

The Assembly met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRESENTING PETITIONS

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

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

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

These petitions come from the town of Weldon, Mr. Speaker. I so present.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also have petitions to present to do with Jack Messer's severance. 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 around the Channel Lake fiasco.

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

The petition is signed, Mr. Speaker, from the people from Regina.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, as well to present a petition to this Assembly. And reading the prayer:

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

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

And this petition, Mr. Speaker, is signed by individuals from the Saskatoon, Melfort, Yellow Creek, and Nipawin areas of the province.

Mr. Heppner: — I too rise enthusiastically to read the prayer for the petition that I have here this morning.

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 of the facts surrounding the Channel Lake fiasco.

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

And these are signed by people from Tisdale, Melfort, Wadena, Gronlid. Thank you.

Mr. Gantefoer: — Mr. Speaker, I rise as well to present petitions from people in my home community of Melfort. The prayers 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.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

Ms. Draude: — 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.

And the people are from Tisdale and Melfort.

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I as well have a petition to present today. The petitioners are concerned about the issues surrounding Channel Lake and Jack Messer. The petitioners come from the Melfort area of Saskatchewan and I'm pleased to present on their behalf.

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to present a petition this morning as well.

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 is signed this morning by the good folks in Assiniboia.

Mr. Aldridge: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker, I too rise to present petitions on behalf of people concerned about the Plains Health Centre closure, many of whom I'm sure to expect to see out at our many public forums that we're going to hold on this very issue throughout the . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order, order. Now the hon. member will recognize of course that in presenting petitions to the House the hon. member is not to enter into debate, and I'll ask him to go directly to the prayer.

Mr. Aldridge: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and the 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.

Those who've signed the petition, Mr. Speaker, are from communities such as Shell Lake, Saskatoon, and the city of Regina. I so present.

Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also present a petition on behalf of people concerned about the closure of the Plains hospital.

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.

The signatures are all from Pilot Butte, and I so present.

Mr. McPherson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I join with my colleagues today to bring petitions forward in regards to the Plains hospital.

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 that have signed this petition are all from the Ponteix area and fully intend on being in Assiniboia on Tuesday night. I so present.

Mr. Goohsen: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy this morning, Mr. Speaker, to present petitions. I'll read the prayer:

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

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

Mr. Speaker, these today come from the communities of Robsart, Consul, and Regina, as well as Gull Lake, and I'm happy to present them on behalf of those people 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.

Of citizens of the province petitioning the Assembly respecting the twinning of the Trans-Canada Highway; saving the Plains Health Centre; ending the practice of night hunting; and cancelling severance payments to Jack Messer.

NOTICES OF MOTIONS AND QUESTIONS

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I give notice that I shall on day no. 24 ask the government the following question:

At a Saskatchewan Wheat Pool meeting in Cudworth last November, the past MLA for Humboldt, Mr. Armand Roy, stated that he and others have been appointed by your government to hold area meetings regarding the grain transportation and short-line railway issue: please list all those appointed for this purpose; what is their mandate; what is their remuneration or pay for providing this service; which department or agency is paying for the appointees' services; has the remuneration for these appointees been included in last year's budget or this year's budget; please indicate where such remuneration is documented in the 1997-98 or the 1998-99 Saskatchewan *Estimates*.

Mr. Goohsen: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I give notice that I shall on day no. — I think it's 25 maybe — ask the government the following question:

Minister of SERM (Saskatchewan Environment and Resource Management) and Minister of Saskatchewan Water Corporation: how many water wells are there in the province; how many of these water wells are now mildly contaminated; how many are classed as unfit for human but still fit for animal use; how many are not fit for use at all; how many require chlorine, fluorine or filtration treatments before use; and, how many water wells contain heavy metals associated with the development of Alzheimer's disease?

I so submit.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I would like to introduce to you and to my colleagues in the Assembly, some very special people that are sitting in your gallery, Mr. Speaker. My daughter Kim, my wife Barbara, and my wife's sister, Beverley Mahon, who travelled here from Thunder Bay to be with us today, and please welcome them here this morning.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Langford: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too have some special guests here this morning. There's 24 students from the William Mason High School — or School — in Chociceland. And you may recognize some of them, Mr. Speaker, we had the privilege together to visit them this winter.

With them is their teacher, Mrs. Betty Reiter, Mrs. Marilyn

Elchuk, Mrs. LeAnne Clarke, Mr. Jeff Smith, Mr. Glen Brazier, Mrs. Cindy Leyh, and Mrs. Shelley Korol. I will be meeting with them later on for photos and drinks and a few questions and answers. Would everyone please help introduce them.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Can-Oat Milling Opens in Martensville

Mr. Langford: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Not so long ago raw oats were shipped out of Saskatchewan for processing, usually to the U.S. (United States). That meant that we also shipped out of the province, jobs. I am happy to announce, Mr. Speaker, that this is no longer true.

Yesterday I attended an official opening of the new Can-Oat Milling facility in Martensville. This plant will double the output of Can-Oat Milling. It will process more than a million pounds of processed oat products each day. And, Mr. Speaker, the plant employs 33 people permanently. This is jobs that once were shipped out. This plant is now 100 per cent owned by the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool, which means that these jobs will stay in Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, this is a state-of-the-art facility and it is good news for the Saskatchewan farmers, the Saskatchewan workers, and to the Saskatchewan economy. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Kelvington Students Celebrate Canadian Citizenship

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, recently the Robert Melrose Elementary School in Kelvington held a very unique and special celebration. Sara Piot, a 17-month-old girl from China, was adopted by her parents, Laurel Irving-Piot and David Piot, and she received her citizenship papers.

As part of the educational experience, the students watched a video on Canadian heritage. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights and freedoms was read, reminding the students of how hard Canada fought for, and has enjoyed, these rights and freedoms.

The students then took an oath of reaffirmation of Canadian citizenship and were presented with a celebratory certificate issued by the Hon. Lucienne Robillard, Minister of Citizenship.

At a time when Canadian unity is an issue and Canadians are considering what the country means to them, these students have been given a very valuable lesson on citizenship and shared in a unique experience.

In closing, I would ask the members of this House to join with me in welcoming Sara as a Canadian citizen.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Swift Current Pioneer Co-operative Has Record Year

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Pioneer

Co-operative of Swift Current and area had a banner year in 1997. Sales were 79.2 million while net savings were 4.8 million — profits that stayed in Saskatchewan and did not flow out to New York, London, or Zürich. Ninety members turned out for the annual meeting where general manager Stuart Dryland gave the good news.

Numerous improvements to rural co-ops, which were partly responsible for the record year, were highlighted at the meeting. Some of the new improvements were as follows: a new service station at Tompkins; a new store in Stewart Valley; a new office warehouse addition at the Kyle farm centre; a chemical warehouse in Morse, complete with a key lock upgrade; and scanners installed at Cabri, Gull Lake, Hodgeville, Kyle, and Tompkins — investing in rural Saskatchewan, the Saskatchewan way.

With record profits come record patronage allocations for cooperative members. This year members received well over \$2 million in cash refunds. Dryland adds that providing the best service possible remains the cooperative's primary objective.

Mr. Speaker, I congratulate the Pioneer Co-operative of Swift Current and area for continuing to add to the strength of an already strong Saskatchewan economy. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Educated Corpse

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My members' statement this morning is entitled "The Educated Corpse."

We'll be the very smartest dead people
Saskatchewan has ever seen!
If you've been watching the news lately
You'll know exactly what I mean

\$ Just how many million
By the time they're done adding on
The Plains is getting a facelift
And they don't see anything wrong!

Waiting lists are lengthy
Some are backed up for a year
Turning a hospital into a school
Is supposed to make us cheer?!

Priorities have fallen by the wayside
The health care system's come undone
We may be dead - but educated
The smartest corpses under the sun

If the Government can't accommodate
Sick people with hospital beds
What makes them think we'll be well enough
To go to school and use our heads

Without a healthy body
The mind won't learn or grow
Change a hospital into a school
Smart move - I don't think so!

Mr. Speaker, this thought was sent to me by Peggy Millman from Imperial, who is one of the 6,600 people on our

waiting-list today in Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Weekly Newspaper Headlines

Mr. Ward: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Here are five headlines from Saskatchewan weekly newspapers:

(1) "Jo-Lin Plumbing and Heating opens outlet in Preeceville." The *Preeceville Progress*, March 12.

(2) "North East Terminal Ltd. embarking on \$1.5 million expansion." *The Wadena News*, March 11.

(3) "Manufacturing new opportunities for Saskatchewan prairie farmers." The *Kinistino-Birch Hill Post-Gazette*, March 17.

(4) "McLean's agra centre completes expansion." The *Melville Advance*, March 18.

(5) "Ochapowace establishes financial services partnership." The *Broadview Express*, January 27.

These five stories have two things in common, Mr. Speaker. They each give evidence that the Saskatchewan economy is alive and thriving throughout the province, in our small towns as well as our cities. And each comes from the constituency of an opposition member.

I'm happy to share this good news with their constituents, with all the members of this Assembly. And like the members before me, I wonder why they are not interested in promoting the hard work and initiative of their own constituents. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Peewee C Champions

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise today to talk about the provincial peewee, or 13 and under, C champions. The Lampman-Alameda Imperials won the C championship last Saturday, March 28.

They played a tough series against Redvers, Midale, Pense, Richmond, and finally the northern champions, Watson. The Imperials received a real scare in the Richmond series when they fell behind 7-1 after the first period in Richmond. The game ended with an 11-all tie. The return game in the Imperial's home rink ended with them winning the series with an overall score of 22-21. Great for the shooters but not so good for the goalies.

The team was made up of 15 boys and one girl, Jenna Waugh, of Lampman. The coaches are Murray Wheeler and Darrell Fornwald. Congratulations to the team and coaches for a fine end of a good season, the peewee C champions, Lampman-Alameda Imperials.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Prince Albert Bottling Plant

Mr. Kowalsky: — Mr. Speaker, if you wanted the best bottle of Coke in the world where would you go? — Right in my hometown, Mr. Speaker, in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan.

For the second month in a row, the Prince Albert bottling plant, which is owned by the Hauser family, has been awarded the overall Coke quality award for Canada. And when you consider that Canada is recognized as the country with the highest overall quality, it could be argued that the Prince Albert bottlers makes the best Coca-Cola anywhere.

Management and staff are quick to point out that the quality awards are the result of total team effort, from the syrup maker, to the label operator, to the truck drivers.

