget in a row; debt reduction continues on; our spending in Health is up again from last year, \$1.7 billion.

So today I'd like to start out about jobs. And jobs are very important to our people, both rural and urban, and young and old people alike as well. And, Mr. Speaker, last year we can very proudly say that we had 13,000 new jobs in Saskatchewan, a very important achievement; more people working in the province than at any other time in history.

Our economy is healthy. Our retail sales and manufacturing shipments are up. Oil drilling is at record levels and wholesale trade is up 26 per cent — the highest increase in all of Canada.

This budget does focus on building our local economies. We can still do more, doubling investment in regional economic development to \$6 million, increased support for locally based cooperatives, supporting neighbourhood development organizations to help revitalize our inner cities. The commitment to innovation and research is being continued, a 15 per cent income tax credit is being provided for research and development to help all Saskatchewan industries invest in their own future as well as ours. This tax credit is intended to help create the climate for investment in innovation. So certainly jobs, and particularly for our young people, remain a top priority and we will look for another record number of people working in Saskatchewan in 1998.

Mr. Speaker, agriculture remains the backbone of the Saskatchewan economy and we are very pleased to say that we have ... an additional \$14 million will be invested in agriculture research, and to keep us competitive with the world. And certainly our industry here is a leader in the world. Whether it's developing new varieties of seeds, new equipment

for farming, Saskatchewan is the home for that.

And for an example, my neighbour, Jim Halford, and Conserva Pac, a zero-till seeder at Indian Head, this past few months he has been shipping these air seeders . . . zero-till seeders to places like Germany and Australia, not to mention all throughout western Canada. And this again is an example of a farmer with an idea, and ability to put this, his ideas, to work, and exporting it to other countries around the world.

We will also be introducing changes to the deductible for horticultural and livestock facilities from 500 to \$100, to further help Saskatchewan farmers. Other activities such as more options for our crop insurance program to provide more options and flexibility to farmers are in the works.

And of course we, like everyone else, are very concerned about rail-line abandonment, and I can assure you that our Minister of Highways is dealing very aptly with this, I guess this challenge. Challenge and change are always with us and may not always be for the best, but we will be working with landowners, farm organizations, and certainly the federal government and the rail lines themselves to maintain a network of rail systems to deliver our grain.

Probably the best thing we could have for agriculture right now is about a 2-inch rain around the third week of April and there'd be a lot more optimism out there. But spring is here. Farmers are already cleaning seeds, getting equipment ready, and making decisions for their upcoming weeks when — if this weather continues — there will be lots of activity out on the land. And of course for the cattle producers, it's calving time and this is great weather for that as well.

Mining is another important sector in our economy and mining remains very important, from potash to uranium, here in Saskatchewan. And this budget builds on that strength by exempting exploration equipment for use in the mining sector from PST (provincial sales tax), and instead offer more exploration here in Saskatchewan.

New petroleum research tax incentive will encourage oil and gas producers to continue to create new methods of exploration and production. And certainly there's always concern from people in rural areas when there is oil and gas activity on their land. And I certainly want to compliment the oil and gas industry by their cooperation and their ingenuity. For an example, directional drilling has greatly reduced the impact on land.

And I do know that the petroleum industry is as concerned about the land and the environment as we are and we look forward to working cooperatively. There's new research going on to show how we can re-establish vegetation, natural vegetation, in areas which have been disturbed. And I'm sure we'll see continued progress in this area.

But, Mr. Speaker, one of our most valuable assets is our children and families. And we have \$20 million of new money for our families, and in particular, our children. The Saskatchewan Child Benefit will help 80,000 children and that's a large percentage of the children here in Saskatchewan.

The Saskatchewan employment supplement will top up the wages of low income parents to give them a little hand when they need it and discourage people from falling off onto the welfare system. We wish to keep people working. And again the Minister of Social Services and the Premier announced this package last week and this is certainly good news for a lot of people in Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Order, order. Why is the hon. member on her feet?

Ms. Stanger: — With leave, to introduce guests.

Leave granted.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Ms. Stanger: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to introduce to you and through you to the House, a constituent and a friend of mine, Mrs. Fern Nielsen, from Turtleford. Fern is involved in the Wheat Pool and is here on business meetings, but she's also a great promoter of the community of Turtleford and she tells me the bantam kids won the hockey against Redvers. So we're really happy to hear that.

And also the Turtleford fair has been declared — if you can imagine — the best country fair in all of Canada.

