

The Assembly met at 1:30 p.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRESENTING PETITIONS

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to present a petition. And I read the prayer which goes as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to halt any plans it has to proceed with enforced amalgamation to municipalities in Saskatchewan.

This comes from people in Grenfell, Melfort, Lake Lenore, St. Brieux, basically all over Saskatchewan because that's the attitude. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Ms. Draude: — Mr. Speaker, I too have a petition to present today for cellular coverage in the Watson area. The prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the provincial government to ensure reliable cellular service to Watson and area by installing a cellular tower at Watson.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

The people who have signed this petition are from Quill Lake, Leroy, Englefeld, and Watson.

Mr. Gantfoer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to present a petition from people opposed to the enforced municipal amalgamation. The prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to halt any plans it has to proceed with enforced amalgamation of municipalities in Saskatchewan.

Signatures on this petition, Mr. Speaker, come from the communities of Broadview, Kipling, Hanley, Saskatoon, Allan, Dundurn, and communities thereabouts.

I so present, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As well to present petitions to the Assembly in regards to forced municipal amalgamations. Reading the prayer:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to halt any plans it has to proceed with enforced amalgamation of municipalities in Saskatchewan.

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

Mr. Speaker, the petitions I present are signed by individuals from the communities of Windthorst, Peebles, Glenavon, Chamberlain, Dalmeny, and many other communities

throughout the province of Saskatchewan.

I so present.

Mr. Peters: — I also bring a petition in regards to amalgamation and I will read the prayer:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to halt any plans to proceed with enforced amalgamation of municipalities in Saskatchewan.

Signed by petitioners from Duck Lake, Glenavon, and Grenfell.

I so present.

Ms. Eagles: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too stand today to present petitions on behalf of Saskatchewan citizens concerned about forced rural amalgamation. And the prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to halt any plans it has to proceed with forced amalgamation of municipalities in Saskatchewan.

And the petitioners that have signed this are from Grenfell, Glenavon, Storthoaks, Carnduff, etc.

I so present.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you; that's music to my ears, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to present a petition on behalf of people in Swift Current who are concerned about hospital funding in my hometown. And the prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the provincial government to assist in the regeneration plan for the Swift Current regional hospital by providing approximately 7.54 million, thereby allowing the Swift Current District Health Board the opportunity to provide improved regional health care services.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

And this petition has been signed by people in the city of Swift Current.

I so present.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I also have a petition to present today to do with the forcing of municipalities to amalgamate against their will. The prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon.

Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to halt any plans it has to proceed with enforced amalgamation of municipalities in Saskatchewan.

The signatures, Mr. Speaker, are from the communities of Glenavon, Richmond, Storthoaks, Gainsborough, Bellegarde, and a number of other communities, Mr. Speaker.

I so present.

Mr. Weekes: — Mr. Speaker, I also rise to read a petition opposed to enforced municipal amalgamation:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to halt any plans it has to proceed with enforced amalgamation of municipalities in Saskatchewan.

From people from Windthorst, Vanscoy, Saskatoon, Regina.

Mr. Brkich: — Mr. Speaker, I too have a petition against forced amalgamation:

Whereas your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to halt any plans it has to proceed with enforced amalgamation of municipalities in Saskatchewan.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

The signatures here are from Regina, Waldheim, Cadillac, and surrounding areas. Thank you.

Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I have a petition concerning the lack of cellular service in the Watson area. And the prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the provincial government to ensure reliable cellular services to Watson and area by installing a cellular tower at Watson.

The petitioners are from Watson and Naicam area. I so present.

Mr. Wakefield: — I too have a petition signed by citizens concerned with the forced amalgamation. The prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to halt any plans that it has to proceed with enforced amalgamation of municipalities in Saskatchewan.

Signatures are from towns of Kipling, Maidstone, and Waseca.

I so present.

Mr. Hart: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too have a petition that I'd like to present on behalf of citizens concerned with municipal amalgamation. And I read the prayer as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to halt any plans to proceed with enforced amalgamations of

municipalities in Saskatchewan.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

And this petition is signed by citizens of Windthorst, Vanscoy, Montmartre, and Delisle.

I do so present, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Allchurch: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I stand today too to present petitions on behalf of forced amalgamation.

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to halt any plans it has to proceed with forced amalgamation of municipalities in Saskatchewan.

And I have petitioners from Duck Lake, Maidstone, Prince Albert.

I so present.

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is with great responsibility that I rise as well to present a petition on the issue of forced amalgamation. The prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to halt any plans it has to proceed with forced amalgamation of municipalities in Saskatchewan.

This petition is signed by the good citizens of Kipling, Broadview, Grenfell, and Windthorst.

I so present.

READING AND RECEIVING PETITIONS

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

Of citizens of the province praying that the Assembly cause the government not to implement the Personal Income Tax Review Committee's recommendation to expand the provincial sales tax.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Mr. Speaker, it's a great pleasure to introduce to you, and through you to all members of the Assembly, the former member from Carrot River Valley, Mr. Andy Renaud. It's good to see Andy back here today, and I had a chance to visit with him a little bit last night.

And as I indicated in my maiden speech, I certainly appreciated the campaign that we had in Carrot River Valley. I still believe it was probably one of the classiest in the entire province.

As most of you members will know, Andy is an avid curler and golfer and I am just very glad to have played my part in allowing him to further pursue his recreational interests.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Gantefoer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I too would like to join in welcoming Andy to the Assembly today. Andy has always been and continues to be a constituent of mine, and I've always been happy to have him. And I'm also more pleased now that when he is in the constituency he's not undermining my incredibly good work.

In addition I'd like to welcome Ken Magnus here from Tisdale. Ken is a small business individual and runs a business in Tisdale. He's been very active in the community, and he's very proud of his accomplishments.

The one shortfall — an error of judgment — was to run for the Liberals in the last provincial election.

However, we do welcome him here. Ken, take care.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Peters: — . . . my wife, Shirley, over there. Our friends, Isabelle McLellan, Werner and Eileen Peters from Winnipeg, Manitoba. Eileen is also Ben's cousin.

Ms. Lorje: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Like other members in this august Assembly, I would like to join in welcoming former MLA (Member of the Legislative Assembly), Andy Renaud.

As many of you know, Andy was my seat mate for many years, so we shared a lot of laughs and quips about the opposition and a lot of . . . We share the same social democratic ideals.

I would also note, as has one hon. member, the presence of Ken Magnus.

Now what members in this Assembly may not be aware of is that Ken Magnus, the former Liberal candidate for Carrot River Valley, and Andy Renaud, the former New Democratic MLA and candidate for Carrot River Valley, have actually formed a partnership in a consulting business. So they . . . There is another coalition happening in business as well as in government — proof once more of the wisdom of the liberal and democratic political philosophies.

While I'm on my feet, Mr. Speaker, though the . . . I have one other guest I would like to introduce. And this is a very important introduction for me because this is the introduction of a young man who has already demonstrated a very complete commitment to politics and to education. I'm not sure what his political ideology is or will be, but I do know that whatever political party he eventually decides to join will benefit considerably from him.

I am referring to Michael Burgess in the Speaker's gallery. Michael is a student at Walter Murray Collegiate. He took yesterday off from school to come down to watch the presentation of the budget — he came down on the bus — and decided that this theatre was so interesting that he would stay here today to observe the proceedings today.

Members of the legislature might note that one of the things that Michael has already accomplished is a web page and it is at

www.server.4mg.com. And I would encourage all members to go and access this web site and see what the youth of today are thinking. The web site is actually an acronym for students against the violation of expression and rights.

I ask all hon. members to join me in welcoming Michael Burgess to the legislature.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to recognize Gord Gunoff and other members and staff from IBEW (International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers) who are in the gallery. And I hope that we could both agree that we're enjoying a quiet period in our relationship, and it's nice to see you here today.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Melenchuk: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to join with my colleagues in welcoming Ken Magnus and Andy Renaud, to your gallery today. As has been stated, Ken is a small business person in Tisdale — owner and operator of Taylor's Mens Wear, and he was our candidate in the last election.

And we do have the coalition arrangement in the gallery that we're seeing now, but it's just representative of the large business support for this coalition government.

Thank you very much.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Tributes to Sandra Schmirler

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — Mr. Speaker, by leave of the Assembly and notwithstanding the rules and procedures for members' statements, I would ask that members' statements be used today to pay tribute to the memory of Sandra Schmirler; and if necessary that the period of ten minutes usually allocated to members' statements be extended beyond that time if necessary; and in doing so, the Assembly observe the following order of speakers: Deputy Premier, the Leader of the Opposition, Leader of the Third Party; and, at the conclusion of our remarks, that the Assembly observe a moment of silence.

Leave granted.

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — Mr. Speaker, I know I speak for all of us represented here, and indeed for everyone in Saskatchewan, when I say how greatly saddened we all were to hear of the passing of Sandra Schmirler.

Mr. Speaker, the writer Bernard Malamud said once, and I quote: "No life can be recaptured wholly as it was."

Mr. Speaker, that is especially true of the life of Sandra. For although it was a life tragically cut short at just 36 years, it would be impossible to wholly recapture a life so full of accomplishment, a life so full of achievement, and a life so full

of joy.

Mr. Speaker, for most people in Saskatchewan Sandra Schmirler, the impact she had included the sport of curling, it had impact across the province, our nation, around the globe, and at the very pinnacle of this sport in the Olympic Games.

Her record in curling speaks for itself — a three-time Canadian champion, three times world champion, and a winner of the gold medal representing this nation at the Winter Olympics. And I know for most of us, we will always remember the sight of her rink on the medal podium at Nagano singing our national anthem. But even more importantly in some ways, waving a tiny Saskatchewan flag for the admiring world to see.

And we'll remember the achievement and we will remember the pride each of us felt. Because, Mr. Speaker, it's easy for us to appreciate what we can see. And it's easy to appreciate the gold medals and the amazing performance, the championships, the amazing pressure shots, like that little wick into the house to count for three. Every curling fan knows exactly what I mean and we can all see in our mind's eye that litany of events.

But it's just as important and maybe more so, Mr. Speaker, that we remember to appreciate those things we don't see or can't see. The years of practice, the commitment, the training, the personal sacrifice that goes into this kind of a championship career.

And we must also appreciate the things we can't see, those things like the qualities of determination, the commitment and the discipline. And somebody mentioned to me today that when Sandra lined up to deliver that final rock, that she had the look.

Those were the qualities Sandra brought to the ice and allowed her to become a champion. Those were also the qualities she brought to her courageous battle against her last challenge; a challenge she faced with her characteristic focus, determination, and hugely competitive spirit.

And perhaps that's why we were so sad here in Saskatchewan when we heard the sad news of Sandra's passing. We knew she was up against her toughest opponent, but somehow we were all confident that she would win because Sandra always won. She always found a way to overcome whatever challenges she faced; and we prayed that her strength and that fierce will to win would carry the day again. And sadly, it was not to be.

But I hope we can look beyond Sandra's passing to the fight she put in fighting cancer. And I hope we can focus on the bright and glorious stories and story that was Sandra Schmirler's life — a life of commitment to her sport and ideals, a life of achievement and accomplishment, a life that was too full to be wholly recaptured in these few brief moments and few words.

But, Mr. Speaker, I want to say on behalf of the Premier, of the Government of Saskatchewan, and indeed all people of Saskatchewan, I hope we join together with all colleagues here in the House and add to the record my most profound sadness, and let me extend my deepest condolences to Sandra's family, especially her husband and two small children. Our prayers are with them and I want to thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise in the Assembly today and on behalf of the official opposition to pay special tribute to Sandra Schmirler.

It was with heavy hearts that we said goodbye to Sandra who passed away after her courageous battle with cancer. She will always be remembered as not only one of the world's greatest curlers, but also an international ambassador for the province of Saskatchewan.

I would like to also take this opportunity to send best wishes to Sandra's husband, Shannon, her mom, Shirley, and her two daughters, Jenna and Sara. Sandra's sickness, passing, and funeral were so much in the public eye, and I'm sure that it was a difficult time for the family but they acted with courage and dignity and let the rest of us share our concern and sorrow with them. And we thank the family as well.

Sandra was an inspiration to the people around the world, particularly to us at home as we watched her lead her team to a gold medal at the Nagano Olympics. She was involved in six provincial championships and skipped a foursome that captured three national titles and three world titles. Although this is a very sad time, we should reflect on all of Sandra's proud accomplishments as her legacy will live on.