The production and quality tests are based on pre-set production and packaging specifications by Coca-Cola. The company tests for accuracy in several areas, including carbonation, sugar content, taste, and appearance. The testing process is completely random, and no bottling plant knows when an inspection will take place. Therefore the consecutive back-to-back awards indicate that the Prince Albert plant has a consistently high-level product.

The Hauser family's bottling plant is the only privately owned bottler in the province, and they have shown that they can compete with anybody by beating out large corporations in Winnipeg and Toronto.

Mr. Speaker, we now have evidence when it comes to Coke from Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, it's the real thing.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Save the Plains Public Forums

Mr. Aldridge: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the Liberal opposition and the Save the Plains Committee are going to give the people of Regina and southern Saskatchewan a voice. The NDP (New Democratic Party) may not care; the Tories may have thrown in the towel. But the people deserve a say in the future of the Plains hospital and the dangerous road that this government is taking at the expense of our health care system.

We announced yesterday that a number of public forums will be held, including one in Regina on April 29, and invited the Minister of Health to attend. The minister says he doesn't know how appropriate that would be. He doesn't know what he could possibly add.

Well he might start by explaining to people why the NDP government is taking a path that makes no sense in health care or financial terms. He might end by explaining why this government has ignored the wishes of a hundred thousand people who have signed petitions opposing the closure.

Mr. Speaker, the first rural meeting has been scheduled for next Tuesday in Assiniboia. And if this government truly cares about what people have to say, at least one member of this government will attend to explain. Because this issue is now more than just about saving the Plains, it's about saving our health care system and saving lives.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ORAL QUESTIONS

Regina Hospital Emergency Services

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Health. Mr. Minister, yesterday afternoon we got a call from a nurse at the Plains Health Centre. She informed us last night the Plains was going to be the only hospital in Regina with an emergency room open. Staff at the Plains were told that the Pasqua and General were shutting down their emergency rooms because they were full and they had nowhere to put patients after they got out of emergency.

Mr. Minister, this is a crisis situation — a city the size of Regina with only one emergency room open in a hospital that's going to be closed in a few months. Mr. Speaker, how can this happen? Were you even aware of this crisis and what are you doing about it?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Speaker, to the member from Moosomin. I have here a front page story yesterday from the *Leader-Post* . . . or the third page story, and the third page story reads, and it's a quote from the chairman of the district health board, and what the chairman of the district health board says is that they've been conducting an audit and they've been conducting this audit of health services now in the Regina area for some months.

But he says in the first two weeks of March they revealed that the health district was running a 5 to a 10 per cent vacancy rate, the equivalent of 20 to 70 hospital beds. The health district has 675 beds currently, and today the district health board continues to tell us on a regular basis that there are vacancies.

Now I've said from time to time that there are peaks. But the audit that the district health board is doing on an ongoing basis says that they have 10 to 15 per cent vacancy rate on a regular basis.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the minister didn't answer the question. His audio obviously isn't working. Mr. Speaker, not only did the Pasqua and General close their emergency rooms, but the emergency room at the Plains was so swamped they had to keep extra staff on for the night. And this, Mr. Minister, is the hospital you're closing. This isn't planning, it's crisis management.

Mr. Minister, this is a disaster waiting to happen.

What if a disaster did happen? What if there was a major medical emergency such as a plane crash or a bus crash or a poison gas leak? What would happen then? Two full hospitals, inadequate emergency services, and that's before the Plains closes. How bad is it going to be after it closes?

Mr. Minister, are you prepared to take responsibility for the lives that will be lost if there ever is a major medical emergency and we can't handle it because the emergency rooms are closed?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Well, Mr. Speaker, I think it's important for us to realize that in this province we have established services in such a fashion that you can deal with emergency crises. And I think if the member would just pay some attention to what's happened in this province.

And let's just take the example, take the example of the plane crash at . . . or the train crash at Biggar where, at Biggar, we had a major catastrophe; where we had a huge issue; where a number of individuals, of people, required emergency services.

And did the province's health care system respond quickly and adequately? The answer, Mr. Speaker, is that it did. Not only did it respond adequately and quickly, today we're receiving letters from people across Canada who were on that train, who say to us that they have a tremendous appreciation for the emergency services that were provided out of the Biggar hospital, out of the Saskatoon hospital.

And I say, Mr. Speaker, that when the members opposite, whether they're Tories or whether they're Liberals, they stand up in the House and abuse the health care system in Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, they fearmonger and they need to get in touch to what's happening with health services across the province.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, when the minister talks about meeting the needs of people, the minister forgets that he's closed even more hospital beds since the last tragedy took place in this province.

Mr. Minister, a second nurse who spoke at the General says this is not an isolated incident. It's a regular occurrence. They close down the emergency room at least once a month because the hospital is full. And I've talked to ambulance drivers who have indicated that's a problem they face on an ongoing basis — because the hospital is full.

You keep telling us everything is fine. Mr. Speaker, the minister says we have plenty of beds. He's saying, don't worry; be happy. Mr. Minister, people in Regina and southern Saskatchewan are worried. It's time for you to pull your head out of the sand and start addressing that concern.

What are you doing to address emergency room shut-downs and what are you going to do to ensure that we have enough beds available in Regina to address emergency situations?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Speaker, I want to reiterate one more time to the member opposite, that in this province we just completed a review of some of the acute care beds in the province, and it was done by Health SURC (Health Services Utilization and Research Commission).

And what Health SURC did in the review of 780 patients across the province is they said this on the final outcome of their review. They said today, Mr. Speaker, that of the 780 people

who were occupying acute care beds, they are non-acute care patients. They're non-acute care patients. Which says, Mr. Speaker, that we have some way to go yet. We have some way to go yet in terms of establishing our efficiencies in the utilization of some of our acute care beds.

Now they didn't say that we didn't have enough beds in the province. They said we have enough hospital beds in the province. It's how we use the hospital beds in the province into the future, Mr. Speaker. And we'll continue to work with the district health boards; we'll continue to ensure that we have quality health care services that are provided out of our emergency services.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Inquiry into Channel Lake

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my questions this morning are for the Premier. Welcome home, sir. It's good to see you again.

Everyone's been kind of wondering lately if you're going to show up at the Crown Corporations Committee and take the witness stand, or are you going to order your hand-picked NDP committee to vote us down again.

In one hour of sworn testimony, Jack Messer has already revealed that cabinet knew what was going on in Channel Lake every step of the way, including yourself. I expect Mr. Messer is going to tell us a whole lot more about what he knows before this is over — \$300,000 and a free lawyer, I don't think is going to be enough to keep him quiet.

Mr. Premier, are you going to come to the Crown Corporations Committee and take the witness stand or are you going to hide behind the NDP committee?

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, I want to remind the House and you, Mr. Speaker, that it was the government under the leadership of the Crown Investments Corporation minister, who tabled 100-150 pages of independent reports by Deloitte Touche and by the CIC (Crown Investments Corporation of Saskatchewan) — documentation. So we're on a path of making sure that all of the facts are out; all of the facts are basically out now.

Mr. Speaker, I understand that a good work schedule and a fair one has been established by the Crown Corporations Committee. Let it do its job. If at some appropriate time more information is required that has not already been required and the committee feels they can add . . . that I can add some pertinent information, I'd be pleased to be helpful.

After all, as I say, we tabled the reports and we want this to end on a very positive experience for the Crown corporations of Saskatchewan which the people of the province support very strongly.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Premier, we have a whole lot of questions for you about the whole Channel Lake

situation. We think that the witness list should be extended to include yourself and the Deputy Premier and a number of other cabinet ministers. Jack Messer has already given sworn testimony before that committee.

Will you confirm, sir, that if you are asked by the committee to attend Crown Corporations and give sworn testimony before that committee that you will indeed attend that committee?

I think everyone in the province is asking that question. Everyone wants to know the answer to that question. Will you confirm, sir?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Well, Mr. Speaker, what everyone in the province of Saskatchewan is asking is whether or not the Tory Party over there is committed to keeping the Crowns, judging by today's *Leader-Post* opinion poll.

And it's strange, Mr. Speaker, it's strange that the numbers of the opinion polls indicate this time round exactly what they indicated about a decade ago. Three out of five of Saskatchewan voters do not want our Crown corporations privatized.

And here we have the candidate, one of the candidates of the Saskatchewan Party, Mr. Hermanson, saying on March 14 the following:

I think after 10 minutes debate, people of Saskatchewan would be willing to sell the Crown corporations of Saskatchewan.

That's their position. So that's the question that's on the minds of the people. The question on our minds is how to make the Crown corporations more accountable, govern better.

And as I've already indicated before, if the committee should make a request, would you support it, after all the information is in, that I might be able to add some additional new information, I'd be very pleased to be of help if at all possible.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Boyd: — Mr. Speaker, Mr. Premier, last week you denied that you stepped in to stop the SaskPower board from firing your NDP buddy, Jack Messer. But people who were on the board at the time don't seem to back it up. Today's *Leader-Post* quotes from one former SaskPower board member saying that there was a strong opinion on the board that Jack Messer should be fired.

Mr. Premier, will you admit that you stepped in and overruled the wishes of the SaskPower board to save Jack Messer from being fired?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, this is a very old question to which I've already answered on Monday of this week and has been written on many occasions in the previous reports before Channel Lake and post Channel Lake. I refer the

member and I refer the House to my answer on March 30, 1998, to *Hansard*, where I say in part, quote:

I'm informed that the SaskPower board held several in-camera meetings, and that many members of the board concluded they had . . . serious issues with the personality and . . . management style of Mr. Messer.

I made that comment. And then I said the following, quote:

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.

And that's what happened with the board eventually.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Health Care Services in Melville

Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the people of Melville are anxiously awaiting word which will confirm that this government will finance 65 per cent of the anticipated cost of constructing a new hospital.

However the North Valley Health District is running a deficit of a half a million dollars even after a hiring freeze, and cutting its spending to the bone.

Mr. Speaker, my question for the Minister of Health: the people of Melville are concerned that they may have a shiny new hospital but won't have adequate funding for beds or staffing. How do you intend to address this concern, sir?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question from the member for Melville and to say to the member from Melville that, as he knows, we just completed our budget process and have announced to the district health boards what in fact their allocations are going to be for 1998-99.

And the member knows that there is going to be an enrichment to the district health board in terms of the funding that they're getting this year, to assist them with dealing with some of the issues that are prevalent in their district as it relates to emergency services, as it relates to acute care and long-term care. And we're going to continue to provide that support to the districts across the province.