So she gave me all this good news today, and we welcome her here to the legislature.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

SPECIAL ORDER

ADJOURNED DEBATES

MOTION FOR COMMITTEE OF FINANCE (BUDGET DEBATE)

Hon. Mr. Scott: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A final comment on the investments in families package is family health benefits will be extended to children in low income working families. Again, this is an incentive to help keep people working and giving them a helping hand. And we're very pleased to be able to offer this. Certainly everybody wants to have a job and be contributing to the economy and this whole package will go a long way in doing that. And certainly like to congratulate the Social Services minister on this fine job.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Scott: — For rural Saskatchewan we have some good news too, Mr. Speaker. By the end of the year or so, we will have 911 emergency phone service in every home, business, and farm in Saskatchewan, including Fort Qu'Appelle.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Scott: — We are improving the cost-sharing

formulas for RCMP policing.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Scott: — We will be reducing costs for RCMP services in 100 communities. And in looking after my two favourite constituents, the MLA for Weyburn and the MLA for Melville, at Fort Qu'Appelle for an example, Mr. Speaker, they will pay \$69,800 less for RCMP services, and in Milestone, \$9,200 less for RCMP services. And not to forget my home town, Indian Head, it'll be \$15,000 less for RCMP services, and at Qu'Appelle, \$28,000.

So this is also good news for rural Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Scott: — We're also removing the sales tax from the purchase of fire trucks and attached equipment for municipal governments. This was a little slow in coming, Mr. Speaker, as my home town of Indian Head purchased their truck a couple of months ago, so I suspect I'll probably be hearing from them.

But we think of the volunteer fire departments, Mr. Speaker. This day is very appropriate to comment on volunteers, whether it be in our fire departments, our local service clubs, what have you. And of course we recognized six very distinguished individuals here earlier today with the Saskatchewan Volunteer Medal. And we will look forward to next year's selection for this very important exercise as well.

Well education is very important, Mr. Speaker, and good news in this area as well. We have increased funding for K to 12 schools operating grants by over \$20 million; increased funding for K to 12 school capital grants, \$7.3 million; and increased funding for post-secondary education by another \$18 million. So we are helping to expand and improve our education here in Saskatchewan, as our children are our future.

Our children and the environment. We have a very good news story here as well, Mr. Speaker. Effective April 1, 1998, SARCAN will provide a 5 cent deposit refund for juice boxes and other cardboard beverage containers that are returned to the nearest SARCAN depot.

This is great news. Many schools use the recycling program to raise funds for sporting equipment and such like. And when you think that over 24 million juice boxes are used in Saskatchewan each year, there is certainly a potential to raise considerable money through this.

And it's good for the children; it's good for the environment; and it's good for jobs because SARCAN will, at a minimum, be hiring 10 more people to expand this program, and depending upon the success — and we think it will be successful — there will be up to 35 new people working in our SARCAN system, which is recognized throughout North America as one of the best recycling opportunities for the public and which benefits the environment and also people with special needs.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Scott: — For the people that hunt in our province, we

have good news as well, Mr. Speaker. We have removed the \$11 big game damage compensation licence fee.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Scott: — This will be replaced by a new program that will compensate landowners that incur crop damage by big game.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to use this opportunity to thank the hunters for their support for the last two years. Thanks to their initiative, we got a program started — albeit it wasn't comprehensive enough; it did not raise enough money — but it got the program going. And now it will be replaced by a good program, a well-funded program jointly funded by the federal government, which we very much appreciate. The federal government will contribute \$12 million to waterfowl damage, \$5.8 million to big game damage, and the province will contribute \$5 million to each, waterfowl damage as well as big game damage.

We are also raising the coverage to 85 per cent from 70 per cent, and a \$200 deductible . . . it's been lowered to 200 from \$500, and this too is good news. And the fact that the landowners do not have to pay any premiums, I think this will be a very popular and successful program because landowners preserve the habitat. They provide homes for wildlife and we really appreciate that. And I'll comment a bit more on that a little later on.

So again this is good news for everybody concerned.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Scott: — We have good news in forestry too, Mr. Speaker. We will be increasing our spruce budworm spraying program by \$1.2 million.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Scott: — This spraying program is a biological control. It is viewed as a safe exercise in controlling spruce budworm which has made major inroads in our forests, especially along the east side of the province. And so we will continue to do this to enhance and help the forest industry.

Two point five million dollars will be spent on reforestation. And as you know, forest harvesting practices in years gone by were not very sustainable. We have a large area of the province which never was reforested. Last year we planted over 1 million seedlings in this backlogged area and we will continue to do that again this year.