Mr. Speaker, in Sandra's hometown of Biggar, Saskatchewan — in the constituency that I have the privilege of representing — residents are endeavouring to keep Sandra's spirit and legacy alive. The people of Biggar, in Sandra's honour, are building the Sandra Schmirler Olympic Gold Park, which will be officially opened this summer.

Mr. Speaker, the community of Biggar is rallying together to show their appreciation for all that Sandra has contributed to Saskatchewan. All those involved in this effort are more determined than ever to see the park come to completion.

True to Sandra's form, she was dedicated to this project from the beginning. She offered knowledge and insight for its development and wanted to help in any way that she could. Sandra wanted to make sure that the park would be accessible to everyone and that it would fit in with the new school being built.

Mr. Speaker, this personifies her selfless character as she was more concerned about what she could give to her community rather than receiving — a lesson that we can all learn from.

Sandra gave her best to her family, her sport of curling, her home communities of Biggar and Regina, her province, and her country. Whether one knew her well or just saw her on television, you could not help but like her. Her winning smile, self-deprecating sense of humour, and sense of optimism were contagious.

Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the official opposition and all of the people we serve, and in particular as the member for Rosetown-Biggar, I am honoured to join with the Deputy Premier and the Leader of the Liberal Party in paying special tribute to Sandra Schmirler. We will remember you.

Hon. Mr. Melenchuk: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker, guests and

fellow members of this Assembly. As Leader of the Liberal Party of Saskatchewan, it is an honour to stand before you today to pay tribute to one of Saskatchewan's brightest stars. Earlier this year, Sandra Schmirler was taken away from us following a lengthy battle with cancer.

As all of you know, prior to entering politics I was a practising medical doctor. In my experience I have witnessed first-hand how the ravages of cancer can strike without warning and without notice. Sandra's diagnosis and her struggle exemplified the indiscriminating nature of this disease. For cancer to take someone as young and as full of life as Sandra is truly a tragedy.

Sandra had a never-give-up attitude and a spirit that can be recognized in her many accomplishments. She took a love for her sport beyond what many of us only dream of. Yes, Sandra was an Olympian and a world champion.

Yet the dedication she had for her sport was second only to the dedication she had for her family. When we remember Sandra let us not only remember her for her achievements on the ice, but let us also remember her for who she was. Sandra recognized the importance of her family.

It's true that she realized the value of practice, hard work, and determination. But even while she remained focused on her pursuit of excellence, she never lost sight of what was truly important. We have much to learn from Sandra and she will remain a role model for many, many years to come.

When things looked tough, she inspired a sense of optimism and hope. She had something that seemed to make miracles happen and an attitude that made even the impossible seem possible. Her attitude and leadership carried her and her teammates through many tough times, and more often than not, it pushed them onward to yet another victory.

And, of course, let us not forget that we will also remember Sandra for her love to curl and her good sportsmanship.

When Sandra was first diagnosed with cancer, it was a shock to all of us. And when she passed away, her family's loss was felt throughout Saskatchewan, across Canada, and throughout the international curling community.

To her husband, Shannon, and their two daughters, Sara and Jenna, I wish to say on behalf of all of us here today that our hearts and prayers are with you. Sandra will always be remembered in the minds of all of us and in our hearts she will always remain.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: — I would ask all hon. members to join in rising for a moment of silence.

The Assembly observed a moment of silence.

The Speaker: — I thank you, hon. members.

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the member for Rosetown-Biggar, by leave of the Assembly:

That the transcripts of the statements made with respect to the memory of Sandra Schmirler be communicated to the bereaved families on behalf of this Assembly by Mr. Speaker.

I so move.

Motion agreed to.

ORAL QUESTIONS

Tax Implications of Budget

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As you might guess, my question is for the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Minister, for months Saskatchewan people have been looking forward to an immediate tax cut in the provincial budget. And what happened? At midnight last night you hit Saskatchewan taxpayers with a \$160 million tax hike. Not a tax cut, Mr. Minister. A tax hike. An increase.

Mr. Minister, you just don't get it. Saskatchewan people are demanding tax relief. Not three years from now. Not three months from now. But right now. And what did they get? A tax hike.

Mr. Minister, Saskatchewan taxpayers are demanding tax relief. How can you possibly justify raising the taxes?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Mr. Speaker, the difference between the Leader of the Opposition and this government is that the Leader of the Opposition is thinking about the next three months. What we're thinking about on this side of the House, Mr. Speaker, is the future of this province. That's what we're thinking about.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — This budget, Mr. Speaker, is about the future. It's not about the next 24 hours, it's not about buying people's votes with their own money — it's about the future. And when you're building a province, Mr. Speaker, as we on this side of the House are doing, you need a vision, Mr. Speaker. You need a vision for the future and you need a plan to develop the economy. And that is what is in the budget, Mr. Speaker, a plan which will save the average Saskatchewan family \$1,000 a year.

Mr. Speaker, if the opposition leader had any vision he would know that on July 1 of this year the flat tax is going to be cut in half, and nine months from now we're going to a new tax system, Mr. Speaker. And what we need here is vision, and the Leader of the Opposition has no vision, and that's why he has no future, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hermanson: — Well thank you, Mr. Speaker. Unfortunately three years from now many people won't still be in Saskatchewan because they're not prepared to wait that long. I want to quote one of the columnists from today's *StarPhoenix*

because I think he summed up what every taxpayer in Saskatchewan is thinking this morning. I quote:

I was hoping for tax cuts now. I was looking to the government for reassurance now that I'm not a fool for staying in Saskatchewan.

And all we get now, however, is a sales tax on used cars and used sofas. We're bleeding to death here and the government gives us another puncture wound and the promise of first aid next year.

Mr. Speaker, people are not fools for staying in Saskatchewan — Saskatchewan is a great province. But this government is wrecking it.

Mr. Minister, where is the tax relief you promised? Why didn't you cut our taxes now?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Mr. Speaker, instead of listening to the gospel of gloom and doom from the Leader of the Opposition, let's listen to what the people of the province are saying.

We have Stan Schmidt, the president of the chamber of commerce saying, this budget puts us in a much more competitive position.

Canadian Federation of Independent Business: These changes are going to be significant.

Executive director of the North Saskatoon Business Association. "There is no question it will benefit all people in this province."

Mr. Speaker, while he is spreading his gospel of gloom and doom, we're offering a bright future for Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker.

And I'll tell you something. The Leader of the Opposition is unhappy. And I'll tell you why, Mr. Speaker. He hates this tax cut. He hates this tax cut because he's been asking for tax reform for years. Now he's got it and he's afraid he's not going to have anything to complain about any more, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — But we're not going to be guided by the doom and gloom of the Leader of the Opposition. We're looking to the future, and our future is bright in Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well I sure live in Saskatchewan and I'm not getting a tax cut. And neither are the people of Saskatchewan. That's why they're upset.

You can try and spin this however you want. The bottom line is taxpayers are getting taken to the cleaners — which, by the way, is now taxable. Tax hikes now, tax cuts later. The problem is nobody believes you, Mr. Minister, because they know how

you operate. They know you will find a way to claw back every dime of whatever tax cut they can get in the future.

Higher utility bills, higher property taxes, more PST (provincial sales tax). One way or other, you will reach into their pockets and take back every dime of this so-called tax cut. They've seen you do it before; they know you'll do it again.

Mr. Minister, it's really simple. Why don't you just cut taxes instead of raising them?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition talks about picking people's pockets. I'll tell you one thing we're not going to do. We're not going to pick the pockets of our children like they would do if they were in office.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Because when we're talking about slashing taxes by hundreds of millions of dollars irresponsibly, freezing health care and education, and going back into deficit and debt like they would, Mr. Speaker, then you're picking the pockets of the next generation. But we're not going to do that.

We're going to build a bright future for the next generation, Mr. Speaker. And I'm not concerned about the doom and gloom from the Leader of the Opposition over what's happening in the next three months. I'm looking to the new tax system that is representing the largest tax cut in the history of this province.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hermanson: — Well, Mr. Speaker, the minister doesn't seem know it but our kids are leaving Saskatchewan because of his high taxes. The NDP (New Democratic Party) keeps telling us you just have to wait. Tax hikes now; tax cuts later.

Well, Mr. Minister, Saskatchewan people are sick and tired of waiting. They're tired of waiting for a tax cut, they're tired of waiting for the health system to work, they're tired of waiting for highways that are safe to drive on, they're sick of waiting for you to create a long-term farm safety net program. They're just sick of waiting, Mr. Minister.

And now guess what they are waiting for? They're waiting for the next election so they can finish the job, finish the job they started on September 16 and get rid of the rest of you people . . . all your Liberal flunkies.

Mr. Minister, why do we have to wait? Why don't you just cut taxes now?

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Mr. Speaker, as I said to the Leader of the Opposition — although he may have trouble hearing me because the members opposite are yelling quite loudly — but as I said to him, on July 1 of this year, three months from now, the Saskatchewan flat tax is being cut in half. And on January 1 — nine months from now — we're going to a new taxation system, Mr. Speaker, that is going to eliminate the flat tax, the high income surtax, and the debt reduction surtax.

And it's going to be the largest tax reduction in the history of the province. Something that commerce professor Glenn Feltham at the University of Saskatchewan calls enormously important, Mr. Speaker. To the people of Saskatchewan, a bright future is enormously important.

To the Leader of the Opposition, short-term political nitpicking is important, but that's not what's important to the people of the province, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Tax Implications for Municipalities and School Boards

Mr. McMorris: — Mr. Speaker, my question too is to the Minister of Finance. Mr. Minister, the biggest winner in yesterday's budget may have been the company that makes Alka-Seltzer because, judging from the initial response, your budget left most of the people in Saskatchewan feeling sick to their stomach.

After all, just 10 hours ago you promised big tax cuts. You increased the provincial sales tax by \$160 million. I guess that's the NDP's idea of tax relief — just like Alka-Seltzer. More money for the NDP means less money in the pockets of Saskatchewan families.

Unfortunately the tax increases won't be stopped with your budget, Mr. Minister. The mayor of Saskatoon is saying this morning that property taxes will be going up to pay for the NDP government's massive increase in the PST.

Is that the NDP's master plan, Mr. Minister? Raise the PST by \$160 million, then sit back while municipalities are forced to raise property taxes to pay for it?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Well, Mr. Speaker, listening to these questions, I think I'm going to need some Alka-Seltzer myself.

But I want to say to the member opposite, if they would look at the budget and what it says, instead of listening to the doom and gloom of his leader, Mr. Speaker; he would know that in the budget there is \$5 million more for municipal infrastructure. And the city of Saskatoon is going to receive more money under the grants in lieu of property tax, Mr. Speaker. Funding to the city of Saskatoon under this budget is going up, Mr. Speaker, not down. And I would invite the members opposite to actually read the budget and have a look at what it says.

But I just want to say, Mr. Speaker, that what we're really seeing here is a group of people that are very unhappy that we're repairing and fixing the income tax system. They've been calling for it for years, Mr. Speaker. They want to keep complaining about it. They're going to manufacture something. But I'll tell you, Mr. Speaker, the people of Saskatchewan know that we're going to do the right thing.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McMorris: — Mr. Speaker, another question for the Finance minister. See if he can get this one right.

It gets worse, Mr. Minister. First you jack up the PST by \$160 million. Then you force municipalities to increase property taxes to finance your dog-and-pony show. And thanks to the leadership of the Leader of the Liberal Party, that is what is left of the Liberal Party, school divisions are on the ropes as well.

Mr. Minister, the school boards are saying your budget forgets children. They say that the budget will force many boards to cut programs, to cut staff, and to close schools. And just like the municipal counterparts, school boards are being forced to increase education tax to keep roofs patched and the lights on.

Isn't that what really happened yesterday, Mr. Minister? A massive \$160 million sales tax grab by the NDP government that will force school divisions and municipalities to increase property tax.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Mr. Speaker, some of these questions are strange coming from the members opposite when you consider that at least two of them, the member from Kindersley and the member from Moosomin, campaigned in 1991 to harmonize the PST with the GST.

Talk about . . . talk about people that want to raise taxes, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: — Order. Order. I would like to hear the response from the minister. Order, please.

Hon. Mr. Cline: — When we came in, Mr. Speaker, we had to fix that. Because they had passed a Bill under the former government, which the member from Moosomin was part of, to harmonize the GST (goods and services tax) and the PST.