The member knows, the member knows that this year, Mr. Speaker, we've provided an additional \$30 million to the districts across the province and it's going to assist them and enrich and help them provide services across the piece for all districts, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Osika: — Mr. Speaker, a supplementary. The fact is this

government is talking about helping the health districts, and the North Valley Health District particularly, finance a new hospital. However, bricks and mortar mean nothing if there isn't appropriate funding for hospital beds and the front-line health care people.

Will you make a commitment to the people of Melville and the North Valley Health District today, that you will in fact provide the level of funding that is needed to fully staff and operate a new hospital?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure what the Liberal members are really asking us to do here in health, because today the member from Melville stands up and talks about how important it is to continue to put money into the operations of health districts across the province.

And I say to him that over the last four years we've continued to enrich that piece so that health districts can provide a comprehensive level of services. And then he says, the member says that he's not interested in seeing the government putting any money into bricks and mortar, when I know that the member from Thunder Creek has been saying to me now for the last three days, and will likely stand up again today, and say to me that what we need to do is we need to save the Plains Health Centre. So we should be putting more money into bricks and mortar, more money into bricks and mortar and less money into services.

What is the member from Melville asking? He's asking us not to put any money into the bricks and mortar piece; then he should be talking to the member from Thunder Creek and saying to him that those services are no longer required at the Plains Health Centre.

Our role, Mr. Speaker, is to provide comprehensive funding for facilities, for staffing, for direct services. That's the objective of this government, Mr. Sir, is to provide a balanced approach to providing health services to all people in the province.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. People in rural areas and all over this province are extremely concerned. We talk about all the money that the government is putting into health care, but where is it going? We still close hospital beds and we have front-line care workers that are fired or let go or cut to the bone because the health districts don't have the money.

Mr. Speaker, the government is providing \$30 million in additional funding for health districts. But the fact is that this funding is not going to improve front-line health care — it's going to meet deficits. Regina Health District faces \$5 million deficit; Saskatoon district, \$5 million in the red. The Living Sky District faces a one and a half million dollar shortfall. The East Central District is saddled with \$2.4 million deficit. The Battlefords needs \$1 million to break even. And now we learn that in the North Valley Health District, they also face a half a million dollar deficit.

To the minister, Mr. Speaker: you're only pumping enough

money into the system to keep our districts barely afloat. There's no extra funding to improve the system. When are you going to end this vicious cycle?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Well, Mr. Speaker, I know that the member from . . . or the Leader of the Opposition has recently been travelling the province and having some discussions about where the funding is coming from to deliver the services. And the leader is asking for, the leader is asking for some additional funding, that it be provided, to more funding for the province.

Now in 1996, the good doctor said, in his comment when he was asked about what would he do in terms of reducing the debt in the province, and the good doctor said what he would do is take the money out of health care — he would take the money out of health care. He said he would find a portion of the savings of the debt in the \$1.3 billion that we were spending then in health care.

And when I asked the member opposite and the good doctor, what is happening in terms of Ottawa's participation in the funding, the answer is that we aren't getting any.

I say to you, you table me the letters, table us the letters that the good doctor has written to Ottawa asking Ottawa to participate in enriched funding for health care in this province. Could you table that? Because I suggest, Mr. Speaker . . .

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

Compensation for Hepatitis C Victims

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it appears that once again another province has taken the lead in doing what is right. British Columbia's NDP Premier says he's not comfortable with the compensation package being provided to victims of hepatitis C.

Mr. Minister, your NDP cousins, your cousins believe that all victims of hepatitis C who contracted the disease through tainted blood should be entitled to compensation. Mr. Minister, you plan on discussing this matter with your federal and provincial counterparts this weekend. Will you open up the process to include all victims and their immediate families?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Well, Mr. Speaker, I want to say to the member opposite and to all members of the House today that this issue of compensation of people who have been infected by hepatitis C has not been a political issue. It has not been a political issue. And today the member opposite raises it in that light.

Because over the past four months, members of all parties, members of all governments, whether they're federal ministers, whether they're Mr. Rock, whether they're in fact all of the provincial health ministers, or whether they are territorial folks, we've all come together to make a decision about how it is that we can ensure that we can compensate people who have been infected by hepatitis C.

And at the end of the day, Mr. Speaker, we've said we will

provide a compensation package that will be fair, that will be comprehensive, and that will be unilateral for all people across the country. This, Mr. Speaker, is not a political debate. This is about a debate about being fair and equitable to all Canadians who have been infected by hepatitis C.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Minister, your decision has nothing to do with being fair. Nothing at all. Mr. Speaker, I would think that if a government is going to err, it should err on the side of the victims, who in this case contracted the disease through no fault of their own. It simply isn't fair that governments will only compensate those who contracted the disease during an arbitrary period. Mr. Minister, by refusing to include these victims in the package, you are simply inviting more legal action. Your government, however, seems to like that.

Why are you forcing these people to spend their last days in a courtroom battle. Will you recommend to your federal and provincial counterparts that this package be opened up to include all victims and their immediate families?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Speaker, I want to go back to my earlier comment where I said to the member, and will reiterate again, that this is not a political debate and should not be a political debate. The member opposite should recognize that his good friends in New Brunswick, his cousins, who are also Liberals, have said that they support this package.

The people from . . . the federal minister, Mr. Rock, has been on his feet every day saying that he believes, he believes that we have a fair and comprehensive package, his Liberal cousins from Ottawa.

And collectively, Mr. Speaker, we as provincial ministers and the federal minister have said that in order for us to provide the best comprehensive package for Canadians irrespective of where they live, whether it's in New Brunswick, or whether it's in British Columbia, or whether it's in Ontario, we want to ensure that they get the best package that will serve them well into the future, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Grain Transportation

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The issue of grain transportation is high on the agenda of farmers in this province, Mr. Speaker. On February 19 a meeting was held in Saskatoon for the purpose of reviewing the future of our grain transportation network. At that meeting the Premier was asked to initiate a court challenge under the combines Act against the rail and grain companies for colluding to effect elevator rationalization.

Mr. Premier, at that time you stated you would familiarize yourself with the combines Act. Have you examined the Act, and will you now comply with the request by farmers to initiate a court challenge?

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, this is a very important

question affecting large numbers of farmers, because the railway companies, it appears, are determined to proceed with their plan with respect to rail-line abandonments notwithstanding the fact that Mr. Justice Estey has been asked by the federal government to study this whole project. Our position at the policy, political in the best sense of the word, is first to say that all of the western governments agree that there should a standstill or a moratorium on the policies of the railway companies; that there should be an encouragement to look at short-line hauls, making sure that the transportation railway network system is as efficient as possible; to try to get the federal Prime Minister to say to the railway companies, as he can by law, do not do this until Mr. Justice Estey complies.

I was speaking in Rosetown and in the west side of Saskatchewan — I'm very surprised that none of the Tories members raised this issue at all in the House. There are hundreds of farmers concerned about this, hundreds of farmers concerned about this.

So we are pursuing it on this basis and we think that is the appropriate way to go to save money and time and get solution.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Julé: — The question that I asked you — I asked you if you would now comply with a request by farmers to initiate a court challenge. That is what the farmers asked of you and that is what they want to know.

Mr. Premier, at that same meeting you were asked if your government was willing to look into a north-south, Churchill-Mississippi railway linkage system in order to increase effectiveness and ensure costs savings. You stated and I quote, "We are actively examining north-south linkages."

Could you please state, Mr. Premier, how you are actively examining this proposal, and what is the status of your examination.

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — I think this is an important question. And there is no new news in my answer but I'm going to repeat it because of its importance.

The Minister of Highways has indicated that as part of Saskatchewan's overview of the entire transportation policy, we're looking at the actions of the railway companies. We're looking at the question of north-south linkages. We're looking at the question of Vancouver and the Port of Vancouver. We're looking at the question of the damage being done by the trucks to the highway system as they shift from rail to highways. We're looking at all of this.

What we need to do here, and I say this with utmost genuine sincerity in terms of federal-provincial cooperation, we need truly a national transportation plan which takes into account the exigencies of today's world and the changing nature of marketing grain products; but involves Ottawa support together with the province of Saskatchewan and the provinces of the West — in fact all the provinces of the country who are desperately in need of more money for highways and the like.

So the status of the report is that it is ongoing. It is only one

piece of a large puzzle and a complex puzzle and an expensive puzzle. What I would really like to do, as I close my answer, is to make sure that the Prime Minister directs the minister federally and ministers provincially. We're ready to come right away. We're ready to fly to Ottawa. We're ready to protest to Ottawa. I don't want to do this, but whatever we need to do to elevate this issue so that the railway costs and the railway actions don't add an unfair burden to our producers.

So the study is ongoing. It's not complete, but you have to understand, Madam Member, that it's part of a large matrix.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ORDERS OF THE DAY

WRITTEN QUESTIONS

Mr. Kowalsky: — Mr. Speaker, as it pertains to question 20 regarding Highways and Transportation, I am very pleased to submit the answer to the question.

The Speaker: — The answer for question no. 20 is tabled.

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.

Mr. Koenker: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure, Mr. Speaker, to address the budget on behalf of my constituents from the constituency of Saskatoon Sutherland.

I'd like to begin by welcoming the pages to the Legislative Assembly and to thank them for all the work that they do on our behalf. And not only the pages but also all of the staff of the Legislative Assembly and the building — the housekeeping staff, the janitorial staff, the people who repair our phones and type our letters and so forth. They help us do our jobs.

I want to begin this morning, Mr. Speaker, with a little bit of a history lesson supplied by a friend who's a member of the Sutherland business association in Saskatoon. We had this conversation about a month ago, before the session started.

And he tells the story of his sister-in-law. The place was Leask, somewhere actually outside of Leask, on the farm. The situation was that his sister-in-law had just begun to go into labour and needed to get to the hospital. The time was April of 1960.

And in April of 1960, for his sister-in-law to get to the hospital in Shellbrook, that journey started with a three-and-a-half mile ride by tractor over the fields in fourth gear at about 8 miles an hour. And once the sister-in-law crossed the fields by the tractor to the highway, she was met there by a neighbour who then drove her 35 miles to the Shellbrook Hospital — on gravel the

whole way, about an hour's drive. And there at the hospital she delivered her child and everything was safe and sound.

Now I share this story supplied by my constituent because it illustrates for me the change that we have seen — the profound change that we have seen in Saskatchewan, not just in the last century, but in the last few decades. How far we have come in terms of upgrading our highway system and what massive change we've seen to our health care system.

It's not like the '70s when someone who was in labour and delivered a baby would have to spend a week or more in the hospital. And how far we've come now in the '90s when stays for maternity are only a matter of days, and there's provision for services in homes — postnatal.