A current forestry practice require the industry, the companies, to reforest on their own. Basically if a tree is cut down, another tree is planted.

(1615)

We will continue to fund forest fire-fighting. We budgeted twenty-seven and a half million dollars to control forest fires in our commercial forest.

And \$300,000 will also be spent towards the dreaded Dutch elm

disease. And this disease is moving into Saskatchewan, it is here. It has made its way across North America from the eastern seaboard. And we will be working with communities and with the Dutch elm disease committee, Save our Elms committee, in trying to control this disease.

We need to only look at our trees in our towns and our cities and see how many are elms and to see what the . . . and try to visualize what our communities would look like with no elm trees left. So we are certainly prepared to do this, and we look forward to additional funding as the problem becomes more severe. In fact, last year we did top off the spending for Dutch elm disease control.

Another area which I'd like to comment on, Mr. Speaker, is our representative areas network. Saskatchewan, along with most other jurisdictions in the world, is committed to preserving biological diversity and representation. And we are certainly doing that.

In the last few months we have been able to register over 3 million acres in our representative areas network. This includes a variety of programs. We have our provincial parks, we have ecological reserves, and more recently, we are very pleased to sign a memorandum of agreement with the PFRA (Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Administration) and they have enrolled 1.8 million acres of their provincial pastures.

These are native grasslands where cattle are grazed, and certainly the management will not change. Obviously with cattle grazing on these areas for a hundred years has not impacted the vegetation. We just want them to continue on doing what they are. And they too realize our native grasses are much more hardy in the long term than introduced species. So we're very pleased to be working with Agriculture in that area.

We have a partnership with Ducks Unlimited Canada. They have enrolled over 900,000 acres in our representative areas network. The Redberry Lake pelican project, 14,800 acres. This is our first aquatic representative area.

In the east side of the province, in the forest regions, we have identified 27 new parkland reserves consisting of 189,000 acres. So we . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. Order. Order, order. I am finding it a little difficult to be able to hear the hon. minister put his remarks in the budget debate. And I know that all hon. members are finding important things to exchange ideas about, and I encourage them to do it in a quieter fashion so that the hon. member, the Minister of Environment and Resource Management can continue in an unimpeded way.

Hon. Mr. Scott: — Thank you very much. I'm very pleased that the member from Cannington is listening so closely here.

Well, Mr. Speaker, we will continue to work in our representative areas. The vast majority of people appreciate our natural heritage and our wildlife, and I might add that historic sites, archaeological sites, will also be incorporated in our representative areas network.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Scott: — A program which we launched a couple of months ago, Mr. Speaker, is conservation easements. And this has the potential to be very, very successful and popular. Conservation easements is a process whereby landowners can register some native habitat and agree to have it preserved in perpetuity. And in return the individual will get an income tax credit. And for those of you who have filled out your federal income tax, you'll note there is a column, ecological sensitive area, or something along that line.

For an example, if a landowner signed up a 10-acre wetland and it was valued at \$100 an acre, but if the wetland was cultivated . . . drained and cultivated, it would be valued at \$300 an acre, the landowner would get the difference which would be \$200 an acre times 10 — \$2,000 credit for maintaining that wetland on his property.

So we have a potential to work very closely with landowners, and because it's a federally driven program, people in downtown Vancouver and Toronto will be helping rural people protect habitat and we look forward to great successes here. We've already got several landowners that have signed up some property.

These easements will transfer with the title. Again this is very important to people. Many landowners are getting old, like myself, and sometimes our children will not take over the farm, and when you sell to a stranger, perhaps the first thing that happens is the bulldozer moves in and the habitat is destroyed.

Because the easements will go with the property, Mr. Speaker, the new landowner will not be allowed to destroy this habitat so that our children can come home from the cities on weekends and go walking in the prairie at this time of the year looking for crocuses. And we want them to be able to do that, and certainly our grandchildren as well.

So this is a very good news program again for rural Saskatchewan and really all the people of Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Scott: — Although not directly related to our budget, Mr. Speaker, I would like to just comment on the controversial gun control legislation. The federal government has spent hundreds of millions of dollars on this program so far and virtually has not registered a single long arm.

And as you probably know, the side-arms and handguns have had to be registered since 1940. But gun control, it's not a very good term because we here in Saskatchewan, we're well aware of gun control and the responsible use of firearms for many years. We began our hunter safety program in 1960. At that time, we experienced over 100 firearm accidents each year. Now, Mr. Speaker, 37 or so years later, we experienced less than five accidents and no fatalities in recent years.