But I want to say in answer to the question, that funding to school boards for the third year in a row is going up at least 5 per cent, which is twice or three times the rate of inflation, Mr. Speaker.

We're making substantial new investments in education. Because unlike the members opposite who in the last election campaigned to freeze education funding to the rate of inflation. So in the election they want the schools frozen, but now they say that they would do something else. This is not credible, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McMorris: — Mr. Speaker, another question for our dazed and confused Finance minister.

Mr. Minister, after listening to the things coming out of your mouth today, most people in Saskatchewan must be wondering whether you slept through yesterday's provincial budget disaster. Do you know that there is more trouble, that you keep pitching this bogus story about the NDP is cutting taxes in this budget, or that you actually believe in your own tall tale.

Mr. Minister, school divisions and municipal councils are saying your budget stinks. They are saying property taxes are going up because NDP government jacked up the PST by \$160

million.

What are you going to tell the mayor of Saskatoon and the president of the Saskatchewan School Trustees Association? How do you explain that your government is sitting on a \$170 million slush fund while you force municipalities and school divisions to increase property taxes?

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm going to very proudly tell the president of the school trustees association that funding for education is going up at least 5 per cent as a result of this budget, which is three times as much as that party over there advocated in the provincial election.

And I'm going to tell the mayor of Saskatoon the truth. That there's \$5 million more for municipal infrastructure and there's more money for Saskatoon under the grants in lieu of taxes program, Mr. Speaker. So there's things for education and municipal government in the budget, Mr. Speaker.

But what we need to do, Mr. Speaker, is look to the future, look to a plan to create jobs and a better economy in Saskatchewan. That's what this budget does. It's a budget of optimism and hope, contrasted with the doom and gloom that we're hearing from the other side of the House, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Fiscal Stabilization Fund

Mr. Hermanson: — Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I'll try another question to the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Minister, yesterday Saskatchewan taxpayers saw the real dollars contained in the old liquor and gaming fund, all 700 million of them. Mr. Minister, when the Saskatchewan Party proposed using \$300 million from the liquor and gaming fund to help cash strapped farm families, you said it would bankrupt the province. You said that money was for rainy days. You said you'd have to raise taxes.

Mr. Minister, yesterday you did raise taxes for the people of Saskatchewan and you still have \$700 million in the old liquor and gaming fund. Now, Mr. Minister, you are moving some of that money into another fund, the fancy slush fund that we might call the fudge-the-books slush fund.

Mr. Minister, how can you explain to Saskatchewan people that you can't afford to lower taxes when you sit on a \$700 million slush fund of taxpayers' money?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Mr. Speaker, with the greatest of respect to the Leader of the Opposition, I don't think that members on this side of the House have to take any lectures from the Leader of the Opposition about fudging the books. I realize that the members opposite are very knowledgeable about that, Mr. Speaker, but I really don't think they're the paragons of virtue when it comes to talking about financial accountability.

But I want to say to the member opposite, this is the same old voodoo economics we've heard from these members before,

which is spend every cent of money that comes in and more, and go into deficit and go into debt.

And we're not going to do that, Mr. Speaker. We're going to set aside a reserve to protect the people of Saskatchewan from deficits, from debt, from higher taxes, and from cuts to services. That is the sensible, responsible thing to do. That is our record, Mr. Speaker, and that is what we plan to continue to do.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hermanson: — Well our Finance minister has so much in reserve, if you put it in wheelbarrows they couldn't all haul it out of here, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the Finance minister is fooling himself if he thinks the people of Saskatchewan haven't caught on to his game.

Mr. Minister, this morning Saskatchewan taxpayers woke up to \$160 million increase. They are paying more at this very minute. Mr. Minister, you can boast about cutting personal income taxes by about \$40 million, but that is absolutely irrelevant compared to the \$700 million slush fund you have right in your own pockets.

You can say you're increasing health spending, but health professionals are already trying to figure out how they're going to get by. Today school boards and teachers are realizing crunch time has come.

Mr. Minister, when your \$700 million slush fund could be used to immediately help ease the pressures on education and health sectors, how can you look these people in the eye and tell them that's all you can do?

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Mr. Speaker, the difference between the members opposite and members on this side of the House is that the members opposite want to mortgage our future. The members on this side of the House want to invest in the future, Mr. Speaker, and that's what we're going to do.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — And I put this challenge to the Leader of the Opposition, Mr. Speaker, we have set out a plan for the largest income tax cuts in the history of the province. And I say to that member, is he in favour of that plan, is he in favour of those income tax cuts or is he not, Mr. Speaker?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hermanson: — Mr. Speaker, that Finance minister would be proud if he could sit on a billion or two billion dollars and have no one left in Saskatchewan. That seems to be his goal.

We're looking for a break in this budget. They aren't sitting on a personal slush fund to help get them through and they weren't expecting the government to reveal a big pot of money saved for a rainy day.

Saskatchewan people have been hearing over and over from the NDP government that they will have to make due with less. They have tightened their belts, they have paid their dues, and now when governments all across the country have been

reducing taxes — just lowering them, not raising them — Saskatchewan people were hoping to get something back too.

Instead, Mr. Minister, you opened their wallets and took money from them while winking and saying, trust me, the rest will come later. Then you flaunt \$700 million slush fushion, slush fush — oh, that's tough — slush fund in their face. Mr. Minister, I'm getting worked up, this is serious stuff.

How can you withhold taxpayers money in this slush fund when so much could be done to improve the economic climate in Saskatchewan?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Well, Mr. Speaker, all I can say is the opposition must have very little to complain about if all they can do is ask the same questions over and over again. The same questions, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — But I'll say this to the member opposite, Mr. Speaker — we have a plan for the future. We have a plan to reform the tax system. We have a plan that is simple, is fair, and is competitive, Mr. Speaker.

And the reason we're hearing so much protest from the other side is that the members opposite know that the people of Saskatchewan know that this is the right plan for the future, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — And it's making the Leader of the Opposition very uncomfortable. But I'll just make this other observation. Now we have the Leader of the Opposition complaining because we're operating at a surplus. Can you imagine what he'd be saying if we were operating at a deficit, Mr. Speaker?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Gas Tax Reduction

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is also for the Minister of Finance. Mr. Minister, all rhetoric aside, you know that yesterday people were expecting some immediate tax relief. You know it and we know it; they said as much on September 16 and they've sent that same message consistently since then.

But you blew it, Mr. Minister. You blew it by raising taxes at midnight last night. But the good news, Mr. Minister, is that it's not too late. The federal Minister of Finance, in fact, has given you a second chance. In today's *National Post*, Paul Martin says he will cut the gas tax at the pump if the provinces are willing to do the same.

Mr. Minister, soaring gas prices are hurting everyone in the province. Here is your chance to cut taxes now, to provide some immediate tax relief now. Will you take Paul Martin's offer? Will you cut gas taxes in Saskatchewan?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Mr. Speaker, I want to inform the member opposite, who seems a bit confused, that on July 1, we will be cutting the Saskatchewan flat tax in half. And nine months from now we will going to a new tax system which will abolish the flat tax, the high income surtax, and the debt-reduction surtax, Mr. Speaker. And we're going to have the biggest tax reduction in Saskatchewan history.

But I'll tell you what we're not going to do, Mr. Speaker. We are not going to return to the voodoo economics of the 1980s which says that we're going to slash taxes, spend more than we have, go into deficits, and go into debt. We're not going to do that, Mr. Speaker. And that's what the members opposite would do if they were given the chance, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's not difficult to understand why the minister's really avoiding answering the question, because here we're proposing an idea from this side of the House as we have done as well since before and since the election to provide some meaningful tax relief to Saskatchewan people right now. And he doesn't want to answer the question, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Minister, analysts are saying that gas prices will remain high at least through the summer, but they may start to come down in the fall. Here's your chance to make up for the mistake that you made yesterday.

Today the Saskatchewan Party is proposing that the province of Saskatchewan immediately cut fuel taxes by 5 cents a litre which would then be matched by Ottawa, based on what the minister said this morning, providing motorists with a 10 cent a litre break at the gas pump.

We are proposing that this measure remain in effect for six months and then it would be reviewed based on the gas price at that pump at that time. Later today the Leader of the Opposition will move this proposal as an amendment to your budget.

Mr. Minister, will you support this proposal? Will you give Saskatchewan taxpayers a tax break right now? Will you cut the gas tax by 5 cents?

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Mr. Speaker, I want to say to the member opposite that the member opposite should be familiar with the Grant Devine administration we had in the 1980s, because I think he worked in that administration, Mr. Speaker. And I want to say this, Mr. Speaker, that this is the same kind of thinking that we had in the 1980s when the then premier abolished the road tax for short-term political gain; went into deficits, went into debt, racked up \$140 million a year debt because of that kind of thinking, Mr. Speaker.

What we are going to do on this side of the House is to invest in our highways and transportation system, Mr. Speaker. We're going to make the largest investment ever in highways and roads, and we're not going to return to the voodoo economics of the 1980s, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Maybe the minister doubts that Saskatchewan people want some immediate tax relief, and if he does, I'd invite him to my constituency; I'd gladly tour him around. The tax burden that Saskatchewan people face is an emergent problem, it's an immediate problem, and something needs to be done.

We are proposing today a step that could be taken to lighten the tax burden that Saskatchewan people face. The Minister of Finance in Ottawa has proposed an option, an alternative for the government to consider which we would like to also present to this Assembly and to the people of Saskatchewan.

Will you support the proposal? Will you cut gas tax in Saskatchewan by 5 cents initiating a possible 10 per cent cut per litre at the pumps?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Mr. Speaker, I think we should take note of the fact that this is the 1982 election campaign all over again.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — It is an attempt to buy short-term political goodwill with the people's money, Mr. Speaker, but it is an attempt that amounts to mortgaging the future of our children, Mr. Speaker. It is the voodoo economics of Grant Devine, an administration that the member worked in and he's familiar with that administration.

We need, Mr. Speaker, political courage and vision and a long-term plan, not this kind of short-term thinking that will lead us into deficit and debt, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 8 — The Department of Post-Secondary Education and Skills Training Act

Hon. Mr. Hagel: — Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 8, The Department of Post-Secondary Education and Skills Training Act be now introduced and read the first time.

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

TABLING OF DOCUMENTS

The Speaker: — Before orders of the day, I have some documents to table before the House. The first is a letter of resignation from Mr. Strelloff, the Provincial Auditor.

I also have the document submitted by the caucuses, the financial . . . audited financial statements, and also the *Special Report by the Provincial Auditor to the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan regarding Changes to The Provincial Auditor Act*.

MOTIONS

Hours of Sitting

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — Mr. Speaker, before orders of the day, I move, seconded by the member Cannington:

That by leave of the Assembly, that notwithstanding rule 3(4) of the *Rules and Procedures of the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan* that when the Assembly adjourns on Thursday, April 20, 2000, it stands adjourned until Wednesday, April 26, at 1:30 p.m.

I move this, Mr. Speaker, in light of the fact that that is the Easter weekend so that families can prepare for a longer weekend than might otherwise be available to them.

Motion agreed to.

(1430)

ORDERS OF THE DAY

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.

Mr. Hermanson: — Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I was responding to the budget yesterday, somewhat in a state of shock, not believing what I was hearing from the Minister of Finance — that he was actually going to increase taxes rather than cut taxes — I thought have I got something wrong here? Did I miss something?

But then I checked the papers and I checked with colleagues and people throughout Saskatchewan, and guess what? The entire province is sharing that same shock, that same dismay.

We heard reports from the Saskatchewan School Trustees Association. They feel that this budget is an attack on children.

We heard condemnation from SUMA (Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association) who see the expansion of the PST as a tax on municipalities.

We heard from the Canadian Taxpayers Federation who were astounded that this government would raise taxes when other governments were lowering taxes.

We heard from the roadbuilders' association who are astounded that this government does not recognize the deterioration of our roads and highways in Saskatchewan and are putting so little from this budget into highways.

We heard from SAHO (Saskatchewan Association of Health Organizations), from health care unions — all these people were disappointed with the Finance minister's budget.

The first thing that everybody noticed — and there is no way they could hide this, Mr. Speaker — the first thing everyone noticed is that taxes went up at midnight last night. The taxes were up. What a dastardly deed by our Minister of Finance to read a budget and promise tax cuts and then immediately raise our taxes — immediately raise our taxes.