The story illustrates how far we've come, not just in terms of change, but in terms of expectations, Mr. Speaker. Expectations about the level of program services that we want or require in our province. Expectations about what our tax dollars go for and our need to attack debt. And these are some of the things I'd like to talk about today, basically predicated on comments from constituents of mine as I circulated in my constituency the day after the provincial budget and went door-to-door to talk to them about it. And I think the story I've just told about the travel to the hospital puts into perspective some of the budget comments I heard from other constituents.

I think of the man, for example, one of the first doors I called on, who said that he was quite satisfied with the budget and then went on to comment that he was glad that we were making movement or progress on the deficit. He indicated that he was an upper income earner with 15-year-old and 12-year-old children, and how happy he was, how pleased he was that we were making progress on the deficit so that his children wouldn't have to carry this burden and pay it for themselves. That someone . . . He felt that they shouldn't have to pay for the deficit that they hadn't created. And he indicated in typical Saskatchewan spirit, I would say, that he would much sooner pay it himself than see his children pay it. And I think that's a tribute to this man, and really to the people of Saskatchewan, in terms of the attitude that they take to the deficit and the fiscal responsibilities that we have.

I think of another man who, in the course of my travels that afternoon as I presented myself, indicated that he felt badly for me because we shouldn't have to deal with that problem. And I didn't know what he was talking about when he said we shouldn't have to deal with that problem. And it turned out that he was talking about the Channel Lake problem.

He felt badly, that we shouldn't have to deal with that problem because we had done such a good job in dealing with the province's finances. And in his perspective, although it wasn't acceptable that there were problems with Channel Lake, in terms of the larger perspective of government he didn't see that as conditioning all of reality in terms of the way government is dealing with its responsibilities.

He too was interested in the provincial debt; that was on his mind. And he wondered why we didn't do as government a better job of explaining to people the interest on the debt and the implications of that interest for program expenditures and

the fiscal health of the province. And unfortunately, at that point in our conversation, the phone rang and he had to run to answer it and we were able . . . we weren't able to continue the conversation.

A woman on that same street was actually quite well informed when I came to the door, and asked some very thoughtful comments. Again she was concerned about Channel Lake; she didn't like what had happened with Channel Lake. And it was very interesting that she said she didn't want the numbers; she wasn't interested in the numbers and the amount of money that was lost. She didn't like what had happened and she wanted to know what we were going to do about it in terms of a public inquiry. I thought that was a very interesting comment.

She also asked about the number of individuals in Saskatchewan who were paying income tax. Someone had told her that there were 300,000 taxpayers in the province of Saskatchewan and she wondered whether that was true, whether everyone was paying their way if we had such a small number of taxpayers.

I didn't know the answer to that question at that time, and so subsequently I've taken some steps to find out the answer. And I'm told by Revenue Canada's taxation statistics, which are supplied to the Government of Saskatchewan, there were 675,220 tax returns filed for the tax year 1995, which are the most recent statistics, by individuals in Saskatchewan. And of these tax returns, how many of them had tax liability, were paying taxes — 460,800. So it means that basically about half of the . . . more than half of the people in Saskatchewan submit an income tax return and that almost half of them are paying something on their income tax returns.

This raises the question of why taxes are so high. And when people ask me that question as I go door to door, I have a very simple little exercise. I turn to page 67 of the provincial budget and I show them the statement of general revenue and expenditure and I point out the interest on the public debt. But before I point out the interest on the public debt I show them the table and I point to the highest expenditure by the Government of Saskatchewan — for health care at 1.7 billion — and I ask them, is that as it should be? Yes.

What about the second priority. Education, 560 . . . well basically half a billion dollars; I won't go into the particular numbers. I say, what do you think about that? Yes, that's as it should be. You can add to that even another half a billion dollars almost, for Post-Secondary Education and Skills Training, which would mean we spend about 1.7 billion on health, basically about 1 billion on education. What's the third largest expenditure of the Government of Saskatchewan?

An Hon. Member: — Interest on the public debt.

Mr. Koenker: — No, no, no, not interest on the public debt. People tell me, well what about welfare. I say no, no, not welfare. Well what about farmers, they say. I say no, it's not farmers. I say, would that we were giving that money to people on welfare; at least we would be providing food and shelter and clothing for people. Would that we were spending that money as the third largest expenditure for farmers in Saskatchewan. At least they would be seeing some benefits.

The third largest expenditure of the Government of Saskatchewan, unfortunately, is something called servicing the public debt, at about three-quarters of a billion dollars. And that gives them pause to think, and to realize the scale of the problem that we have in Saskatchewan when we are spending as our third largest expenditure simply the interest payments alone on our public debt.

(1100)

And it's no wonder then that we have some of the highest taxes, in Saskatchewan, in all of Canada. It should be no surprise or secret to people once we understand that we have one of the highest levels of public debt. And that, as I go through the crowd talking to people about the budget, brings me to talk about the need for a balanced perspective in terms of the province's finances.

With the interest total of total expenditures being so high, we simply have to deal with this problem and do something to reduce debt, to pay down our indebtedness. It's like people paying off the mortgage on their house. They have to take some of their income and spend it not just on food and clothes and entertainment and holidays, but they simply have to deal with attacking the mortgage on the house and not just meet the interest payments but to pay down the principal.

And so that is one of the three priorities — top priorities — of this government, which is to pay down the public debt.

We need a balanced approach of course, and that means it's pretty tricky when you're trying to pay down debt, to lower taxes, and to increase expenditure for services at the same time. But that's exactly what we're doing in this budget, what we've done in previous budgets, and what we will continue to do for the people of Saskatchewan — to provide a balanced approach between debt reduction, tax reduction, and some modest improvement or expenditure on services.

I just want to close this part of my remarks by talking about the interest on the public debt, just to put it in perspective another way. If you take the sum total of the interest that we have paid as a New Democratic government on public debt since we've assumed office, that total is five and a half billion dollars — that's with a “b”, billion with a “b” — five and a half billion dollars. And that, as my colleague says, is more than the total budget of Saskatchewan this year. That is more than the total budget of the province of Saskatchewan this year just that has gone on interest payments alone since we have formed government.

Well this is all basically because the subsequent . . . the previous government, the legacy that we inherited, was a legacy of \$15 billion worth of debt. And we are working at reducing that debt down to \$12 billion this year, and reducing it further by the year 2002 to \$10.9 billion. It doesn't go down very fast.

There isn't very much to show for all that debt except interest payments on it, but we are determined to tackle that debt so that we can, as we tackle it and we pay less and less on interest, we can put more and more to services. But I caution people and say today this is a slow, slow draining away of debt. It does not happen overnight. It does not happen very fast even over the

course of a year or two or three. It is a long-term prospect and I dare say our children will still be paying for some of that legacy of debt.

I have many things to say, Mr. Speaker, on many different subjects. I'd like to talk about the increase in expenditure for health care in this budget — \$88 million in new spending on health care. Is it enough? No it isn't enough. But given the legacy of debt that I've talked about and the need to attack the interest payment that is draining away our ability to enhance services, I say \$88 million is basically all we can afford to put into health care this year. It represents the highest expenditure in health care in the province's history but it really isn't good enough. We need to get rid of that debt.

I'd like to talk a lot about the good news for post-secondary education, an increase of \$48 million in expenditure for higher education in our province — \$48 million this year. Is it enough? No it isn't enough, but it's all we can afford. We have to be careful. We have to be prudent. We have to be responsible in our public expenditure. And so this has to be good enough for this year. It's a significant investment but it's not good enough.

Part of that expenditure, I'm proud to say, goes to revitalization of the University of Saskatchewan and the University of Regina, the additional funding of \$18 million. That's a hopeful sign; boy we got a long way to go. Part of that increase in funding, that \$48 million, goes to student financial assistance for student loans programs. That's helpful. It's not good enough, but it's as good as it gets at this stage.

And I especially want to talk about one program, and I won't talk long about it. I could go on for quite a length about the new social programs that the Minister of Social Services and the Minister of Finance have introduced with this budget. The child benefit program here in Saskatchewan, the investing in families programs that have recently been announced with the budget.

With these initiatives, Mr. Speaker, this government is turning welfare on its head by investing \$93 million in new social programs.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Koenker: — And if there is one thing, and one thing only in this budget, that should bring joy to the hearts of Saskatchewan people, all Saskatchewan people, it's that we are finally beginning to have some fiscal freedom to target financial resources to those people who are most in need.

It has been a shameful decade or more, that approaches almost two decades, where we have not spent money on people in need — on the poorest of the poor — the way we should have; on hungry families and people struggling in poverty. And this is a blight and a shame on our province and our society. Poverty is, as the Canadian Council of Catholic Bishops have said, is a damning indictment of our whole society and we as government and as individual citizens, have to be our brother and our sisters' keepers. This is our calling, I believe.

And so when we have increased funding of \$93 million for standing welfare on its head and bringing assistance to people in poverty, and the working poor, so that they can get out of

poverty; so that they can provide clothing and food for their children under the new child benefit plan; so that they have expanded protection for health benefits, for medicine and for eye glasses and for dental care under the health benefit plan; so that there is an income supplement program that doesn't penalize people on welfare from going out to work, but encourages them to go out to work so they can keep more, so they can become independent and free of the welfare and poverty cycle — I say we're on the right track. It is enough? No, it isn't enough in my judgement, but it's a huge start in the right direction, in tearing down the walls of welfare that keep people dependent and a huge step in helping people toward independence.

And in this regard I'd like to pay tribute to one individual who is a friend and a mentor and a fellow sojourner on life's path. And I'm speaking of Father Bob Ogle in this connection. Father Bob Ogle really was one of the people who inspired me to enter public life and to seek public office. And it began when he asked if I would accompany him as he went door to door as he was seeking the nomination in Saskatoon-Humboldt back in the . . . 1977, and after he won the nomination in September of 1977.

It was Father Ogle who really taught me how to go door to door and to engage in political activity. But he taught me something much more important than the politics. He taught me something very profound and important about personal values and a profession of faith, I would say.

He taught me about what he referred to as his support for a preferential option for the poor. And he kept using that term — a preferential option for the poor — and for those in need. A preferential option for the poor, for supporting those in need, for being our brothers' and our sisters' keeper.

And that connected with me, Mr. Speaker, on a very profound level and it encouraged me to enter public life and to try to work toward that objective of exercising, as we have any kind of personal or even political power, of exercising a preferential option for those who are most in need — for those who are poor, for those who are sick, for those who need a helping hand of some sort, for those who need advocacy. And in the final analysis, isn't that the work of a public servant, any one of us who is elected to this legislature.