We believe in firearm safety, responsible use of firearms and also responsible storage of firearms. Our volunteers, again, volunteers with the emphasis on volunteers in Saskatchewan, have trained well over 160,000 people in the safe use of handling and storage of firearms, and we will continue to do that despite the off-track basis which Ottawa seems to be set on

going here.

We went to court along with Ontario, Manitoba, Alberta, and the two Territories, so it's not just Saskatchewan that views this piece of legislation as unworthy and useless, but it's many other jurisdictions.

The court ruling has not come down but we will continue to try to bring some sense to and have responsible gun control, a responsible use of firearms continued here in Saskatchewan and the rest of Canada.

Mr. Speaker, in my closing comments, Saskatchewan continues to be the best place in the world to live. We are in the best country and Saskatchewan is the best province to live in, and this is largely due to volunteers such as those that we recognized today. But it's also a sense of pride and commitment and enthusiasm, the ability to face challenges and take on new challenges, and I fully agree that Saskatchewan is the best place in the world to live.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Scott: — And, Mr. Speaker, part of our budget package clearly points out — again if the member from Cannington could especially note this — the Saskatchewan people pay the lowest overall taxes and household charges of anywhere in Canada. And we are very proud of that.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Scott: — So, Mr. Speaker, again I would thank you for the opportunity to comment on this very good news budget, and we look forward to continued debate. And I will certainly be supporting the budget at the time of the vote. And thank you very much.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Bradley: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It surely is of great pleasure to be able today to speak in response to our government's 1998-99 budget, our fifth consecutive balanced budget presented by our government.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Bradley: — Mr. Speaker, we are continuing . . . continuing our strategy of investing in people, creating more growth, more jobs; providing greater benefits to the people of Saskatchewan in recognition of the sacrifices that they have made to balance our budgets.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to take a moment also to talk to my constituents from Weyburn-Big Muddy. This is a constituency that I'm very, very proud to represent — a constituency consisting of the city of Weyburn; many, many towns and villages; many farms. It is a constituency in which of course farming is the backbone. And of course the city of Weyburn is the largest grain handling point in all of Canada.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Bradley: — It's a constituency that has oil and gas,

which is extremely, extremely important part to that constituency and to our whole province. As a matter of fact this June we had the largest economic development energy announcement, in the CO₂ project in the Weyburn-Estevan area, of anywhere in Saskatchewan — \$1.2 billion project announced for our area. Good news for Weyburn and Big Muddy, good news for the province of Saskatchewan.

But the other thing that's very rich, that our constituency is rich in, is in the people. The people there, we have farmers, we have small-business people, we have people that believe in the voluntarism that we also saw today in the Assembly. They believe in entrepreneurship, but they also believe in cooperatives. They believe in a balance of public and private enterprise.

I'm very proud to represent this constituency because the people there have met many, many challenges. And we've seen how they've met those challenges in the way of adding the Little Red Bus Line as a way to provide transportation to many of their communities. In order to change in some of the kinds of things that . . . (inaudible) . . . with some of the health centres, we're now seeing a health centre that is providing many, many services in Bengough, Radville, and Pangman, and still have physician services in each of those areas, which I know the opposition thought would not happen.

An Hon. Member: — And they make the best pies down there.

Hon. Ms. Bradley: — And they bake the best pies and jams also. We have very good, very good business there.

An Hon. Member: — Prize winning Kentucky Fried Chicken.

Hon. Ms. Bradley: — Yes, the prize winning Kentucky Fried Chicken, that's right, also in Weyburn-Big Muddy.

(1630)

An Hon. Member: — All in Canada.

Hon. Ms. Bradley: — That's right. That's right.

In volunteerism, we have wonderful efforts in sports, in culture, in dinner theatres, in figure-skating; for youth groups, for special needs people, for seniors. Everybody is part of the community. The churches are very, very active and involved in our constituency.

Today when we were valuing voluntarism, the idea of community and caring, it was very nice today to have two people here in the . . . witnessing that, from Weyburn. Judy Buzowetsky was one of the award recipients last year and she was here. And she exemplifies the type of people that come from my constituency and right across Saskatchewan.

One of the most important things in representing my constituency — that I believe — is accountability. And I've always believed that, and when I first decided to run, that it's very important for an elected person to be accountable and to believe in a two-way communication.

And it's one of the things I want to again congratulate my

constituents on, is that I've had a very good working relationship with the local governments, with health boards, with education boards, and with the constituents right across Weyburn-Big Muddy. And I've really valued their input and their direction and the concerns that they may raise to me.