The Saskatchewan Party was founded on a principle of lower taxes for Saskatchewan and that remains our principle today, Mr. Speaker. And when we form the next Government of Saskatchewan, we will not play a shell game like this Minister of Finance. When we promise tax relief, we will deliver tax relief.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hermanson: — And I tell you, Mr. Speaker, we would not deprive the taxpayers of the benefits they deserve if we were sitting on a \$700 million slush fund.

I agree, Mr. Speaker, that the province does need to keep a contingency fund. It's quite normal to keep 100 million, 150 million, 175 — maybe with inflation someday it might have to be \$200 million. But this Minister of Finance admits that he's sitting on \$700 million of cash that he will not give back to the people of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, a family earning a very modest \$25,000 a year will see an enormous tax break — an enormous tax break of \$10 a month. I'm sure that's got them rejoicing in the streets of Regina and Saskatoon.

Mr. Speaker, once the hikes in utility rates are factored in, that family has \$2 more a month at their disposable. The massive increase in PST that the government will take will kick in immediately, but taxpayers will have to wait, cross their fingers, and hope that tax relief comes someday.

Now, Mr. Speaker, part of the expansion, part of the expansion of the PST is on used goods. Now I can imagine . . . they put a deductible in there — a \$300 deductible. Isn't that great. I can just see the auctioneer now — how much do I have bid on this stove? How much do I have bid — 200, 250, 275, 299, 299.50, 299.75, 299.99 — sold. Now we'll sell the oven racks, Mr. Speaker. Who'll give me \$100 for the oven racks? What a mess this Minister of Finance has created.

Mr. Speaker, they're expanding the PST to real estate fees — real estate fees, engineering fees, architecture fees. Mr. Speaker, they're taxing the future. They're taxing those who want to build Saskatchewan. What a mess the NDP are making.

Now we do approve of the cuts in income tax. I don't know if the Minister of Finance didn't understand that. He didn't seem to understand it. But we've been calling for significant reductions in income tax for quite some time.

However, there is a little question. This government should have taken action to make sure that tax cuts actually got to families in this province, and that's not happening in his budget.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I could talk for an hour about the PST but I'm going to move on to some other areas.

This year's estimate of provincial health funding represents an increase of \$16 million over what was spent in the fiscal year just ending. Far less than the rate of inflation which is what we had committed to. We said we would at least keep up with inflation. This government's not keeping up with inflation so they're actually cutting funding for health care. They said to us: zap you're frozen, because we wanted to keep up with inflation. Well, zap they're frozen and they're chipping off chunks off the block, Mr. Speaker.

The minister says we can't throw money at the . . . the minister says we can't continue to throw money at the problems in health care. But we agree. We've been saying that for months — for years — which is surprising that the minister did not announce the audit of our health care system.

The federal minister is now talking about doing an audit of health care. This minister is talking about reducing health care services. This minister is talking about a health transition fund — most of which by the way, most of which by the way comes from the federal government. The people of Saskatchewan are quite worried about this transition fund. They've been dubbing it the close the hospitals fund, health reform being the code word for closing hospitals.

You know, I remember not very long ago there was a sign here on the Ring Road on the south side of Regina. Do you remember that sign? It said Plains hospital closed. Remember that sign? It wasn't there too long. I expect that that's what the \$150 million is going to be used for. They're going to buy a bunch of more closed hospital signs and put them up along our highways.

Now perhaps the Leader of the Liberal Party will chain himself to a few of those closed hospital signs. Let's see if he keeps his promise this time.

An Hon. Member: — Ah, it's just political rhetoric.

Mr. Hermanson: — Just political rhetoric.

Mr. Speaker, we see in this budget no guarantee to stop hospital closures. We see no plan for shortened waiting lists. All we hear from the Minister of Health is more talk about private health care. There's no vision for health care.

This government has already passed legislation that Ralph Klein is considering passing in Alberta, and the country is upset about it. We've already passed the legislation here in this province.

Let's move on. If there's no vision in health care, let's move on to education. Other than taxpayers being slammed in this budget, perhaps the most critical failure in the budget was its support for education. While the government tried to use some accounting tricks to make the increase to education look larger than it was at the end of the day, it's a fifth — \$18.5 million increase.

Now it's quite interesting to hear the Minister of Education. I've heard him on the radio; I've heard him on the news. He's saying it's . . . I don't know, was it 35 million the number he's using? And he says, the school boards can't count. He says

they're so used to bad news that they don't know good news when they see it.

He's insulting the school boards of Saskatchewan. They can't count. The doctor is telling the school boards of Saskatchewan, the people in charge of education, that they can't count. What an insult, Mr. Speaker. What an insult to the leaders who provide education for the people of this province.

Now, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker, we shouldn't be surprised. We shouldn't be surprised. That was the minister who said, before the election, before the election, if I were the Premier, I'd cut out the entire Executive Council Communication Department. Do you remember him saying that?

He said no more . . . (inaudible) . . . Well I looked at the budget numbers and they're still there and his share of them are still there as well. Mr. Speaker, who is it that can't count? Who is it that can't count?

And, Mr. Speaker, I noticed something else in the budget and this was really in a . . . you know what they go from a nice number to zero. The Leader of the Liberal Party's office went to zero. The Liberal leader's office went to zero. That shows you the direction the Liberal Party is going, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the Liberal leader has been a deserter of his own party and it's reflected in the budget. He had absolutely nothing. How fitting.

Now, Mr. Speaker, it's interesting that the education portfolio was so neglected this year since the Minister of Education is supposedly, supposedly a full partner in this coalition agreement.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the SSTA is so angry that they say the government has forgotten children in this budget. The government — that means this minister — has forgotten children in this budget. Once again the government is passing along the cost of education onto the backs of school boards and onto the backs of property taxpayers.

So while we certainly approve, Mr. Speaker, of a rebate to revenues for property tax and agriculture land, even though it is not a long-term solution, it will not do a thing, Mr. Speaker, if mill rates continue going up. For all other property taxpayers it's even worse. This is one more example of the NDP putting into one pocket and taking from the other. The downloading continues.

So much for the NDP's promise to ensure our children have the best education. If education is to improve or even stay at the same level in Saskatchewan, it appears it's going to have to be local taxpayers, property taxpayers, who foot the bill.

This government has shown no vision in the budget. Capital funding for schools remains frozen. It's those fellows over there, those fellows and gals who are doing the freezing, Mr. Speaker.

Now, Mr. Speaker, municipalities. And we raised this issue in question period today. The PST has far-reaching effects. Today the city of Saskatoon has said that the PST increase will almost

certainly mean a hike in the mill rate in that city. I'm sure that they will thank their NDP MLAs in the city of Saskatoon for that tax hike in addition to the PST tax hike.

Mr. Speaker, this government makes it even more insulting for local governments when the province . . . when this provincial government stands in its place and points to the municipalities as a source of great waste in this government. Mr. Speaker, that response is truly, truly disgusting.

We see very little of municipal infrastructure money coming in this budget. The province-directed funding, that little program where they give \$5 million here and \$5 million there, that looks an awful lot like the HRDC (Human Resources Development Canada) scandal in Ottawa. Perhaps it was some of the Liberal influence in the budget that got that idea.

Now another question, Mr. Speaker. We looked in that budget, we looked hard and wide to find out where the funding was coming from for 200 more police officers. The election promise prior to the election was that there would be funding for 200 more police officers in Saskatchewan to help municipalities and to ensure the enforcement of law in this province.

But we've looked and we've looked, Mr. Speaker. I don't know, has anybody found that funding for the 200 police officers? I can't find it. Just disappeared into thin air like so many other NDP promises.

And then we look at the . . . we see what they've done as far as agriculture is concerned. And we applaud the fact that they're lowering property taxes. We applaud the fact that they are removing the cap on the farm fuel rebate. But of course the problem is that there is no long-term safety net proposals in this budget. There is no reason to believe that they have a vision for agriculture. All they're looking at is the immediate and not looking forward into the future.

The error that the government made when they cancelled GRIP (gross revenue insurance program) and didn't replace it, haunts them day after day, year after year. And there was nothing in this budget that indicated that the nightmare will come to an end.

Mr. Speaker, I could talk about highways. They finally reached the \$250 million level that they had promised several years ago. The problem is that the . . . (inaudible) . . . are worse now than they were when they made that promise. And in fact they are \$200 million behind schedule and the hope of better highways in Saskatchewan certainly fades with this budget.

I was driving on the highways just the other day, Mr. Speaker, and the potholes they filled just prior to the last election have reappeared. They're there as deep and as plentiful as they always were.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I want my colleagues to have opportunity to respond to this budget so I will not speak too much longer. But I will close in saying that people need to see help now, not four years from now, especially after learning about the \$700 million slush fund that the government is sitting on. We are the little . . . With the little the people got this time around, I can hear the engines starting, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, and colleagues, can you hear the engines starting? The convoy beginning to form up? Where are they heading, Mr. Speaker? And how old are they, Mr. Speaker? Mr. Speaker, they're Alberta bound and they're young people. They're taxpayers, Mr. Speaker. They're going to a province where, when they promise a tax cut, they deliver a tax cut, and they don't raise taxes with the other hand.

Mr. Speaker, as my colleague from the riding of Swift Current mentioned in question period, we are willing to give this government a second chance ... (inaudible) ... the new government. They've only been around for a few months. They have this problem of a coalition. Maybe they're having trouble working together. Maybe they're having trouble getting their act together, Mr. Speaker.

Well we're pretty generous over on this side of the House. We're pretty considerate. We've decided to give them a second chance. You know, they're losing the spin war on this budget. And I've heard them on the radio. They're trying to spin this really positive. Of course they fired all their spin doctors after they lost the election and they got some new spin doctors, and these people are having just as much trouble as the former spin doctors were having.

So, Mr. Speaker, drawing from the member from Swift Current's suggestion in question period, for relief for Saskatchewan drivers on the price of fuel until the price comes down, I'm going to make an amendment to the budget speech ... to the budget motion, Mr. Speaker. This will give the government the opportunity to actually provide immediate tax relief.

(1445)

Mr. Speaker, I would like to move, seconded by the hon. member for Melfort-Tisdale:

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

urges the provincial government to immediately reduce the provincial fuel tax by 5 cents a litre to be reviewed after six months in light of the federal Finance minister's offer to match any provincial fuel tax reductions with a federal fuel tax reduction.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Gantefoer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me a great deal of pleasure to rise and second the motion proposed by the Leader of the Opposition.

Once again in this province the official opposition, the Saskatchewan Party, is providing leadership and direction for an aimless NDP and now NDP-Liberal coalition.

Mr. Speaker, through the last two years, repeatedly, time after time after time, we have offered suggestions that were not only practical but doable to improve the situation for our citizens in this province. Through the campaign and through the election, we clearly identified some significant priorities that this province needed to face up to — tax relief being the first and most predominant responsibility that had to happen.

And the members opposite can argue that this is some philosophical direction that we were taking. It really wasn't. It was pragmatic. It was a recognition of the fact that if we're going to move our province forward for our children and grandchildren, we simply have to become more competitive.

It simply was not good enough to be the highest taxed province in this country. It simply was no longer good enough to have the longest waiting times. It simply wasn't good enough to have the worst roads. It simply wasn't good enough to have all of our students leaving this province to find careers and opportunities. It simply wasn't good enough to have our farmers left on the winds of international trade wars.

It simply wasn't good enough any longer for the province to sit there with a do-nothing NDP government and let this province drift aimlessly. Mr. Speaker, this simply wasn't good enough, and more people voted for our dream than for any other dream in this province in the last election.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Gantefoer: — Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker, the people of this province clearly understand that we've been drifting further behind every day that this government is in office and they were crying out desperately for a change.

And unfortunately, unfortunately the third party didn't understand that. And what they did is, rather than accept the challenges of making this province move forward, they decided to opt in with the status quo and sell out in a shotgun marriage that is going to be the death of this province if we don't change the direction. It certainly is euthanasia for the Liberal Party of Saskatchewan, and that has accomplished at least that little bit of progress.

Mr. Speaker, what we need to accept are the realities that are facing us. And I am pleased to say that this NDP-Liberal coalition at least accepted to some measure the philosophical or the pragmatic admission that the level of taxation that they were imposing on this province was no longer acceptable. And at least somewhere in the future, if you can believe these people, the kind of people that said all campaign promises are just rhetoric, and political rhetoric, if you can believe that kind of government if you like, then at least we'll give them the benefit of the doubt that the long-term personal income tax relief that is proposed in this budget is needed.