And so I want to pay tribute to Father Bob Ogle this afternoon as a man who cared deeply about people, especially those who were in need. And I want to thank him for the gifts that he shared with me and with countless other people in and through his person and through his values and through his Christian faith. And so I say to Father Bob, well done, thou good and faithful servant.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Koenker: — And while there are many, many other things I could say this afternoon, Mr. Speaker, would that these same words could be said of each of us in this Assembly in different ways — well done, thou good and faithful servant, in exercising a preferential option for the poor. Not just serving your constituents, but serving those who are most in need of advocacy, of assistance, of financial help, of government

programs. Would that those words could be said of us. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(1115)

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I am glad to have the opportunity this morning to speak on this year's budget. And I certainly do not rise to embarrass the government; they're doing a good enough job of that themselves.

But I would like to make some points out here that affect my constituency and, for that matter, the people of Saskatchewan. What did this budget actually do for the people of Saskatchewan. It was a very lacklustre budget. It lacked anything in it that the average person out there could really say, oh here, this helped me.

We had a 2 per cent income tax drop, which is a step in the right direction; a very small step, but at least it's a step in the right direction. But having gone by that, there's really nothing for the average person in the province of Saskatchewan. It works out to about a half a cup of coffee a day for someone in Saskatchewan. And I guess they should be thankful, because the Prime Minister in their budget, Mr. Martin, filled the other half a cup. So the highest taxed country, probably in the world, and the highest taxed province in Canada — what did we gain? A cup of coffee. And you don't even want a refill because you've got to buy that yourself.

Really, this budget, what did it do for the taxpayers of Saskatchewan? Nothing. What did this budget do for families in Saskatchewan? Nothing. What did this budget do for young people, our most important resource? Nothing. What did it do for our seniors, the people who built this province? Nothing. What did it do for business, the backbone of this province? Nothing. They are the ones that are saying taxes have to go down if we're going to survive.

What did it do for the communities in this province? Absolutely nothing. We're losing them at the highest rate we've ever lost them in the history of Saskatchewan. The numbers are dropping, and from what I understand, that a study done by your government, or at least looked into by a professor at the university, says we're going to end up with about 60 communities in this province down from the number of over 500 now.

That should be another embarrassment to the people on that side. We're changing our whole way of life in this province. And we're actually promoting it. We're not trying to stop it from happening.

What did this budget do for municipal governments, the whipping boy of the government since they were elected in 1991? Absolutely nothing. Last year you cut \$29 million from these people. And what do you do this year after being telling them for the last year that this province is doing wonderful? You give them a measly \$3 million. What will that do when you thin that out over the municipalities of this province? It won't even affect the bottom line at all.

The City of Regina grants in lieu, this great big announcement last summer, the saviour for the cities of Saskatoon and Regina — because it really doesn't affect anyone else. Twelve million dollars for the City of Regina and they were ecstatic — oh this is great.

But it isn't so. Again, what does the government do? It backs out on another one of its promises and I believe now it's down to about 3 million — well we're not sure, maybe one and one-half million — so Mr. Archer and company, who were counting on the 12 million, can start raising their municipal taxes again.

You know really what this is doing to the heartbeat of the NDP supporter out there which was really wavering to start with? Well it's hardly beating and the light's going out very quickly.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to touch on health care, health care which is a main issue in question period these days. And really this responsibility goes to the present Health minister, the past Health minister, and actually the Health minister before because she was the person that started health care reform. And that was the problem we have now with our health system. Because really when you think about it, Mr. Speaker, this is one area that government is putting more money into.

And what is it doing to solve our problem? Absolutely nothing. In fact I believe maybe it's creating a bigger problem because the government thinks it's healing, it's fixing, it's really bringing something together to help us with our health care.

And what did he see? The Plains is closing. That's after what? Fifty-two hospitals closed, then another one, then another one. And now the Plains, probably the most important hospital to southern Saskatchewan and to the people in Regina. I know, Mr. Speaker, because my constituency has many people that have had their lives saved or tremendously good health care provided them at the Plains.

A great positive to the Plains is how quick we can get there. I know, because last year, or the last time, last election, my father had a heart attack on election day. And it wasn't because he was so surprised I was elected, because it was before it was over. I know what you were going to say.

But he came to the Plains. And, Mr. Speaker, that 15 or 20 minutes, the difference between the Plains and the General, could have saved his life — and has, that 20 minutes has saved many lives out there.

And I would ask the present Minister of Health to reconsider the closure of the Plains and think about that one. Because I believe here what is happening is the Regina Health Board is taking directions from this government, through funding or any other means this government has saw fit to instruct them, to close the Plains Health Centre.

We hear today in question period that the General and the Pasqua emergency rooms had to shut down last night because they were full; they had no beds.

Well think about that for a minute. What if the Plains was already closed? There wouldn't be one emergency room bed

left in the city of Regina, and that covers all of south and east Saskatchewan plus every person that lives in Regina. This is a crisis and it could have been a catastrophe if something bigger happened last night.

Mr. Speaker, we have the Minister of Health telling us, oh, we still have 675 beds in Regina. Not going on to mention that that's down from the thousand beds or more that used to be before health care reform took over. And I know a little bit about health care reform because I was a member of a municipal government out there who was asked by one of the previous ministers of Health, come out, take part, help us reform health care.

And we took her at her word. We did come out. And we spent about two months of going to meetings, meetings, meetings, and really felt we had some input. We were asking our people what they would like to see happen. We all knew health care had to be fixed; it couldn't continue like it was. We never once dreamt what was going to happen.

We got about two months into our meetings with our people and deciding how we would like to see it, and before we were finished, the Minister of Health came along and said, well you've had input, now this is what we're going to do. And that's what's gone on all the way along.

It's happened. You've pretended to listen to the people, the municipal people who are elected out there, and then you come along and do as you wish. And the Minister of Health, I really, I wouldn't, I don't, I wouldn't envy the position he's in. Because what I believe is happening is that the bureaucrats are running the health care department not the Minister of Health. I believe he's the puppet they send out to explain the programs that they've decided to come up with. And I haven't seen too many of those bureaucrats living outside the cities.

So I really don't think they have rural people's health care at heart. In fact I know they don't. I'd be a wee bit embarrassed if I was a Health minister to have to keep running out and passing the word that the bureaucrats are telling him to do and say. And this is what will happen in health care.

Mr. Speaker, I also have a concern because when I was elected to Regina, and in fact even before as I used to come into Regina quite often, I saw that big H on that sign coming in on east Victoria and I guess I was a little naïve because I was really certain that that said hospital.

And now we find out, Mr. Speaker, what it really stands for is the Howard Johnson, the overflow for our health care system in Regina. If you have an operation in the afternoon and, as usual, are out of beds, where do you go? You go to another part of our two-tiered health system — to the Howard Johnson. And I want to thank the people at the Howard Johnson for taking care of our sick in this province. They are to be commended.

Mr. Speaker, another part of my concern out there coming from the Saltcoats constituency, and for that matter what's affected the Melville constituency, Canora-Pelly, all those constituencies out there including Yorkton, is that Yorkton — that it should be a really strong, viable, regional hospital — is being migrated into the city of Regina or Saskatoon and will end up being

nothing more than a band-aid station if we don't take direction action now. Because the smallest accident out there only stops at Yorkton to really change ambulances and head for Regina. And it's happening more and more and more.

And the way the system is set up, the minute the patient is transferred to Regina, the funding migrates with it. When the next budget is done, they say, well see, they came to Regina so Yorkton doesn't get that money the next year. And it won't be long before Yorkton is neutered to a point that we don't even need that hospital. We have to come to Regina anyway.

And this is happening all over the eastern part of this province and the whole south side that rely on the Plains Health Centre. And we're going to lose it, Mr. Speaker.

I would like to touch on a minute, Mr. Speaker, and commend the Minister of Health for finally getting to the point where he's providing dialysis treatment in the city of Yorkton — something I have lobbied hard for for the past two, two and a half years. And it took a long time coming, but there is a lot of people out in my constituency and on the east side that are very grateful that they are finally this fall going to have access to renal dialysis in the city of Yorkton.

I think, Mr. Speaker, and I have a hard time understanding why it took so long, because from my understanding it costs about 30,000 a year to treat . . . to provide dialysis here. And part of our health care problem, I think, is showing up now with . . . I know I have two people from my constituency that are living in Saskatoon that are waiting for a kidney transplant and I believe there is a lady in Regina also doing the same, but it costs 30,000 to provide renal dialysis for the average patient in the province a year and it costs 15,000 for the transplant.

Those numbers tell you there's a problem here because of the lack of beds we have in this province. And it once again shows that we have a two-tier health system.

An example of that, Mr. Speaker, is the ambulance costs. They're astronomical for the average person out there. I hear of stories of \$1,100 to get to Regina by ambulance — \$800, \$700. Well the people in the city of Regina, yes, they have to use ambulance, but they never get to the point I'm sure of where they have to pay in excess of \$1,000 to phone an ambulance to get to the hospital.

An Hon. Member: — They don't have to take out a loan anyway.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Exactly. They don't have to borrow to get to the hospital and that's what's happening in rural Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, one of my critic areas is highways. And last year we heard the member for Tisdale, I believe it was when he was Minister of Highways, make this great announcement about two and a half billion dollars for highways over 10 years. And I actually applauded him because we definitely need that money for highways; in fact we really need more but I realize it's a good start in the right direction.

But again, as this government has done in the past with every

other part of their budget, every other part of the funding they have for different areas, comes out with a great announcement about how wonderful we are, this is what we're going to do.

Well guess what happened with highways? Last year we spent 208 million — that's 42 million short of the 250 million that you promised shortly before. So I thought well at least that's only a one time thing. You'll have the gusto to come this year and catch up because we've been told the province is doing so well.

Whoops! This year 218 million. Well in my calculations that's about 80 million already we're short over the 10-year period.

Now when are you going to catch up? Because at this rate we're going to be about 4 or \$500 million dollars short in 10 years from the big announcement that you made last year of spending on highways.

Again this should be an embarrassment. If you're not going to spend it, don't come out and announce it if you want to take accolades for that announcement. But then when it comes to backing up what you say? You don't do it.

Municipal governments, people . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. Before things get out of hand here I'm sure that the hon. member for Saltcoats will recognize that rule 28 asks the hon. members, requires the hon. member to direct his debate through the Chair, and I'm sure that he'll want to continue his budget debate in the spirit of the rules of the Assembly.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I apologize. I will so do. As you can see though, Mr. Speaker, I really take to heart some of the things that are happening here and I really believe we have a better way on this side and we will show that in '99 when we get there.