I need to provide the information of what our government is doing to my constituency, and I need to listen to their concerns in order that our government can be directed in making the best policies and programs for our constituency, but also for our province.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Bradley: — This fall I did a number of accountability meetings, and in the winter, before leading up to our budget. We also did a householder in which we asked people to respond on what they thought our government's priorities should be and what we should be doing with any surplus funds.

The results of those meetings and the results of the coupons that I received back said that the people of Weyburn-Big Muddy wanted a balanced approach. They wanted to see some debt reduction. They wanted to see tax cuts. And they also wanted to see service enhancements.

And the percentages did almost work out to a third, a third, a third. They were very close. That's balance. And that's what our budget has delivered, is that balanced approach.

When we asked them about taxes, what did they ask for? They said, well if it's sustainable, we'd like to see reduction both in provincial sales tax or with income tax. And last year's budget we were able to deliver a 2 per cent reduction in the sales tax. This year in our budget we've been able to reduce income tax by 2 per cent.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Bradley: — The people of Weyburn-Big Muddy, when we ask what kind of services and what programs were important to them, health care certainly was a top priority, which has been a top priority of our budget and of our government.

An Hon. Member: — Most money ever.

Hon. Ms. Bradley: — That's right. The most money ever — \$1.7 billion in health care.

Education was another priority. Another, the second priority of our government, in which we again enhanced funding to both K to 12 and post-secondary.

They saw education tied in with job training, and we're very pleased to see that we got training strategies in order to meet the needs of the economic development and the growth that we're seeing right across this province.

Highways and roads, transportation issues, a top priority for our constituents. And then community safety, and other Social Services issues. And I was so pleased to see that the people of

Weyburn-Big Muddy were wanting the same kinds of things in which our budget has been able to deliver upon.

And so that's why I'm so pleased today to be able to rise and speak in support of our budget this year.

Now when we talk about the tax cuts, I'd already mentioned the two percentage on the provincial sales tax last year, the 2 per cent on personal income tax this year, but there were other tax incentives also, incentives to help with job growth, and those were important too. We saw incentives that will help in the mining industry, incentives to the gas and oil sector, incentives for the film and video industry — and that's important because jobs and economic growth is very, very important for us to continue.

We also saw grants in lieu being brought in which helped relieve some of the taxation levels for our urban governments across Saskatchewan.

Every tax cut that we do has to be sustainable. It's a dividend that's payable on the hard work and the sacrifice by the people of Saskatchewan, and our tax cuts are here to stay.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Bradley: — And as I was saying, investing in people, that means jobs and economic development. We've doubled our investment to our regional economic development authorities, and I certainly heard that was good news in Weyburn.

We've increased our support to locally based cooperatives, another good news story. We're supporting neighbourhood development organizations to help revitalize inner cities. And we're investing \$5 million to the northern development fund to help the ongoing diversification of the North.

As my colleague, the minister from Indian Head-Milestone has said, we're also doing good news things in this budget for the environment, and for our communities, in being able to expand the spruce budworm spraying an additional million dollars to safeguard our forests, which is certainly part of a job strategy.

Another good strategy that helps is recycling, which I know Weyburn is very, very proactive on, and the number of other communities in Weyburn-Big Muddy. I'm very, very pleased the students were to see that there was increased funding for SARCAN recycling and that we'd expanded our recycling program to include juice boxes and other cardboard containers — extremely positive move.

All of these things help to build jobs, economic growth, within Saskatchewan. There was \$14 million added to encourage agriculture research into a new animal vaccine, ag-biotech, modern dry-land farming methods — definitely initiatives that we need for growth of agriculture industry in this province.

An Hon. Member: — And more new jobs too.

Hon. Ms. Bradley: — More new jobs, exactly. And the other really big piece, I thought, that was very good news for the agriculture community, is that we lowered the annual deductible on building materials for horticultural and livestock facilities,

which we introduced last year, but we've now reduced it from \$500 to \$100. So this again will help Saskatchewan farmers grow and develop in those areas.

More jobs. We're doing very well on jobs. And as I said earlier, we provided tax incentives for the expansion of the mining industry, for the oil and gas industry, for the film industry. These are all good news for economic growth, for building jobs in Saskatchewan.

In order though to have good jobs we also have to make sure we invest very wisely in our education, and we've done that by this budget. We've increased spending to both the K to 12 budget and the post-secondary budget. In K to 12 we've increased foundation operating grants and we've also increased the capital fund so that buildings can be either renovated or new buildings are needed . . .