But it is needed now, Mr. Speaker, not in three years; it's needed now. It's needed desperately now because our people need a signal that they have to have a reason for staying in this province. And quite frankly, the signal they got yesterday is that their pockets are being picked again by this NDP government before they're going to ever get around to doing tax relief.

Mr. Speaker, when I phoned into my community yesterday it was very interesting that the amount of cynicism there is as a result of this government's mismanagement. People understood very quickly that taxes were going up and they quite frankly are very cynical and very suspicious about any promised tax relief into the future.

And in the meantime, in the meantime, the same old concerns go on. The farm community is worried about their cash flows going into the spring seeding season. The people that are on fixed incomes are wondering how they're going to pay this extra tax. The teaching and educational community is wondering what's going to happen by the meagre amount of increase that has been applied to education; how in the world is it going to be possible for school boards to balance their budgets and not increase the mill rate.

We met, I met with the school divisions in my constituency, Mr. Speaker, and they've told me that their budgets are tighter than they have ever been in the last decade. And you know what's happening? The government now promises them about half of what their cost increases are going to be.

So what's that likely to mean? For the school boards who have already cut to the bone on pupil-teacher ratios, have cut to the bone and deferred capital improvements to their facilities, who have cut to the bone and eliminated any discretionary spending that they've had, they either are going to now cut essential programs or be forced to raise property tax.

So what have you done in this budget? You have forced a situation where again in education things are going to get worse. And any relief that there was going to be for the farm community who are protesting by their meetings, of a tax revolt, the high level of education tax on farm property, are going to be left with any benefit that was promised to them in this budget being eroded by the decisions school boards are going to have to make.

So where are we at? We are at ground zero, if you like — nothing has improved.

Mr. Speaker, the other area in my constituency and in many others that people are concerned about is the economic future. Everybody in my community and in the communities around are concerned about the business climate. They're concerned about the fact that businesses are struggling.

If anyone thinks in this province that the business community in this province is somehow removed from what happens in agriculture, they're not. And anyone that has a small business or even a medium business understands that as soon as the farm community is short of cash, that immediately translates into a downturn in business spending in our communities.

And everywhere I go people are saying this first quarter of the year has been the most difficult that they've had in some time; that consumer confidence isn't there. The people were waiting for meaningful tax relief as a signal that this province was finally accepting the realities of competition and the realities of the marketplace. And quite frankly, it just didn't happen yesterday, and so we're certainly very disappointed.

Over the last days and weeks as well, increasingly, people have expressed their concern about what's happening to fuel prices. Every day you go on the roads and pass filling stations in this province and across the country, you see the price of fuel going up — you see it going up dramatically.

And so, Mr. Speaker, where indeed it is a step in the right direction to remove the cap on farm fuel, for many people that I heard this morning are saying that our operation generally operates on diesel fuel where the tax is not applied anyway. And that at the 900 cap that was there, that was about all we were using. So removing the cap, while it sounds very good, is not going to result in very much saving for most farm people in this province.

But you know what is happening, is the price of fuel is going up across the piece for everyone. And now there needs to be an opportunity for the rest of the province to be able to have a methodology of having some meaningful tax relief right now, at a time that they need the cash in their pockets.

This government is very proud of the fact that they're sitting on a great big fat \$700 million slush fund. And they take great pride in saying, oh that's wonderful; isn't this good economics? Well I'm sorry, members opposite, good economics means there's a people in this province . . . the citizens in this province need to keep the money and make their own decisions about how they're spending it.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Gantefer: — The people of this province will make better decisions about how to spend the money that their own sweat and toil earns than the government opposite, coalition or not, will make. A hundred times out of a hundred, people will make better decisions on what to do with their own money.

So, members opposite, we've given you a wonderful opportunity to get something right out of this budget. We're giving you the opportunity to have a six-month time to take the federal Minister of Finance up on an offer that he's made, and reduce the provincial tax on fuel by 5 cents a litre and hold the federal minister answerable for his offer of matching that amount. Ten cents a litre would be a significant saving for Saskatchewan families over the next six-month period of time.

And hopefully at the end of that, when that promise is reviewed, that the results of the OPEC (Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries) countries' decisions to increase the amount of barrels of oil that they're going to pump out of their reserves will then have an effect that will reduce the natural price of oil, and that measure could then be terminated.

Mr. Speaker, again, again, the Saskatchewan Party has come up with a practical, pragmatic, doable solution for this government who will throw up their hands and instead of doing something practical, will simply sit on the big, fat slush fund and let Saskatchewan people out there to struggle for themselves with gas prices.

Mr. Speaker, there are many more things in the general context that I could engage in in terms of the budget debate, but I would feel it would be negligent on my part not to touch on the area

that I'm responsible for as a critic — the general area of health care.

Mr. Speaker, health care is in a very difficult situation in Saskatchewan. It is also having difficulties right across this country as provinces are struggling in different ways to cope with the fact that the federal Chrétien government has dramatically decreased the federal contribution to health care.

Mr. Klein, the Premier of Alberta, was quoted some weeks ago, something to the effect that said, if you're contributing so little to the parade, you're not going to be able to dictate the destination of where it's heading. And I think that's true.

And I know that the minister is engaged in negotiations with the federal government as we speak, and with her colleagues across the country, asking Mr. Rock and the federal Liberal government to restore the kind of funding that is appropriate if a federal government is going to have a meaningful role in health care policy delivery. And we from this side of the House wish all of the provincial ministers well in those efforts.

Mr. Speaker, having said that though, there is a challenge that has been laid down by the federal Health minister. And that is there may be, there may be funds available if the provinces will come up with a plan.

He has said that he is no longer willing to just throw money blindly into the same situation. And he believes, I believe quite correctly, that the system needs to be analyzed much more honestly and that fundamental change has to happen if we're going to continue to sustain the universal health care system that this country is rightly proud of.

And so, Mr. Speaker, I again go back to the fundamental tenets of what we said needed to be done. You know in 1992, the government, '92-93, launched the so-called wellness model. And it was launched on some pretty decent rhetoric.

And I'm quoting from a new document that was prepared by SAHO for the provincial ministers of Health. And they said that there were five goals that were part of that whole direction that was taken.

And the goals are these. The first goal is that public policy should promote good health. Pretty difficult to object to the philosophical statement that was made.

Secondly, that health promotion and disease prevention should be one of the fundamental goals. Pretty hard to argue with that.

A goal should be that services are community based. A goal was that there should be better integration and coordination of health services. And a further goal is that we should have better use of health resources.

(1500)

Five goals that I think are very, very admirable and very reasonable.

But what has happened, you know? Where are the public policies that promote good health. Where are they? Individual

health districts are struggling to come up with ideas that will meet that challenge. And some are succeeding in decent measure. But by and large, there's no vision as to how that goal may be met.

Health promotion and disease prevention — again another admirable goal. But what is happening in a practical sense out in the health districts and in our communities?

The goal of community-based services. Well that goal has really gone off the rails, because what's happened since this wellness model was introduced? We've seen hospitals close. We've seen transitions or conversions. And I'm really worried when they come up with a new transition fund. Does that mean we have a transition from an acute care hospital to some wellness tent and first-aid station? We're really concerned about what that might mean.

But where are the community-based services any longer in rural Saskatchewan? Where are those community-based services? This goal has been completely abandoned, and not only in rural Saskatchewan. What happened to the Plains hospital, the hospital that the Leader of the Liberal Party was going to chain himself to the doors to prevent closing. Now he says nothing. I mean if he ever did have the courage to chain himself to the door, someone should have thrown away the key because he should still be there.

So what's happened, what happened is now he's sitting across with the government, cozying up and pretending that he's taking credit for everything. So let him take credit for that, Mr. Speaker.

So where is the realization or any progress that's been made to the goal of community-based services? Where has that been? It really isn't there.

Integration and coordination of health services was another goal. Well, Mr. Speaker, I think that districts have tried to work together, and there is a great deal of co-operation that's going on in districts.

In my corner of the world, I point with a great deal of pride to the fact that the North-East Health District, the Pasqua Health District, and the North Central District co-operated between the three of them to lobby the government effectively to have a renal dialysis unit put into Tisdale, Saskatchewan. A perfect example of a common sense proposal made by three districts in order to get a service for the people in the area that they all served. So there is some co-operation and integration going on.

But if you can explain to me, Mr. Speaker, how we can possibly make sense out of the fact that we'll send a gentlemen from Codette to the Mayo Clinic for 20 months at a cost of \$20,000 a month when we could have had that service offered in Saskatoon for \$50,000, if you can tell me how that makes sense, and how that is an example of better coordination and co-operation among districts, then I think you can easily see that there is much more work that needs to be done.

And so we're falling desperately short of the goal of integration and coordination of health services.

And finally, it talks about better use of health resources. Well, Mr. Speaker, everyone will say that that makes some sense, but no one has the courage, particularly across the way, and the willingness to really have an independent look at the question: are we using our health resources as we best can?

Our commitment to the funding of health care in this province is approaching \$2 billion, Mr. Speaker. That is becoming an increasingly significant proportion of the provincial economy and the provincial government's budget. And I don't think there's anyone in this House or in this province that would not be forced to admit that that cannot continue to go up exponentially year after year after year.

And at the same time we can admit to that fact of life, we have to also admit that there are challenges of providing quality health care to all of our citizens. Citizens who are endeavouring to find health care services in reasonable proximity to where they want to live. Citizens who are, by and large, aging and are forced to cope with situations where they may not be as close as they feel is responsible to health care facilities.

And citizens who recognize that the day will come where they will have to likely be cared for in a long-term care institution. As much as we want to talk about home care and the fact that as many services as possible should be delivered in people's own homes, that's true. I don't know of a single soul who looks forward to the day that they may have to go to a long-term care institution. They much rather would be looked after as long as they possibly can in a safe and responsible way in their own homes. That's true.

But the reality is there's a responsibility of this government and of this province to provide for senior citizens, the pioneers of this province, in a way that's appropriately thoughtful and comfortable for their needs.

And so when we talked about using these resources that we have, that we have just admitted are limited in terms of the ability to grow and expand, we also have to accept the responsibility that people in this province are entitled to basic services and they're entitled to look forward to the time when they need these services, not with fear and trepidation, but with confidence that they'll be there for them.

And that's our responsibility and our obligation, Mr. Speaker. And in order to do that we simply have to have the courage to look at the health care system in a very thorough way. And as part of the Saskatchewan Party's platform, we said what needs to be done is we need to have a health care value-for-money audit.

Now that isn't simply an exercise by a bunch of bean-counters to make sure all the columns in the ledger are balanced. It means what we have to do is to say things like the Enns situation from Codette that was going to the Mayo Clinic. Those kinds of situations are happening in this province. They are an obvious and blatant complete waste of money.

And the health services for this family and this individual were not improved one bit. In fact he'd have been much happier if he could have gone to the University of Saskatchewan Royal University Hospital for his treatment instead of the Mayo

Clinic. It takes considerable personal time and travel and hotel bills and meals, and all the rest of it — that's just in addition to the cost that the province, the Department of Health paid for the service on his part. So he is looking for this pragmatic solution to his situation.

And you know what the answer was from the Department of Health when we talked about this in the fall sitting? Well now the university . . . or Calgary is going to buy one of these machines and it's going to be offered in Calgary instead of the Mayo Clinic. So that's the solution. And then the minister sort of chuckles with glee and says you know what — the Alberta government doesn't even insure this service in Alberta as if that somehow makes the point.

Well it doesn't make the point at all. It's irrelevant. In fact it makes the point even worse because the Alberta government and the Alberta Department of Health, even if they are so excited not to provide the service, they're at least smart enough to have the machine there. And we can send our cheque and our patients to Alberta.

Same old story, same old vision of this NDP government of being unwilling to look at simple, practical solutions that might force people to look beyond the obvious.

Another perfect example, Mr. Speaker, that I will use by way of example to show that we have to look at using our resources better is the whole discussion surrounding the use of the new drug, or relatively new drug Aracept for people with Alzheimer's disease. And right now in Saskatchewan there is a great effort being made by the Alzheimer's society and Alzheimer sufferers in this province to have the provincial government include this drug in the formulary. Our neighbour provinces have already done that. And I know that the Alzheimer's society is presenting more material and more material and more material because initially the decision was not to permit this drug to be included.