Mr. Speaker, municipal government is one that has been hit by the last six, seven budgets. I believe we have used municipal governments out there who, by the way, have kept their house in order, did not run deficits as past governments all over this country and here in Saskatchewan have done. And now what are we doing? We're punishing them for having done that.

And our road system out there, our sewer system, our water systems, everything that municipal governments whether it's town, city or rural have to deal with are short of funding. And I thought this year, Mr. Speaker, because the Premier had gone around this province telling everyone how great the job that the Finance minister has done, that he has done, and that the government has done, and I believed him because he is our Premier.

But we get to things like this and municipal government funding should be one of the first to have money returned to because they actually were the ones that balanced the budget. And what do we see? Very little of anything for roads out there. Those roads that are deteriorating and falling apart a fast rate, in fact falling apart so fast we're going by now where we can do maintenance to keep them up, we're going to have to start rebuilding them at a fast pace.

President of SARM (Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities), Mr. Speaker, Sinclair Harrison, made the comment that they needed, I believe, \$56 million this year just to keep the roads in the shape they are now. What did they get? Three million dollars, and has to be shared, Mr. Speaker, all through municipal governments.

(1130)

How really did the Minister of Finance balance the budget this year? And let's take a look at this for a minute. Number one, they privatized the upgrader. And there's nothing wrong with that; that's fine. But there's the first portion of money that went to help balance the budget. A draw down on liquor and gaming — part two of balancing the budget.

Part three, Mr. Speaker, was the hand-out from the federal government because we've got ourselves in a position again that we're a have-not province. And I believe that was what the past minister of Finance wanted us to be. And guess what — we're there.

The other part is the Crowns. We're taking money out of the Crowns again to balance the budget but at a much faster rate. And, Mr. Speaker, we all know how that money got into the Crowns was by jacking every utility rate in this province to the highest level that we have ever seen so that we can create the profits of SaskPower a year ago, 153 million. What was SaskTel, Mr. Speaker — \$80 million? And the list goes on.

Then when we get in a pinch we have to take that money, dump it into general revenue so this government can balance its budget, because it isn't happening unless we sell something or we borrow from the Crowns or the federal government bails us out. That same federal government, by the way, that has been used for the last six or seven years to blame for the woes of Saskatchewan.

Education, Mr. Deputy Speaker, affects my area and many areas in this province because of the lack of funding. The 60/40 split that when this government came to power were government-funded — 60 per cent of education and municipalities 40. The first thing this government did was change that. It's still 60/40 but it's completely the other way, Mr. Speaker.

Out in my area and in many other areas . . . The member for Kelvington-Wadena has it happening in her area and a number of other members, even members on that side are having school closures in their constituencies, and the Minister of Education says, well it's all due to the number of pupils dropping in our communities. But that doesn't hold true in every area.

Mr. Speaker, in my area the school of MacNutt is slated for closure. But the numbers in that school are actually going up, not going down. There's a hog barn being built in that area. There's economic development happening and the numbers could go up faster but what seems to me to be happening is we're going to close it quickly before that happens and then we don't have to address that problem later on.

Theodore — grade 10 and 11 and 12 — that part's going to be closed in the Theodore School and those children are going to

be bussed into Yorkton. What that does to a community, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is it helps kill the community. And I know because my children were involved in that when our grade 10, 11, and 12's were transferred to Yorkton. They never return to these small communities and therefore we lose those kids.

And I guess it's just a first step in losing them because the second step, when they graduate and can't get a job, is they go to Alberta. I guess what we're doing is part of the training that we need for them is to educate them how to live on their own in Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, I would also like to touch a little bit on — and I know the budget in one way was directly involved in this because there were changes to The Wildlife Act — but the night hunting issue, Mr. Speaker, I feel this government has really let us down.

They tried to address it by putting a band-aid on it, Mr. Speaker. And they're going to ban spot lighting which out in my area, I believe, makes it more dangerous than it ever was before. Because now we have out-of-province hunters coming in hunting, and at least before with — and I didn't agree with it — but they were using lights to hunt with; now there're hunting in the dark of night. Those hunters have no idea where farms are, where towns are, because in many cases they're out-of-province hunters because they can't do this in Manitoba or Alberta, who have dealt with this problem, not like the province of the day.

I have been to meetings, Mr. Speaker, in Runnymede, Kamsack, Togo. These people are very upset over this issue. And the funny part, Mr. Speaker, is that there was Metis people at this meeting that agreed with the rest of the people at the meeting that this is a problem. And most of them said, we don't need special laws. Treat us like everyone else out there. Sustainance is really a thing of the past where you have to hunt at night. They felt that their sustainance hunting could be done in the daytime. And I believe, Mr. Speaker, that safety is the big issue there.

I'd like to touch on this morning, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to do with patronage. And what does patronage have to do with this budget? Well I think a lot because patronage has cost the taxpayer of this province and is continuing to do it — millions upon millions of dollars.

Let's start for an example, with SaskPower who we take money from to balance the budget so I can see the connection there, Mr. Deputy Speaker, with the budget. Jack Messer — \$5.2 million loss because someone didn't read a contract. Well I don't think we've seen the tip of the iceberg, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because the Channel Lake smell is getting stronger and stronger and stronger.

SaskTel, Mr. Deputy Speaker — and let's touch on that for a minute — \$60 million we lost last year, and partly because Mr. Don Ching is running SaskTel. Another patronage appointment and another buddy of the Premier's.

And the list goes on. Let's not stop there, Mr. Deputy Speaker. STC (Saskatchewan Transportation Company) — Mr. Glendinning was in charge. And I believe if you check Mr. Glendinning's past history, he has some very close ties to the

Premier and the NDP.

What happened with STC? We computerized STC but the computer forgot to send out bills. And in most businesses out there, private business would have caught this right away because they couldn't afford to make that mistake. And I believe it was what? — 1.4, \$1.5 million of bills that didn't get sent out over a period of what? — one to two years.

So we fixed the problem. We fired Mr. Glendinning. But being an NDP supporter, we couldn't let him just sit there, we had to find him a job. So we fired him from STC for incompetence but then we sent him over to liquor and gaming and let him run that. So okay, Mr. Glendinning's there.

So we brought in Mr. Nystuen to replace Mr. Glendinning. Another NDP hack. And what does he do to fix the problem? Instead of getting the computers up and running efficiently, whoops, he turns the switch. Let's shut them things down — they're not working. Let's do it manually.

Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the problem doesn't stop there. The problem didn't stop there. Because now we have the SHIN (Saskatchewan Health Information Network) program that needs to be a computer whiz — for lack of a better word — to get this up and running. Our confidentiality of our private medical records depend on that. The whole system depends on somebody, somewhere, knowing how to get this up and running. They're spending \$40 million on it.

So what do we do? We take a person that shut down the computers at STC — over a million and a half dollars — and bring him in to set up the computers for the SHIN program. The problem gets worse. I have never seen in the history of this province so many friends of the sitting government in high places costing us so many millions and millions of dollars.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would just like to touch on a few of the members opposite, and I believe the budget is tied to this because it's a lot of the things that actually affect the budget because of things some of the members opposite have done. And I'd like to talk first of my friend, the Minister of Agriculture, who used to be my neighbour and his family is still good supporters of mine. His support on the Wheat Board for an example; not listening to farmers out there, what they're saying, and comes out to the Senate hearings and said we must pass this Bill quickly.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, there is people on both sides of the issue that do not like this Bill. This government has managed in the seven years they've been in here to make agriculture one of the lowest priorities in this province. And I noticed this morning when the member for Saskatoon Sutherland was talking about the cost that this government has to run this province, mentioned farmers.

I don't think he gets the picture. Farmers do not cost this province; they are of the biggest part of the economy in this province — 45 out of every 100 jobs are created by agriculture.

So where is the cost and the drain down on the budget from agriculture? I'd say we're pulling our load; in fact I would say we're pulling more than our load. We're trying to supply food

at far less than it costs to grow and we're actually getting nothing for support from this government.

It doesn't matter . . .

An Hon. Member: — What do you want? Government money?

Mr. Bjornerud: — The member opposite says, do we need government money? Well now that's a fine one. These farmers have given up on this government so long ago, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that they wouldn't even consider money being an option. And money will not solve the problem. Hand-outs will not solve it.

What we need is support out there, and by sticking up for the Wheat Board, keeping the Wheat Board in a position of full and total control, is not the support that farmers need right now.

I'd like to also stay with Agriculture for a minute and talk about the member from Rosetown, and the record that member has done for the province's farmers. We go back to the GRIP (gross revenue insurance program) problem when that member was fully responsible. And I think what I'm trying to tie in here, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is the reason that that member will not be re-elected again, that is only one of many of them, what he did to farmers.

Let's go on to his time with Highways. And his idea of fixing the highways of this province was to buy a 44 Massey, an 8-foot cultivator; let's go out there and rip them up and gravel them. That's how he was going to solve the problem. And I believe after the next election we could probably find him a job doing that because a 44 Massey will be cheap and so will a cultivator. And the shape that some of these highways are in, they would be better if we ripped them up and cultivated them — they'd be smoother.

But the member from Rosetown's record does not stop there, Mr. Deputy Speaker. He went on to take on the Environment department and decided, you know what I'm going to do here is dig up every fuel tank in this province. I'll fix the environment; I'll protect the environment. Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, he caused havoc within this department because we dug up many tanks in this province; we closed many service stations in small towns — by the way, many towns that don't have service stations any more, all on account of the member for Rosetown.

And I guess what I'm trying to say for the last two is, the Minister of Agriculture, and the member for Rosetown, is that I don't believe either of these members will be back after the next election. I'd like to touch on my friend, and I say that . . .

The Deputy Speaker: — Order, order. Why is the member on his feet?

Mr. Ward: — With leave, to introduce guests, Mr. Speaker.

Leave granted.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Mr. Ward: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to

introduce to you, and through you, and to my colleagues in the House, a group of grade 3 to 6 children that we have from the Minto School in North Portal, Saskatchewan, probably one of the farthest southern places in Saskatchewan that's part of my constituency. And also with them are their teachers, Alison Hirsch, and the chaperon, Lorna Story and Allison Machan. So I wish everybody would make them welcome, please.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

SPECIAL ORDER

ADJOURNED DEBATES

MOTION FOR COMMITTEE OF FINANCE (BUDGET DEBATE)

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would just like to touch on a few of the members opposite that I feel that probably will not be here after the next election due to the record of, number one, this budget and the past budget.

But I'd like to talk about the member for Lloydminster, who I've become very good friends with, Mr. Deputy Speaker. She's a fine lady. And I guess the old saying, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is, I love you, but I'll miss you, will come true here because we became good friends and I'll hate to see her go.