In post-secondary we added \$9 million to operating grants for universities and federated colleges for a total of \$181 million. And we will invest \$23 million — a 66 per cent increase — in capital funding for post-secondary institutions to begin the process of upgrading their buildings and their facilities.

But one of the most important initiatives that we introduced in our budget is that we will increase student aid by raising assistance limits to account for increased educational costs. But we will also join the federal government in providing tax relief on student loan interest, benefiting 29,000 students and supporting their investment in their own future. But in addition we will refocus the debt relief program to provide upfront bursaries for qualified students.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Bradley: — And let me tell you, Mr. Speaker, we will be doing this now, not in the new millennium. We are focused now for the future of our students in this province.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Bradley: — Mr. Speaker, this budget will invest \$136 million in job skills and training. That's supporting 7,100 people in adult basic education; training 2,800 apprenticeships; and bring 4,600 people into JobStart, Future Skills, quick skills, and other training programs.

We will continue to work with our partners in business, in labour, in education, to make sure that we have the skilled workers for the high-tech, the high-paying jobs in our growing global economy.

Quality public education is certainly something dear to my heart. As a teacher, as a parent, I know it's absolutely vital. And today, it was interesting, I had the opportunity to be in a school in Regina — Judge Bryant — today. My daughter is actually interning there and she was teaching the students on government. And it was so very interesting for the students to talk about what governments do.

And one of the things one student said was, we don't really like paying taxes; we hear our parents don't like paying taxes. And so we thought about that for awhile. We said, well if we didn't

pay taxes maybe you'd have to pay tuition to go to kindergarten. Seems like one province had that idea in our fine country. That was one of those . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Yes, I think it was our neighbour in Alberta.

And so the kids started discussing this and they said . . . I said, well maybe there'd be a tuition and you know maybe it'd be \$2,000, maybe it'd be \$5,000, to go to school. And they said no, no that's not what we want; that wouldn't be fair because those people that don't have enough money wouldn't be able to have education. And you know, they very quickly even said, you know that's why health care in this province is so good, because again, no matter if you're rich or poor, those services are available.

And so the grade 7 students in that school today understood what good government is about. About balance, that you need some taxation in order to provide good services. And you need to pay down the debt. We even talked about debt. They understood it very, very well, of what the important tool government is in providing a better life for their community and for the people in this province.

Now the thing that I'm getting to now is another key area for our budget, is investing in children, in families, in our communities. And, Mr. Speaker, one of the things that I am very most proud of with our budget is the series of announcements that we've been able to make on the initiative called "building independence: investing in our families." I was so proud of our Premier and our Minister of Social Services as they announced this program. As the Minister of Social Services has said, it's turning welfare on its head.

These measures represent a huge step towards ensuring that every Saskatchewan child can build a productive life on the solid foundations of a secure childhood. These measures represent a helping hand to Saskatchewan parents who are working to give their children the very best start in life that is possible for them to give. And these initiatives stem from our basic Saskatchewan values of caring, of community, and cooperation; and from a desire of Saskatchewan people to give the best possible choices to their children, for every child in this great province.

"Building independence: investing in families", it has six components all aimed at helping Saskatchewan children and families. The Saskatchewan employment supplement will be available to provide assistance to 19,000 families, to help low income working people stay in the workforce. This supplement will ensure that their children are better off when their parents are working rather than on welfare.

Second, the Saskatchewan Child Benefit is part of the first new national social program in 30 years — initiated from Saskatchewan. It will provide help to 80,000 children in 40,000 families. This child benefit will help parents provide their children with a decent shelter, good food, and a foundation for future success. For each of these 80,000 children, the child benefit will help fill their childhood with good memories; opportunities to grow to their potential.

Third part of this program — we're extending additional health benefits to another 23,000 families. So that's 46,000 children.

Right now the sad reality is that if parents leave welfare even to enter the workplace, their children lose health benefits, and that's no longer now in Saskatchewan. That's no more. Parents will not be forced to stay on welfare in order to ensure that their children can receive dental care or eye glasses.

An Hon. Member: — July.

Hon. Ms. Bradley: — Right, July of this year. Again we're not going to wait for the new millennium to put our programs into place.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Bradley: — These three new initiatives build on the good work already begun with three other initiatives — the provincial training allowance, the Youth Futures pilot project, and strengthened program accountability.