But the problem is, as I see it, Mr. Speaker, is what they do is they just look at the fact that this drug is going to cost a hundred dollars a month for the formulary budget and for the pharmacy budget in the Department of Health. So the people there are looking at this silo of their own budget and they're saying we can't afford to add this new drug to the formulary. And if that's all you look at then maybe that is a valid argument.

But what about looking at the bigger picture and saying what's the impact of the fact, if you had this drug on the formulary, if people who can't afford the hundred or hundred and fifty dollars a month to pay for it themselves now and could have an effective use of this drug, if now you do not need the home care people to come and visit them two or three times a week, if now you don't need to have these people committed to an institution much sooner than they would otherwise — how much is that saving the province of Saskatchewan in straight economics?

But the system is not responsive to that kind of thinking. Everything is siloed, everything is binned, and we're not looking at the bigger picture. And so when I talk about a value-for-money health care audit, it's not to see if all the silos balance. It's to look at the broader picture to say, are there ways we could do things that are better? And that's what's

desperately needed.

Every now and again, and certainly we've heard it from the federal minister, where he has said that no more money is going to be injected from the federal government into health care until provinces are willing to undertake this kind of comprehensive study. We've been calling for it for two years.

So maybe he's hearing it and I hope that our provincial Health minister hears it, and that if she engages in such a study that it is done in a comprehensive way so that it's not another dog-and-pony show like the investigation about the privatization of the Crowns, or any of these other things that this government opposite seems to do. We just have a no-fault thing that is being investigated, and everybody that's participating in it is saying this is a joke because it doesn't deal with things in a meaningful way.

Well we will not sit idly by and let the government pretend that they're doing something important and valuable and all the while nothing fundamental is happening and changing.

Mr. Speaker, we have to also set a new climate in the health care delivery field. We have to set a climate of co-operation and working together among the various professionals. It hurts me deeply when I see licensed practical nurses launching lawsuits against registered nurses because they feel that's the only way to deal with issues of scope or practice.

That is so hurtful not only philosophically but in a practical way in the workplace. Can you imagine what that does in the workplace where people of both of these classifications of the nursing profession have to work together? It does nothing positive. And it sets a very bad climate.

And while this is going on, what does the government do? They sit down and they say that we're now going to dictate to the Saskatchewan Registered Nurses' Association the new standards that should be imposed for entry into . . . education standards for entering into the nursing practice.

Instead of being respectful of the registered nurses' association's ability to make these decisions together appropriately, they come up with this idea to impose it. And you know what happened — the government finally had to back down, and we're glad that they did. We're also glad, but quite surprised that it takes so long, that they increased seats at the University of Saskatchewan for training of people entering the nursing profession. That's very appropriate.

But what was in their heads five or six years ago when they laid off 600 nurses? What was in their heads? Did they think people, because they said there was going to be the new wellness model — like it was sort of get well, be well, or farewell maybe — that we wouldn't need nurses any more? Like why is this government so short sighted?

You know, surely you can ask the district health boards to do a demographic study of the people in the nursing profession in their district that would say, there's so many people approaching retirement age, there's so many people of an age that they're going to be in here, or certain amount of people that are going to take leaves to raise families or whatever, and match

an anticipated need to a practical reality. Surely they could do that instead of waiting until it's almost too late. And now they've come up with a plan.

Well we think it's important that there are more nursing seats at the university, and we certainly support that.

Mr. Speaker, it'll be easy to take the whole time of the afternoon to talk about what's going on in the health care, but I want to say this. Mr. Speaker, this government, this Assembly needs to set a new climate in health care, a new climate that brings together the various professional suppliers of health care services in a new vision for what is needed, and instead of putting one entity against the other, is to bring them together in co-operation in order to make sure that health care delivery is done appropriately.

We need to do that. And I am waiting for this government to take some initiative. But I suspect, as in most other things, you're going to wait till the Saskatchewan Party comes up with a good idea and the format for doing it.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Gantefoer: — And we're prepared to do that in your absence.

So, Mr. Speaker, if the government can't fix health care, the Saskatchewan Party is up to the challenge, and we'll work forward to that day and we'll give them the good ideas of doing it.

(1515)

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Gantefoer: — Mr. Speaker, it is therefore with great pleasure that I second the motion moved by the member from Rosetown-Biggan and I will be pleased to support this motion.

And I am sorry, I think that the general motion in terms of the budget debate, this province has been let down badly by the lack of vision of this government. I will not be able to support that.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Lorje: — Thank you very much. You know, I've been away from this legislature so long I'm not really entirely sure if I refer to you as Mr. Deputy Speaker or Mr. Chair of Committees. For convenience I will say Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I do thank you very much and I thank all the members in the Assembly, and most especially my colleagues in the Liberal and New Democratic coalition for encouraging me as I stand up to speak to what I consider to be one of the best if not the best budget that has ever been presented in the province of Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Lorje: — I'm extremely proud of this budget, Mr. Deputy Speaker. My very good friend, the Minister of Finance, has worked hard to consult with people all across this province. He's consulted with the whole range of this society and he has delivered to us a budget that does not speak only to one small narrow group of society. Rather this is a budget that speaks to all members of society and for all time.

It is a future-oriented budget. And I can tell you in my speech supporting his budget there will be no crepe hanging here, rather I would like to quote from the CTV (Canadian Television Network Limited) news report yesterday. I was astonished and delighted when they led off their news broadcast on CKCK TV yesterday by saying: this is an historic budget. There are sweeping, sweeping tax cuts is what CTV said. And I thank them for that.

Now I want . . . I would like to start out my remarks this afternoon, Mr. Deputy Speaker, by quoting . . . As I've said, this is a budget for the future. It's happening in the present, but I think we can also look back to the past for some inspiration on the budget. And I would like to look back into the very, very dim past.

I would like to quote a 17th century poet to explain to you why I support this budget wholeheartedly without reservation. I would like to quote from the poet John Donne from his meditation 17. And with apologies to all women because you will recognize this was written in the 17th century, so the language is perhaps a bit dated and perhaps we can just in our own minds substitute humankind for mankind. But with apologies to the sexist references, I think it explains why this budget is important and why we have to adopt it as speedily as possible.

John Donne wrote:

No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main; if a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less, as well as if a promontory were, as well as if a manor of thy friends or of thine own were; any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind;

And that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, captures why I am supporting this budget.

We have to recognize we aren't an island; we don't live as an isolated entity here in Saskatchewan. We have to constantly look . . . we are part of the global sphere, part of the global marketplace. Unfortunately our agricultural producers have recognized that because of the lack of support by the federal government in terms of what is happening with global trade for their products.

We've had to recognize it. We look at what happens in Alberta; we look at what happens in the States. We have recognized that we have to alter our tax regime. We have to continue, as is our responsibility as elected members in this legislature, we have to continue in providing the strong support of social programs that the people of Saskatchewan ask for — the education programs, social services and health care, transportation services, and so forth.

At the same time we cannot keep our tax regime static and pretend that there isn't an effect when people do their income tax calculations in March and April and they use a computer program, and then they go and check to see what they would be paying if they lived in Alberta or Manitoba or Ontario. We are not an island. We have to look to what is happening in other jurisdictions.

At the same time we have to ensure that we are caring for all citizens — the richest and the poorest. Every one of us have to be given due regard in any budget. And that, I believe, is what the Minister of Finance has done in his budget.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Lorje: — While I'm on this topic I just would like to say parenthetically that I would like to thank those people who were so gracious to respond to us after the budget and to indicate the positive things about the budget that they supported and that they appreciated.

I was particularly impressed, I must say, with representatives from the restaurant industry. I know that they lobbied long and hard and were very concerned that we might follow all the recommendations in the Vicq report, and specifically that we might implement — as Mr. Vicq had recommended — that we might implement a 5 per cent sales tax on restaurant meals.

Now I appreciate their participation in the democratic process; and I will say that I even more so appreciate the fact that within 12 hours of the budget being brought down, they had sent a thank you note to the Premier expressing their appreciation for the fact that we did not extend the tax to restaurant meals.

Now one of the things that's always puzzled me in this legislature, I have to say, is the consistent contradictory stance of the opposition members towards our province of Saskatchewan. They say on the one hand that they would like to govern the affairs of Saskatchewan people. And they say that they can represent the people very well.

But on the other hand, they walk around and they tell us that Saskatchewan is probably the most forsaken place on the earth and that its people are woeful in their ignorance because some of them dare to vote for Liberals and New Democrats and dare to cast their votes so that we can have a coalition government.

I always wonder what kind of advancement they're trying to make when they say Saskatchewan is a terrible place — it's really terrible — elect me. And at the same time they seem to be fouling the very place that they're talking about — constantly focusing on negatives, constantly trying to find the worm in the apple as it were. I find this quite amazing.

And I have to say that when I listened to the Leader of the Opposition, one of the things that most struck me about his speech — as well as the wrong-headed interpretation of what the tax changes will be, and I will state that as far as I'm concerned he has got it totally wrong — I was very concerned about a statement that he made that he said that the government is, quote, "losing the spin war."

The Leader of the Opposition in his budget speech seems to

indicate that this is nothing more than a, quote, “spin war.”

Now this is . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Mr. Deputy Speaker, this is an important matter.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Prebble): — I’d like to urge all members to give the member for Saskatoon Southeast the opportunity to make her remarks without undue interruption. And I’d invite the member for Saskatoon Southeast to continue.

Ms. Lorje: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Now I’m just amazed and dumbfounded that he would reduce the budget debate, and the proposed tax changes, to a question of a spin war. And I would have to say, quite frankly, that if ever they should win the spin war, the people of Saskatchewan will lose because they will have been hung out to dry.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Lorje: — Now Saskatchewan is a wonderful place to live — we all know that, and we’re all very proud of it. But when you listen to the members opposite, you would think that we are living in a place something akin to what John Milton wrote about in *Paradise Lost*. And I want to quote again.

He describes a dungeon horrible with no light, but rather darkness visible, a region of sorrow, doleful shades where peace and rest can never dwell and hope never comes.

Now that, it seems to me, is what the members opposite think of Saskatchewan. But we can be thankful that their perception of this place is as skewed as it because they will never rule over this place with that kind of negativity towards the people of Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Lorje: — The fact of the matter, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is that Saskatchewan is probably the greatest place in the world to live. We know this. We’ve got two irrefutable sources of proof.

First of all, the United Nations says it is; and secondly, Conrad Black says it isn’t. So I rest my case.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Lorje: — Now members on this side of the legislature, Mr. Deputy Speaker, know the value of our province, and we recognize the worth of its people, and we are working hard to give them the kind of government that they demand — honest, dedicated, active, and accountable.

We have done well during the decade just past. And yesterday’s address by the Finance minister shows that we’re still driving on the right side of the road as we begin this one.

What does the record show, Mr. Deputy Speaker? Well it shows that the provincial debt to GDP (gross domestic product) ratio has been reduced from 71 per cent when we took office — 71 per cent; the worst in all of Canada — down to 38 per cent now. We can be very, very proud of that.

We have gone from being the worst debt to GDP ratio, to about

in the middle of the pack for all provinces of Canada.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Lorje: — And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, when we adopt this budget and the four-year plan together with it, we will be dropping our debt to GDP ratio down to 31 per cent. We will be almost the lowest, if not the lowest, in all of Canada. That is a tremendous record of achievement.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Lorje: — Our total debt, we have taken our total debt down from 16 billion down to 11.6 billion. I am extremely proud of that. We are paying off the debt of the ’80s. We are not leaving a debt for our children and our grandchildren as some would who advocate immediate tax measures.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Prebble): — Members of the Assembly, I just want to urge everyone to give the member for Saskatoon Southeast the opportunity to make her remarks. I’m having difficulty hearing her. And I think she’s probably having difficulty being heard by other members. So please give her the opportunity to finish her remarks. Thank you.

(1530)

Ms. Lorje: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker for your very kind intervention. I would like to point out, as an esteemed former colleague of mine used to say, the former member for Watrous. He used to say, if you throw a stone in the dark and a dog barks, you know you probably hit the dog.

Now, I want to carry on and just remind all members again about what our record is and has been.

The interest on the public debt, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is now down to \$670 million. Now some people will say, well that’s because interest rates have dropped and so forth; but really it is because we have been paying off the debt. We have had a balanced approach.

We have been paying off the debt that we inherited when we took office in October of 1991. That debt was created by fiscal irresponsibility, by spending today and squandering the future for our children. We have reversed that, and we have taken the debt down almost \$5 billion, and the interest on the public debt is now reduced to \$670 million. I have to point out unfortunately that that interest that we pay, each and every year that goes out of this province, for which the taxpayers of this province see absolutely no benefit, is still 11 per cent of the total provincial budget. But we are bringing it down because we are continuing along a balanced, fiscally sound approach.