Another person I'd like to touch on is the member for Carrot River Valley, the past member of Highways, minister of Highways, and I mean . . . I guess along with this present Minister of Highways, is a kiss of death in this province, because I don't believe, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that probably the member for Carrot River Valley will be back or will the present member for Weyburn be back, because highways alone will be enough to put both of those people to sleep. I would like to mention, and as I realize, the cities are going to be harder for us to break ground in, but I think it's possible and I think I can see it happening.

I'd like to touch on the member for Regina south-east, and I have to be frank about this, Mr. Deputy Speaker. This member ran on the idea of keeping the Plains hospital open. And I agreed with him. It was a good platform. It was a very good platform, except now that member is very silent when the government is questioned on the Plains hospital, and I don't think the people of Regina south-east are going to forget. They elected him to help keep the Plains open and it's not happening.

(1145)

Another of my somewhat rural members is the member from Swift Current, and I believe he's going to have a hard time coming back because in his area . . . I've been to meetings out there with the Saskatchewan Party and we're getting great response. Part of that response is one of the reasons is, we closed care homes out there; part of that response is because high taxes in this province; part of the response is because we wrote agriculture off. We don't care about agriculture, and Swift Current is an agricultural community. So I believe that member will be long gone after the next election.

I'd hate to miss out on the member for Estevan, Mr. Deputy Speaker. One of the examples I would say that's going to hurt you, Mr. Member, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is because this government has decided we'll buy coal from the States. We won't promote our coal industry here. I would suggest, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that member should be embarrassed to say that he's from that constituency, looking after Saskatchewan people.

The member for Weyburn-Big Muddy, Mr. Deputy Speaker, again the Minister of Highways — that's a kiss of death. If that lady had've really seen what was coming — and a fine lady she is — should have said, I do not want this portfolio because I would like to have the chance of being re-elected again.

The Environment minister, Mr. Deputy Speaker — and I have touched on night hunting and stuff like that before — I believe that will be the demise of him. He's gone. And the list could go on but I don't want to take up too much time here. But I'd hate to keep going all the way around, because I believe, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that all the things that that government is doing over there is creating an embarrassment that that government cannot live down. I think, Mr. Deputy Speaker, of what do the people opposite do at night now? You don't dare turn on the radio because the news is all bad. You can't turn the TV on because you're too embarrassed to watch, so that leaves the newspapers.

And let's talk about the newspapers. Let's see the headings, Mr. Deputy Speaker: "Premier won't make promises on road repair." That really impressed SARM at their convention, as I'm sure most of you know. The next headline: "Deputy Premier confession falls short." Well in a real world and an honest and upfront government, what on earth should you have to confess? But his confession not only was poorly done but it was short, accordingly to the media. The auditor, the Provincial Auditor, says we've got to get to the bottom of the Crown fiasco. And it goes on and on.

And the member opposite from Estevan says, we read them. But I would read them quietly and probably with low lights so nobody sees you reading them, because they wouldn't want to see how red your face gets when you read these headlines.

Next headline I read, Mr. Deputy Speaker: "Member for Prince Albert Northcote won't quit over bad deal." So what that's saying is he's not accepting his responsibility. Then we go on, it says: "Cost of chasing Guyana deal worthwhile says the Premier." Well doesn't that take the cake?

It's worth chasing because we spent \$1.4 million but actually only reported . . . the government reported 800,000, but now we find out it's 1.4, but it's worthwhile chasing. With public funds? Well I say the Premier and the members opposite should go out and check with the public, because I have not found one taxpayer in this province that wanted to see their money spent in Guyana.

We go on to other headlines, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and this headline is: "Senate hears clashing views on reform of Wheat Board." And this goes back to our Ag minister saying, let's hurry this legislation through. My buddy Ralph Goodale, who is probably the most hated man in agriculture this province has ever seen, and we have our Agriculture minister siding with him.

Doesn't even consider, doesn't even consider dual marketing, which many in this province want. He says the inclusion clause doesn't matter. Well canola for an example, if it had've been under the Wheat Board, we'd be getting 2.50 or \$3. Instead of that, we're getting eight or nine. Flax, if it had've been under the Wheat Board, we'd be getting 2 or \$3. But it's not. We're getting nine or ten. And the list goes on.

You know that philosophy of the Ag Minister and Mr. Goodale really sums up the members opposite to a T. It says, I'll keep mine but let's share yours. And that's the theory I believe this government works under.

But then there's actually some good news I'm sure the members opposite would like to see. "Saskatchewan Party 4,579 members get to vote for the leadership convention which starts tonight"—that's a headline, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

And you don't have to be embarrassed about that. What you're doing is actually . . . you're helping promote the Saskatchewan Party at a faster rate than we could have ever dreamt doing it ourselves. And we thank you for that.

The next one, Mr. Deputy Speaker: "Sask Party wins over public poll reveals." Actually all week the poll revealed that, I believe. I can't believe it. You just keep doing things that seem to keep building us up.

You know, actually when you think about it, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we're less than eight months old. Really we're hardly out of diapers and we're hardly walking and I believe you already hear our footsteps. And that's hard because if we're just barely walking, you shouldn't even be able to see us, let alone hear our footsteps.

Another headline here: "Richer offers rejected." And that goes back to talking about Channel Lake. And it's very similar to the Crown Construction Tendering Agreement. Don't worry about saving money or getting the best deal, do what's best for our buddies. Something like the patronage thing that I went through before with the list of Mr. Messer, Don Ching, Mr. Glendinning, and oh my God, the list goes on and on and on. It doesn't quit.

But we didn't take the best two offers on Channel Lake. I believe we took one that we could . . . now how should I put this? I guess we don't know till Crown Corps maybe brings it out, but I doubt it. Because of the number of members of the government that sit on that we may never find out all the things that have happened within Channel Lake. But I hope we do, because I think if you could ever drain Channel Lake and get to the bottom of it, there's a lot of skeletons there.

"Deputy Premier says taxpayers came out ahead," and I guess we did. Because I believe what the Deputy Premier is doing is using the Leader of the Third Party's calculator. And you all know how that works—13,000 Liberal memberships. But he punched the wrong button and it was what?—two, three, maybe four. I don't think it was four. I was there once. Sure it wasn't four. It was higher when we were there than it is now by far, but I'm sure it was never four. I think he is borrowing some of John's memberships and that'll do him no favours in Saskatchewan either.

So, Mr. Speaker, if it wasn't that my voice was going I have a lot of other material I'd love to go into. But my throat's getting sore, and you'll notice from my comments this morning how serious I take this, so I thank you for the opportunity for commenting on the budget. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Deputy Speaker:—It is my duty to warn the Assembly that the hon. member is about to exercise his right to close the debate and afterwards all members will be precluded from speaking to this question. Therefore if any member wishes to speak, you must do so now.

Hon. Mr. Cline:—Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It's certainly an honour for me to rise today to close the debate on the 1988-89 . . . or '98-99 provincial budget. Before I do that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'd like to thank the constituents of Saskatoon Mount Royal for allowing me the privilege to represent them in the legislature.

And I also want to thank the people across Saskatchewan, hundreds and thousands of them, Mr. Speaker, who participated in three budget consultation meetings and provided hundreds of very worthwhile suggestions and ideas.

And by and large those suggestions and ideas are reflected in the budget. The budget reflects the views of those people and many others, Mr. Deputy Speaker, who've met with me and met with my colleagues here in the Legislative Assembly.

I want to say that those colleagues too have played a vital role of course in the development of the budget. And I am very proud to be a member of a caucus that comes through time and again with encouragement and advice, teamwork and support that is very vital to this process and to our future as a province.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline:—This is a thoughtful and dedicated group of people, and I want them to know how much I appreciate being their colleague.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this budget is an achievement of which I think we can be proud. And I think it's an achievement that Saskatchewan people can be proud of. It is the fifth consecutive balanced budget, and it represents how far we've come as a province.

As my predecessors in this position, the member for Saskatoon Idylwyld and the member for Regina Dewdney know so well, we faced some very difficult decisions over the last number of years. But balancing the budget was never an end in itself. For this government, it always was a means to an end, so that we could regain our ability to improve the quality of life for Saskatchewan people. And that's why the tough decisions that we made were made.

And we promised the people that when we were able to do so, we would return the benefits of their hard work and sacrifice to Saskatchewan people. And that is what this budget is about. It is a budget about people—their education, their jobs, their families, the health services they use, the highways they drive

on, and the communities in which they live.

This budget, Mr. Speaker, invests in people.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — And it builds on the momentum that Saskatchewan people have established towards the future of opportunity, security, and strength. And most importantly, it invests in our youth — an entire generation of people who had nothing to do with the burden of debt strapped to their backs, thanks to the Conservatives in the 1980s.

What this budget does, Mr. Speaker, is to give back. And remarks I've heard from the Conservatives and the Liberals over the past few days remind me of a saying: "When arguing of the shadow, we forgo the substance." And what the members opposite have done . . . what have they done, other than argue about the shadow, about what isn't there in the budget, instead of examining what is there.

They call for increased health spending, in spite of the fact that we're making the largest investment in health care in the history of the province. They call for an increase in highway spending, in spite of the fact that they gave away millions of dollars in the 1980s that we could have used today on our highways. And they tell us we should spend and spend and spend and spend some more.

Then in the next breath, we hear repeated calls for huge tax cuts. That's what they say. In spite of the fact that when those members and their Conservative predecessors racked up a \$15 billion debt. They did so in the full knowledge that our children would be paying that debt off for years to come.

Mr. Speaker, the shadow of the 1980s still hangs over the benches of the Conservative opposition. Their thinking is, you cut taxes, increase spending, and run the government in red ink. And you continue to do so until the lending institutions or the people catch up to you.

(1200)

The Conservative members will argue and argue and argue about how to spend money we do not have. And why don't we have it? Because those members across the floor spent it and spent more. They mortgaged our children's future, and that shadow will never disappear. It will follow them wherever they go.

And as my colleague from Shellbrook-Spiritwood pointed out a few days ago, and the member from Saskatoon Sutherland said today, Saskatchewan people have spent \$5.7 billion on interest payments on the Conservative debt since 1993 — more than our entire annual budget.

Mr. Speaker, the people of Saskatchewan deserve better and they rightfully expect sound, responsible stewardship of their tax dollars. And when they look to the budget, they look for substance, not shadows. And this budget provides it.

Half a billion dollars gone from the mortgage they put on our children's future; \$58 million back into the pockets of

Saskatchewan families through tax reduction; \$88 million more into health services; \$20 million more into highways; \$29 million more for children. And on it goes.