Mr. Speaker, I am so proud of our government introducing these changes because truly building independence is the Saskatchewan way. Investing in families is the Saskatchewan way, and it's about helping tens of thousands of children in our great province.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Bradley: — Mr. Speaker, I've touched on now, economic development, on training and education, on social programs, but another great part still of our budget is in health care. It's one of the issues again that comes up at many and many of my meetings and people do sometimes raise concerns. I work closely with the health district in my area and I know there's a lot of good programming going on. And they were so pleased that this budget stabilized funding, and that they can continue to develop strong home care services, strong community services, good long-term care facilities, and to work on acute care and emergency service in our area. It is the things that matter.

(1645)

One point seven billion dollars in health care, the biggest increase to our health care budget this . . . was in our budget was to health care, \$88 million. We did listen to people. And, Mr. Speaker, I believe what's going to happen in Regina with the new General Hospital and its expansion and the Pasqua Hospital, we will have the best acute care service that this province can offer to all of southern Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Bradley: — Mr. Speaker, there's other things in our budget that help keep our communities safe: the 911, an important announcement in our budget; added funding for police services to our local governments right across this province. That's right, we've got increased funding to my home town, but I know to Radville and other communities also that's been the case. And actually when I say Radville, I would like to actually just give a warm welcome to Radville because this is the first time . . .

The Speaker: — Order. Hon. members will be aware that

electronic devices are not permitted in the Assembly when the House is entertaining business, and I will ask the hon. member, whoever's cellular phone is ringing, to remove it from the House immediately. Thank you.

Hon. Ms. Bradley: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I was just saying, the town of Radville, I was . . .

An Hon. Member: — How about cellular phones as a topic?

Hon. Ms. Bradley: — Actually that's a good point too. A lot of things to talk about here today. But in the town of Radville I was very, very pleased that they have been also now connected to our Legislative Assembly. So I welcome the constituents that are able to watch the proceedings in Radville, Saskatchewan . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Actually when we hear this comment about cellular service, that's always an issue still in my riding. And we have got a lot of good cellular service across our constituency, and we're actually adding another cell tower at Pangman to expand the service in my constituency.

I know that's still a concern for some other communities, but as we can afford to do these things, we're able to expand cellular service right across this province.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Bradley: — Mr. Speaker, there's another major issue that people have had concerns about in our budget and that certainly is highways and transportation. As the minister responsible for that, I want to take some time to talk about those issues.

I believe what we have done with highways and transportation is address the issue by putting a long-term strategy in place. We have committed over 10 years, starting last year, with a transportation strategy paper. But we've also committed to \$2.5 billion in added funding to Highways and Transportation.

And we're dedicated to build roads and transportation infrastructure for today and for tomorrow. We know that farmers, manufacturers, processors, miners, loggers must rely on our transportation system to get our resources and their products to market.

We know that our roads and our highways are our lifeline between our communities, our farms, our schools, our health centres, and our businesses.

We know that our roads and our highways bring jobs and opportunities for our students, our youth, our business people through tourism and other economic activities.

Mr. Speaker, last spring we introduced a transportation strategy, *Investing in Transportation*, and we are well into implementing that strategy. One of the keys to our strategy is the commitment to shared decision making. We have implemented that commitment by fostering the development of a concept we call area transportation planning. We readily acknowledge that local people are more familiar with local needs and are therefore in a better position to determine priorities based on those needs.

Part of my challenge is to heighten that knowledge and

understanding at the local level, of the many changes that are taking place in transportation. That heightened awareness will enable everyone to better participate in informed decision making. Mr. Speaker, area transportation planning is proving to be a very effective mechanism to involve local people in the transportation system planning and the decision-making process.

We now have five area transportation planning committees up and running in virtually all areas of the province, and two more committees are in their formative stages. And I'm excited by the enthusiasm, the interest being shown by the people. There's volunteers from all walks of life working together to form and operate these committees. And as it turns out, area transportation committees are a catalyst for community action and for community change.

An example of this was the action taken recently by hundreds of grain producers in west-central Saskatchewan. CN's (Canadian National) desire to abandon two rail lines there, in the area known as block 19, motivated more than 500 producers to organize and load producer cars — more than 80 cars in one day early last December — to demonstrate their commitment to keeping grain on their local branch lines.

And, Mr. Speaker, I was there and I met with those producers, as was the minister from Intergovernmental Affairs, was also in that area that day.

An Hon. Member: — I bet Ken Krawetz was there.

Hon. Ms. Bradley: — No, I didn't see any other members of the opposition there. The action is a major statement of the concern that producers have to the federal government about changes that they made in the Canadian transportation Act in 1996. These changes are not producer friendly and do not ensure the best returns for the producers.