Now a couple of other things that I would like to point out. We have a government that probably is the smallest per capita in Canada, and yet clearly is one of the most effective. We are the only province in Canada to have made substantial inroads into the problem, the blight, called child poverty. We are the only province that has reduced child poverty. For that we can be justly proud.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Lorje: — And just in the last year, Mr. Speaker, our social assistance rolls are down by 6,000 people — 6,000 men, women, and children are no longer relying on the public purse for their support. Those people have managed to find jobs and they are contributing in a dignified, respectful way to their own future and to this province.

The budget as I said, is very far reaching. And now it is true as members opposite charge, the people are not going to see an immediate benefit today. That's unfortunate, given the structure of the tax system. We all know and we have to admit it, the consumption taxes are applied immediately. Some of the expanded PST was applied at midnight last night, the balance will click in on July 1. But consumption taxes are applied immediately.

We have to wait to see the impact of the lowering of the income tax measures. Now I would have wished, given that we are de-linking or uncoupling our tax system from the federal government, I would have hoped that we could have brought in the income tax measures immediately. Unfortunately, given the nature of our federal-provincial arrangements with respect to income tax collection, that was not possible.

Perhaps in the future when our Finance minister makes further announcements about income tax cuts, we will have secured the necessary agreements from the federal government so that we will be able to make those immediately stimulative income tax drops. But for right now people will have to wait until July 1 when they see their first solid income tax decrease. But it's an income tax decrease of which I'm very proud because the first thing that we will be doing is moving to chop in half and then to eventually, by January 1 of next year, to completely eliminate the odious flat tax.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Lorje: — Now I wish that we could have achieved all of our income tax measures without having to rely, for the interim, on some consumption tax measures, an expansion of the PST. That was not possible. But as social democrats what we have tried to do is mitigate the effect of the expansion of the PST.

And I do wish that the PST rebate cheques could go out right away. However we have again, as a responsible government, opted for the most effective, efficient administration of the PST rebates.

And that means that rather than create our own bureaucracy and setting up our own collection agents and so forth, that what we're going to do instead is rely on the federal government to send out the PST rebate cheques, using the same method that they calculate for the GST rebate cheques, so that everyone who filled out an income tax form last year will know that come October — which is the earliest point at which we could secure agreement from the federal government — come October they will have a PST rebate cheque. If they qualify because their income is below 26,000 they will get a PST rebate cheque.

That will be from the period from April to October and then thereafter on every quarter they will know that they can expect to see a rebate cheque to compensate them for the additional amount of money that they may pay in PST. So yes, people

have to pay PST on their car washes today, but those eligible will receive their rebate in October: \$77 per person; \$55 per child; to a total of \$264 per family.

Now I want to just point out, too, and this is extremely important from my point of view, that there will be no clawback. There will be no clawback on those PST rebate cheques for social assistance recipients.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Lorje: — This budget is about helping people in all levels of society, but most particularly it is a budget about helping poor people. Over 55,000 people will be removed from the tax rolls. The largest percentage tax reduction goes to low income families. As a social democrat, this is very important to me.

But as an MLA representing probably one of the most affluent and certainly most entrepreneurial ridings in the province, it is also important to me that the budget reflect the needs, priorities, and concerns of the middle class and high income earners. And it does.

The three-tier flatter tax system that the Minister of Finance is proposing is based on four principles — that it be simple, fair, competitive, and supportive of families. Now these new measures I believe do follow consistently those four principles.

The new measures simplify the tax system. They do more than merely simplify the tax system, though this is important. We will now have three levels of taxation: 11 per cent, 13 per cent, and 15 per cent.

And it is important for members opposite to note that there will 15 per . . . or 11 per cent, I'm sorry, 11 per cent on capital gains on farms and small businesses. This is going to dramatically reduce the incentive, whether real or imagined, the incentive for people to create a virtual residence outside Saskatchewan. It means that wealth created in this province will stay in this province.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Lorje: — This budget is about competitiveness. It is important to note that it will improve our competitive position with respect to Alberta. It's important to note that now, once this budget is adopted and the measures are implemented, that 70 per cent of Saskatchewan taxpayers will pay taxes equivalent to what they would pay if they lived in Alberta. We have removed the incentive for people to leave this province to try to gain some small tax compensation.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Lorje: — As I said earlier, Mr. Deputy Speaker, no man, no woman is an island. Saskatchewan is not immune to the influences from outside jurisdictions. And we have responded in a very aggressive, progressive, and far-reaching way to that.

We will eliminate the flat tax. For my constituents this is extremely important. The debt reduction surtax and the high income surtax will go. And at the same time we are keeping a system that is fair and it's progressive and, most importantly, it

encourages initiative and encourages people to remain here in Saskatchewan.

This budget . . . The final principle that the Minister of Finance said was important for him as he prepared this budget, as well as being simple and competitive and fair, is that it also had to be supportive of families. And this budget does provide support for families.

The basic personal exemptions rise; the spousal equivalent is transferable. This will significantly — significantly — help single parent families. There's a PST rebate to offset the expanded sales tax; and our sales tax — even though it's expanded and even though the Leader of the Opposition has to pay 6 per cent on his car wash — it's still, it's the narrowest in all of Canada, save for Alberta, which is fortunate enough not to have to have a consumption tax like other provinces do.

Unfortunately though, Alberta has medicare premiums and quite frankly, given my druthers, I would rather pay a PST at 6 per cent — expanded or not — than have to pay in excess of \$700 a year for medicare services.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Lorje: — There's another important thing that this budget does that is very important to me and to the constituents I represent. It provides support and encouragement for new workers, newly trained workers, to settle here.

No longer will we see the unfortunate situation where people get their post-secondary education — whether it's SIAST (Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology) or a university or through a community college or an apprenticeship — they get their post-secondary training here and then say, sayonara city, I'm off to Alberta.

We will be introducing a tax credit measure to encourage students to put down roots here, to settle here, to remain in this province. And I think that's a very strong measure, and it is something that says we are building for the future. And we are building the conditions for a strong and an educated work force here in Saskatchewan.

You know, I talked yesterday with a man who tells me that his two children who had left Saskatchewan are actually moving back from Alberta. Now I said to him, what do you mean they're moving back? He said, you know, they can get the same jobs — and they're well-trained people — they can get the same jobs at the same salary here in Saskatchewan. But he said — and this is very important — they're going to save, on average, at least a thousand dollars by moving back.

No longer will the one son, who is married, have to have two cars in his household so that his wife and himself can both engage in the long daily commute that they do in Calgary. They won't have to have two cars, so they're going to save money by not having to have two cars. They're going to save money on the insurance. And most importantly, as he said, they will save \$71 a month by moving back to Saskatchewan because they will no longer have to pay the medicare premium.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Lorje: — For them, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the 6 per cent sales tax is a very, very lucrative bargain. A small price to pay for the privilege of living in this beautiful province.

I've got to say that overall this budget is fair, far-sighted, and fiscally responsible. But to quote from one of my constituents . . . and I didn't ask him if I could quote him so I hope he doesn't mind. His name is Kent Smith-Windsor and he is, as many people will know, in charge of the chamber of commerce in Saskatoon.

(1545)

I asked him what he felt about the budget, and he said he was just delighted about it. He said, and these are his exact words, "This budget creates opportunity for Saskatchewan."

And I think Mr. Smith-Windsor captured it exactly right. This budget creates opportunity. This is a budget of hope, of prosperity, and of opportunity. And I'm very proud to be part of the government that has introduced such a fine budget.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Lorje: — Mr. Deputy Speaker, before I take my place, I want to just address one issue. It's an issue that I care very passionately about, and it is an issue that I think will be difficult for all of us to deal with in the next little while. And I hope that we deal with it with fair-mindedness and with compassion.

And I am referring to the fact that in this budget, we have listened to many people and we've listened to the recommendations in the Vicq report and we have done away with the 1937 exemption for provincial sales tax for treaty status Indians.

It was a very difficult decision for all members of this government to make because we have always felt that we needed to provide some measure, some economic measure, for the most disadvantaged of our society.

Unfortunately though, the PST exemption for treaty status Indians had become subject to a lot of misunderstanding, a lot of misinterpretation, and a lot of hateful attitudes. Now this as we all know, and, as one of the members opposite indicated in his private members statement yesterday, this is the month that all fair-minded, tolerant people in this world observe the International Day to Eliminate Racial Discrimination.

It's also a time when . . . just last week I went to a memorial service for three Aboriginal men who had been found frozen in Saskatoon. Rodney Naistus, a gentleman who unfortunately . . . who's body I found when I was out jogging; Lawrence Wegner, a social work student; and Neil Stonechild, a 17-year-old man who died in similar circumstances, or in a similar way to Rodney Naistus and Lawrence Wegner some 10 years ago.

Now going to that memorial service I was reminded most keenly of the incredible difficulties that First Nations people face in our province. I was also reminded that there are three groups of First Nations people in this province.

There are treaty status Indians, there are non-status Indians, and

there are Metis people.

Through a lot of misunderstanding and bad-spirited rhetoric, some people have come to assume that all Aboriginal people received the tax exemption when they showed their status card at the cash register. And that has created a lot of division and concern and consternation within the Aboriginal communities themselves.

I want to say that I take the spirit of the treaties very, very seriously. Those are contractual obligations that we, the settlers in this country, people who are of non-Aboriginal ancestry, those are contractual obligations that we entered into in the 1870s and 1880s when we came here, or when our ancestors came here. My goal as an elected person is to ensure that the benefits and the opportunities that are enshrined in those treaties are actually bestowed upon the Aboriginal people.

Now I am not certain from the debate whether or not the PST . . . not paying the PST is a treaty right for Aboriginal people. My reading of the historical documents would say no, it's not, but I could be wrong. I know that the matter will be settled in the courts eventually.

I can say though that in 1937 when a consumption tax that is now called the PST was introduced in this province, the government of the day and successive governments since — Conservative and Liberal, CCF (Co-operative Commonwealth Federation), and New Democrat — have always said there should be exemptions for certain groups of people.

We all know about some of the exemptions, the exemptions for agricultural producers, for instance — the fact that there are I believe it's around \$275 million in exemptions for farmers with respect to their input costs. None of us argue about that, nor should we.

But in 1937 there was also an exemption for PST created by an Act of this legislature for treaty status Indians. Over time, however, that exemption has come to be misunderstood and misinterpreted. And I believe it is time that we recognize that it is important that we provide benefits and opportunities for all our people, but perhaps those benefits and opportunities can be provided in a manner different from how it was provided in 1937.

I'd like to quote right now from Wilfred Pelletier, a native educator who wrote a book called *No Foreign Land: The Biography of a North American Indian*, and he said, quote:

When you no longer go around accounting for yourself, making yourself understood, justifying your existence, when you no longer feel an alien anywhere, you've come home. You know who you are.

Mr. Speaker, I would hope that with the elimination of the exemption for treaty status Indians, that people, treaty status Indians will no longer be misunderstood. They will finally have come home to their home in this land that is rightfully theirs and ours.

We have different circumstances now than we had in 1937 when the PST exemption was first brought in, so we need

different solutions for sharing benefits and opportunities. Therefore in this budget we have dedicated money to northern development, we have expanded forestry development, and we have an expansion of educational opportunities for First Nations people.

I'm very proud of them and I believe that by sharing these benefits of growth and opportunities, that it will mitigate the loss of the exemption for PST. I also want to point out that status Indians now will be eligible for the PST rebate exactly the same as anyone else in this society.

This was a difficult choice, but as we all know, budgets are about making choices. They are about finding ultimately a balance that promotes the opportunities for all people in society. And I believe that that's what this budget does.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Lorje: — Mr. Deputy Speaker, a budget, like a Throne Speech and like all the Bills that we debate and pass in this House, is just one marker by which a government leaves its imprint.

First it leaves an imprint on the people for whom it speaks by their permission at the ballot box. And secondly, it is a marker on the record of time, of the time that we spend here in this House. And historians in the future will evaluate whether or not the time that we've spent in this House has been good, bad, or indifferent.

But I believe that this particular marker, this budget, brings us closer to the society of equality, fairness, and compassion that we began to forge just eight years ago. It's a perfect society we want.