That, Mr. Speaker, is substance. Is it everything we want? Of course not. Like all Saskatchewan people we too would like to see taxes and debt come down faster. We too would like to take the \$725 million we spent on interest payments in this year alone and put it back into services for people.

But, Mr. Speaker, that isn't possible all at once and Saskatchewan people know that we can't spend like the Conservatives and still keep the books balanced. They know we can't slash taxes to the bone without decimating the services they rely on. And that is why less than one in ten Saskatchewan people support the new Conservative Party.

Mr. Speaker, we have not heard a single credible alternative to the balanced sensible approach this government is pursuing. We've not seen any evidence that members opposite understand what good financial management means to the people of Saskatchewan.

The member from Saltcoats and other Conservatives have said that the federal tax cut recently gives them a half a cup of coffee, and the provincial tax cut gives them the other half. Well, Mr. Speaker, I've heard people complain their cup is half empty sometimes and I've heard people complain their cup is half full. But this is the first time I've heard people complain that their cup is full.

Well I have this to say to the Conservatives: wake up and smell the coffee.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Mr. Speaker, our ability to invest in people is directly related to how well we manage the province's finances. As our financial situation improves, our ability to invest in people will continue to improve.

I want to talk about some of the investments in this budget that I think are particularly important because they focus on the new generation, a generation that had nothing to do with the Conservative debt, and all the generations that will follow.

Mr. Speaker, I and others in my generation were treated very well by the society in which we grew up. We enjoyed all the benefits of public education, health care, and a caring, compassionate society. These benefits were made possible by the commitment of our parents and grandparents and by the commitment of governments across Canada to the well-being of all members of our society.

I and others like me were able to reach for our dreams, to attend universities and colleges without mortgaging our own futures because of that commitment. And, Mr. Speaker, each of us who has benefited from public education has an obligation to give back to society, to think not just about what we can get but what we can give. And I say and this government says, it's time to give back to the next generation.

By the early 1990s, interest payments on the debt surpassed the

entire amount allocated to education for our youth. Interest was the second largest annual expenditure in the provincial budget. That legacy, that shadow, is an affront to those who worked so hard for decades to give us a publicly funded, affordable and accessible education system. And worse, it is an attack on the ability of our children and grandchildren to pursue their hopes and dreams.

Our government says this is wrong. Like others before us, we must do everything in our power today to ease the burden on our youth and allow them to embrace their future. That is our responsibility. That is why I am proud of the major investment our budget makes in education, specifically post-secondary education, and in training our young people for new opportunities.

This year, Mr. Speaker, we are investing \$1 billion in educating and training students of all ages, second only to our investment in health. That includes \$23 million for post-secondary capital needs; it includes \$181 million — 9 million more than last year — for operating costs for universities and colleges. And it includes \$136 million for skills training through SIAST (Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology), JobStart, Future Skills, apprenticeship, and other programs.

University of Regina president, Don Wells, says, “This budget is the most positive I’ve seen for a university in 30 years.”

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — And, Mr. Speaker, we’re increasing the weekly amount of support available through our student aid program to students with dependants so that more young adults can obtain a post-secondary education.

We’re establishing a bursary program to help minimize education-related debt for thousands of Saskatchewan students. University of Saskatchewan Students’ Union president, Natasha Stinka, called the budget incredibly optimistic and said that students were excited about the changes to the student aid program.

Mr. Speaker, while we’re on the topic of the next generation, I think a poll in today’s newspaper raises an interesting point. The members opposite propose a very simple solution to all of our problems. They say sell the Crowns and use the proceeds to give us more today. Spend the money built up over decades. They say sell the Crowns; let’s have a party. We’ll just send the bill to the next generation.

Mr. Speaker, that is just like selling the farm to pay your bills. This is the Tory Party’s budget plan. Sell the farm, pay some bills, and have a party with the proceeds. And who will they sell to? Well from past experience, to their rich friends and at fire sale prices. Never mind the future and future generations.

Well Saskatchewan people rejected this party-now and pay-later approach when the Tories tried it in the 1980s, and I say, Mr. Speaker, they’ll reject that approach again.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Because the people of Saskatchewan and

the government believe that our Crown corporations are part of our province’s heritage, and we intend to pass on this legacy to the next generation. That is what our future is about.

We will be doing all we can to help our youths succeed and prosper in the new century. That also means making sure that Saskatchewan’s economy continues to grow and produce the jobs we want for our youth and our future.

This budget invests in those jobs. For example, the new research and development tax credit has been very favourably received. Peter McCann, the president of Ag-West Biotech, says the tax credit will encourage people to invest more resources in ag-biotech and it will be a major attraction for people looking to invest in Saskatchewan.

And what better place to invest than in industries that will demand the skills and talents of our younger generation.

The same can be said for the new Saskatchewan film employment tax credit, another young industry seeking young, talented people. Rob King, president of the Saskatchewan motion picture industry association, told the *Leader-Post* that the employment tax credit will easily double the amount of money spent and the jobs created by film projects in the province. And Mark Prasuhn, general manager of SaskFILM, added, “We’re all very elated. It’s a great step forward for the industry.”

Young people, young exciting industries — that is Saskatchewan’s future.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Finally, Mr. Speaker, let me touch on this year’s major new initiative, our redesign of social assistance. Why are we doing it? Because we all know that a strong, healthy society depends on the full participation of all its members. We also know that the traditional social assistance program has many barriers to work that discourage people from finding and maintaining employment.

We’re changing that. With new training programs and a growing economy, we’ve seen declines in the number of people receiving assistance. Because, Mr. Speaker, people want to work. But we have to remove those barriers that make it difficult if not impossible for many people to get ahead. That’s why we’re providing an employment supplement to ensure that people are financially better off working than they would be on welfare, to help families with child-related costs when they work and prevent them from falling back onto welfare due to the needs of their children.

This, Mr. Speaker, is unique to Saskatchewan. Like the award-winning action plan for children, it is a tribute to the innovation and compassion of Saskatchewan people and their determination to find a better way of doing things. Many parents moving from welfare to work have also faced the loss of health benefits for their children. Our redesign of social assistance includes a new program of supplementary health benefits for lower-income working parents and their children.

Mr. Speaker, as we know, Saskatchewan had led the charge to

reduce child poverty in Canada by developing a new national program to help millions of Canadian children. The National Child Benefit is this country's first new social program in 30 years. And we can all be proud of our Premier, our Minister of Social Services, and the hundreds of government officials and staff who have worked so hard to keep this issue on the national agenda.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — We can also be proud that Saskatchewan is taking the concept even further.

The new Saskatchewan Child Benefit will complement the national program by providing a monthly child allowance to help eligible families provide for their children's basic food, clothing, and personal needs regardless of their parent's circumstances.

This benefit will reduce barriers to work by providing support outside the welfare system; so that people will be able to leave welfare for work without jeopardizing their ability to provide for their children's needs. We need, Mr. Speaker, to give poor kids a chance to embrace the kind of life that we all want for ourselves.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — And that is what this budget does. Mr. Speaker, it is a budget that looks to the next generation, it is a budget that looks to our future. And that is why, Mr. Speaker, I will be standing in my place in support of it.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The division bells rang from 12:15 p.m. until 12:19 p.m.

Amendment negatived on the following recorded division.

Yeas — 10

Krawetz	Bjornerud	Toth
Draude	Gantfoer	Heppner
Osika	McPherson	Aldridge
McLane		

Nays — 29

Flavel	Van Mulligen	MacKinnon
Shillington	Mitchell	Tchorzewski
Johnson	Whitmore	Goulet
Lautermilch	Kowalsky	Crofford
Calvert	Teichrob	Koenker
Trew	Renaud	Lorje
Sonntag	Scott	Cline
Hamilton	Wall	Kasperski
Ward	Murray	Langford
Murrell	Thomson	

The division bells rang from 12:23 p.m. until 12:42 p.m.

Motion agreed to on the following recorded division.

Yeas — 30

Romanow	Flavel	Van Mulligen
MacKinnon	Shillington	Mitchell
Tchorzewski	Johnson	Whitmore
Goulet	Lautermilch	Kowalsky
Crofford	Calvert	Teichrob
Koenker	Trew	Renaud
Lorje	Sonntag	Scott
Cline	Hamilton	Wall
Kasperski	Ward	Murray
Langford	Murrell	Thomson

Nays — 10

Krawetz	Bjornerud	Toth
Draude	Gantfoer	Heppner
Osika	McPherson	Aldridge
McLane		

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

COMMITTEE OF FINANCE

**General Revenue Fund
Agriculture and Food
Vote 1**

The committee reported progress.

The Speaker: — I wish all hon. members an enjoyable weekend at home with your families or constituents or wherever you may be. Have a good weekend.

The Assembly adjourned at 12:46 p.m.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRESENTING PETITIONS

D'Autremont	439
Bjornerud	439
Toth	439
Heppner	439
Gantfoer	439
Draude	439
Boyd	439
McLane	439
Aldridge	439
Osika	440
McPherson	440
Goohsen	440

READING AND RECEIVING PETITIONS

Clerk	440
-------------	-----

NOTICES OF MOTIONS AND QUESTIONS

Julé	440
Goohsen	440

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Osika	440
Langford	440
Ward	454

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Can-Oat Milling Opens in Martensville	
Langford	441
Kelvington Students Celebrate Canadian Citizenship	
Draude	441
Swift Current Pioneer Co-operative Has Record Year	
Wall	441
The Educated Corpse	
McLane	441
Weekly Newspaper Headlines	
Ward	442
Peewee C Champions	
D'Autremont	442
Prince Albert Bottling Plant	
Kowalsky	442
Save the Plains Public Forums	
Aldridge	442

ORAL QUESTIONS

Regina Hospital Emergency Services	
Toth	443
Serby	443
Inquiry into Channel Lake	
Boyd	444
Romanow	444
Health Care Services in Melville	
Osika	445
Serby	445
Compensation for Hepatitis C Victims	
McLane	446
Serby	446
Grain Transportation	
Julé	446
Romanow	446

ORDERS OF THE DAY

WRITTEN QUESTIONS

Kowalsky	447
----------------	-----

SPECIAL ORDER	
ADJOURNED DEBATES	
MOTION FOR COMMITTEE OF FINANCE	
(BUDGET DEBATE)	
Koenker	447
Bjornerud	450
Cline	456
Recorded divisions (amendment and motion)	459
COMMITTEE OF FINANCE	
General Revenue Fund	
Agriculture and Food — Vote 1	459