As a result of the action of those producers that day, I spoke directly with Mr. Paul Tellier, the CEO of the Canadian National Railways, to express our government's concern with their abandonment process. Abandoning track in the year of a major grain transportation review is shameless. It's not conscionable and should not be happening.

I met with CPR (Canadian Pacific Railway) officials. I've written to the federal Minister of Transport about these same concerns. I've discussed the issue with the grain companies. And, Mr. Speaker, I've raised it in a meeting with Mr. Justice Willard Estey as he began his work on the grain review.

The topic of immediate concern to grain producers is the future of our grain transportation and handling system. And as you know, the whole issue of grain transportation right now is in a turmoil primarily as a result of the actions by the federal government.

First, those federal Liberal government eliminated the Crow benefit costing Saskatchewan farmers annually in this province \$400 million — \$400 million in lost returns. This means the loss of the Crow benefit is costing each of our producers — if we average it out — about \$8,000 a year, \$8,000 in less money to every producer in this province.

But then on top of it all, they not only take the Crow benefit out, they did changes to the Canadian transportation Act. Changes to regulations governing railways have led directly to the acceleration of branch line abandonment and grain elevator consolidation. As a matter of fact, the 1996 changes to the Canadian transportation Act essentially gave the railways a blank cheque to do whatever they wanted.

Now I'm told that the federal government felt it was the railway's turn to get favourable treatment. And there's no doubt that's what's happened.

It's painfully obvious that Ottawa made these changes with little, if any, thought of the consequences to Saskatchewan, to western Canada, and they have shown even less political will to deal with them now that they've caused a crisis in rural Saskatchewan — a crisis of ever-increasing costs for our producers; a crisis of ever-increasing damage to our roads and our highway system as a result of increased traffic.

Mr. Speaker, it is unconscionable to pull out the Crow benefit, to deregulate, and not to know what the plan is in place.

So I commend them — they finally do a review. But while they're doing the review, the railways are going right ahead and abandoning track all across this province.

And I call on our opposition members to have some conscience, to have some caring about rural Saskatchewan and join us in our pleas to the federal government to slow down the abandonment in rural Saskatchewan because they are not only abandoning branch lines, they're abandoning communities and people in this province.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Bradley: — Mr. Speaker, I now move to adjourn debate.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Debate adjourned.

The Assembly adjourned at 4:57 p.m.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS	
PRESENTING PETITIONS	
Krawetz.....	327
D’Autremont.....	327
Toth.....	327
Bjornerud.....	327
Heppner.....	327
Gantefoer.....	327
Draude.....	327
Osika.....	327
Hillson.....	327
McPherson.....	327
McLane.....	328
Goohsen.....	328
READING AND RECEIVING PETITIONS	
Clerk.....	328
NOTICES OF MOTIONS AND QUESTIONS	
Julé.....	328
INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS	
Nilson.....	328
Kowalsky.....	328
Stanger.....	328, 337
Krawetz.....	328
Atkinson.....	328
STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS	
Recycling Program	
Trew.....	329
National Award to Member for Athabasca	
Hillson.....	329
Television Episode Filming in Lumsden	
Murray.....	329
Proposed Use of Plains Health Centre	
McLane.....	329
Gladmar Students Provincial Mixed Curling Champs	
Bradley.....	330
Evesham Farmer Donates Use of Land to Canadian Food Grains Bank	
Murrell.....	330
ORAL QUESTIONS	
Inquiry Into Channel Lake	
Krawetz.....	330
Lingenfelter.....	330
Heppner.....	331
Romanow.....	331
Funding for Prince Albert Women’s Shelter	
Draude.....	332
Calvert.....	332
Plains Health Centre Closure	
McPherson.....	332
Serby.....	332
Inquiry into Channel Lake	
Osika.....	333
Lingenfelter.....	333
Review Rights for Parents of Special Needs Children	
Haverstock.....	333
Atkinson.....	334
MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS	
Establishment of Serious Crime Task Force	
Nilson.....	335
Heppner.....	335
Hillson.....	335
MOTIONS	
Distinguished Volunteer Medal Recipients	
Kowalsky.....	336

ORDERS OF THE DAY

WRITTEN QUESTIONS

Kowalsky336

SPECIAL ORDER

ADJOURNED DEBATES

MOTION FOR COMMITTEE OF FINANCE

(BUDGET DEBATE)

Scott336

Bradley340

VOLUNTEER MEDAL PRESENTATION..... Back of Hansard