Unfortunately, we will never achieve perfection, but we will on this side of the House continually move towards that. It's one step on the way to achieving fairness and compassion and, dare I say it, perfection in our society.

It is a budget that I will gladly and wholeheartedly, unreservedly support.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wiberg: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Speaker, to begin with, first off, I would like to welcome the new member from Saskatoon Southeast. It is an honour that she's here now, and it's certainly exciting for the people of that constituency to finally be represented here. Certainly maybe not quite the way we wanted it to go on this side of the House, but we certainly want to welcome her here.

But unfortunately we're still concerned that there's one member not showing up here on a regular basis every day. So hopefully Wood River will get the opportunity to be represented in the very near future.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, yesterday we had the opportunity to hear a budget speech that spoke about growth and opportunity for the

people of Saskatchewan. Now I want to hesitate that it might be for Saskatchewan itself, but certainly for the people of Saskatchewan. And as they leave this province and move to Alberta or Ontario or North Dakota or Montana or wherever they go, it will certainly be a great opportunity for them. Because what we're seeing is an increase in the exodus of this province because of the short-sightedness and the lack of vision of this NDP coalition government.

Now yesterday one of the great sounds that could be heard in this province as we stepped outside the legislature was the sounds of cars starting as they leave the province. But there was a second sound that we could hear also, and that was the wheels of industry grinding to a halt.

Now I'm not sure how a government can plan on raising funds to operate a province, when by shutting the province down is supposed to be the answer and a vision for the future.

But we heard a little something new in this budget yesterday. We certainly heard in the past that there was some slush funds hidden in the province. We've asked this government on many times, Mr. Speaker, to reveal to us how much money's there; how well we could use it to help this province out and get it back on its feet again. And of course they always said no, no, there's no money there; there's no money to be found.

And then yesterday they announced that, oh, they found \$700 million, Mr. Speaker. Imagine that. All of a sudden, on budget day they found \$700 million. But did they use it to provide tax relief to the people of Saskatchewan? Did they use it to enhance the opportunities for business and for people to get out of bed every day, Mr. Speaker, and go to work? No.

What they did was they took money from a slush fund, Mr. Speaker, and put it in another slush fund. Now it's not called the Saskatchewan liquor and gaming slush fund, it's now called the fudge-the-books slush fund. But, Mr. Speaker, it's still a slush fund. It's still money sitting there, contributed to a fund by the people of Saskatchewan, and all of a sudden we still can't use it. We got to save it for a rainy day.

Well, Mr. Speaker, all we have to do is step outside today and find out it's raining. But what did we get from this province . . . this government for this province yesterday? A \$160 million tax increase. And for that we're all supposed to be excited, Mr. Speaker. We have a reason then to get up today and get out there and contribute to this economy by giving the government more money to waste.

(1600)

Now the minister yesterday spoke about the opportunity that this is going to provide for us — taking money out of my left pocket instead of my right pocket will make life better for me. But the minister also said they're not going to put any taxes on young families. We're not going to tax their clothing, what have you, but we're going to tax their child care. Now this is a vision for the future.

We're going to stop families from trying to get out and contribute to this province. We're going to stop people from trying to create job opportunities and child care by taxing them.

Mr. Speaker, I say this is not a budget that talks about opportunities, but a budget that talks about removing the opportunities for growth and development in this province.

Mr. Speaker, I had the opportunity to talk to some of the professionals in some of the fields of endeavours in this province that we hold near and dear — health and education. They have a great fear out there with the zap, you're frozen, attitude by this government to two of our most highly respected institutions.

Now, Mr. Speaker, we talk about the need for continuing education in this province, the need to have quality education in this province for our students. But, Mr. Speaker, is this government willing to participate? Mr. Speaker, no they are not, I dare say. In fact what they are saying is that if we want quality education, school boards in this province are going to have to find those monies elsewhere.

Now in the budget yesterday, Mr. Speaker, there was a bit of a reprieve offered for the farmers of this province. There's going to be a little bit of a rebate for property taxes. And that'll be great.

Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, the school boards are already talking about, we're going to have to go after that money to offset the increases of inflation for education in this province. Not even bringing into account, Mr. Speaker, the fact that the teachers were going to be getting a raise in the very near future, and probably justifiably so.

But, Mr. Speaker, this is a government that attained a majority through a backroom deal in the dead of night with the Liberal Party . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . I was enjoying the banter, sorry, Mr. Speaker.

But the reality is that the people in the cities, in the urban areas of this province, Mr. Speaker, are not going to enjoy the same opportunities as the rural communities who are getting a tax rebate for their property taxes to help out with the increases in education costs. No, the people that elected this government, the urban members of our society are going to face huge tax increases in the very near future on their properties to help support education and to help support their communities in just trying to deliver the day-to-day services that now this government has chose to tax.

Now there's one of the great philosophies that I have never quite understood from this government, is taxing taxing authorities. But unfortunately with this government, we always seem to be able to find a way to create a new tax to keep the people in Saskatchewan down and out and in a unproductive system that does not allow us to compete with our neighbours, whether they be east or west or south. Actually we're starting to fall behind competing with the people that live north of us, Mr. Speaker.

Now one of the great things that this province has always been proud of, Mr. Speaker, is our health care system. Imagine we were the birthplace of health care in this country, providing an opportunity for everyone to be able to attain affordable health care at a reasonable cost to everyone in this province so that no one is left out ever again.

Well imagine to our discernment in this day and age, Mr. Speaker, that we have now reached a point in our history where this government has been able to take us from one of the highest quality health care systems in this country to one of the lowest. We have the longest waiting list in the province.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, it has been revealed by an audit by one of the health care districts in this province that they could probably achieve some financial savings for the operation of their health district because they overexpend in administration. And if they had those dollars back, the auditor indicated to them, they would not be in a deficit position and, Mr. Speaker, they could improve the health care opportunities for the citizens of their own community.

But, Mr. Speaker, the health care decisions made by this government, by this NDP coalition government, is driven towards the fact that health care is not as important as finding jobs for their own party hacks. And that's all we're getting out of the health care system, Mr. Speaker, is job opportunities for the party hacks of this government.

Mr. Speaker, it was mentioned earlier on a couple of occasions, and certainly by the member from Saskatoon Southeast, that there was a huge change in this province in who we tax. And it sounded like there was a great deal of concern that how are these people who are supposedly oppressed in today's society going to be able to afford this.

But certainly, I think one of the things that we have to remember, Mr. Speaker, is that we are all members of this province. And we all need to participate in its growth and its opportunities.

And for decades and decades, and most of those decades in the last several decades, Mr. Speaker, this government opposite was the government, and for some reason, felt that it was important that that segment of our society remain depressed. And now, when we spoke about the opportunity . . . by allowing them the same enthusiasm and aggressive, progressive attitudes towards participating in the economy of this province . . . during the election, they said nay, that can never happen; we'll never do that. Well, Mr. Speaker, again they broke another promise, but who's counting.

Mr. Speaker, as I listened to the speech yesterday from the Minister of Finance, I was trying to pick out some clues there as to how it might help my constituency, the region that I live in. What's there for us? Was there something for rural Prince Albert? I didn't hear anything. Well, tax increases — that'll help us great. We'll have less money to be able to participate in spending.

Did I hear something for the city of Prince Albert? No, no, Mr. Speaker, I didn't hear that either. The citizens are going to be taxed higher. The city's going to, may be forced to increase property taxes to offset the PST increases that are going against their services. Education taxes will probably have to be increased because of the PST that's being applied to their services.

So I'm not sure how this is going to benefit my region. We talked about very, very minimal increases in Highways. Is that

going to help my area, Mr. Speaker? Oh probably not. The fact is we didn't fix the roads there last year, so now we're going to fix one or two potholes this year.

Mr. Speaker, we're trying to create, many of us in our area of the province, opportunities for growth and development. One of the things that's been talked about many times in the past is continuing the twinning of Highway 11 from Saskatoon right through to Prince Albert. Is there going to be enough money in the budget for that? No, Mr. Speaker, there isn't. The fact of the matter is, I'm very concerned that this government doesn't want Prince Albert and area to participate in the economy of this province and of Western Canada and of the rest of the world.

That's not to say, Mr. Speaker, that there are many aggressive groups out there that are trying to develop the opportunities for growth and for new opportunities for people to get out of bed everyday and go to work. This government has talked many times that we need to reduce the welfare rolls in this province, and we need to applaud that. Both sides of the House agree, Mr. Speaker, that this is a noble cause to participate in. But if we continue, Mr. Speaker, to tax and tax and tax, unfortunately people aren't going to be able to afford to go to work. So we have two choices then, Mr. Speaker. We either go on welfare or we go to Alberta. And I dislike both opportunities, Mr. Speaker.

This province is full of opportunity; it's full of challenge. We should be working hard to develop our province, develop our regions, and instead, Mr. Speaker, what we're getting is more taxes to hold this province down.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wiberg: — Now, Mr. Speaker, we keep hearing that there are promises of pie-in-the-sky opportunities in the future for less taxes, Mr. Speaker.

Now what do we know about this government? Every time they bring a budget forward, they promise next year it's going to be better. Well, Mr. Speaker, this is their eighth next year. Has things gotten better, Mr. Speaker? No — they've gotten worse. We have nothing. It's reached the point where we . . . people are leaving this province in droves. And yet is the situation being addressed by this government opposite? No, Mr. Speaker.

At one time we had an education system in this province that was the envy of many in the world. Mr. Speaker, the people that are graduating for our universities are so few right nowadays, the enrolments are down so badly that we're having to import, Mr. Speaker, qualified professionals to fill the few jobs that are available.

There's people coming in from South Africa, there's people coming in from the Philippines. Mr. Speaker, those opportunities should be filled by the people who live here now and not from some far-off places in the world.

Mr. Speaker, we heard yesterday from the Minister of Finance that change is needed in this province — it is needed now. Mr. Speaker, the members on this side of the House wholeheartedly agree that change is needed, and it is needed now. Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, what we saw yesterday was an Ali shuffle where you dance with the left to the right, and then to

the right to the left, but we continued to shuffle.

Now, Mr. Speaker, doing a shuffle is not a vision for change. In fact it is a vision from a rear-view mirror. And how long are we going to be able to keep looking back and blaming everyone else for our problems here? This government has had ample opportunity to bring the budgets that are necessary to get this province up and running. But no, Mr. Speaker, every year they keep coming and blaming the NDP government from the '70s for all the problems of today.

Mr. Speaker, that was 25 years ago that that government was here. It's time now that this government take responsibility for their own action and for the direction of this province rather than blame someone else.

We can't have progression in this country because of the federal government. We can't have progression in this province because of a government from the '70s. Well who are we going to keep blaming? Next week we're going to have to blame the Northwest Territories for our problems in this province. We're starting to run out of people to blame.

But I think what needs to be blamed, Mr. Premier, and certainly 60 per cent of the people — and all we had to do is check the popular vote, Mr. Speaker — 60 per cent of the people of this province voted against this government. And certainly what we're hearing in the newspapers now is that that budget that was brought yesterday from this government received widespread panic. There was not a great deal of enthusiasm for this. The only enthusiasm there was for the speech yesterday was from the NDP caucus, and even that was muted . . . I'm sorry, the NDP coalition.

Mr. Speaker, it is with a great deal of regret that I have to inform you that I will not be able to support this budget. One of the great disappointments I have is that massive increase in taxes. I cannot support that. But I will be supporting the amendment brought forth by our Leader of the Opposition, Elwin Hermanson.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(1615)

The Speaker: — Order. Just a reminder. I know that the hon. member misspoke calling the member by his proper name. That is not in accordance with the rules of the Assembly. Just a reminder.

Mr. Trew: — Mr. Speaker, thank you. It is indeed a pleasure to stand here in this legislature to address this, which I quite unabashedly say, Mr. Speaker, is the finest budget or the best budget for the people of Saskatchewan that we have ever been able to introduce.

And it's a budget that has been built, has been built, Mr. Speaker, after consecutive building blocks have been put together — not just by successive ministers of Finance starting with Ed Tchorzewski, not just those successive budgets that we put together in government, but by a million people in Saskatchewan who, with the good old Saskatchewan know-how, made it happen, made it work, Mr. Speaker.

And I just couldn't be any more proud of a million people for having the fortitude to stick with it to make today — or yesterday, I guess, would be more appropriate — happen. But it makes yesterday, today, and the future all possible, Mr. Speaker. And I'm just so, so honoured to be able to speak to this budget today.

I want to take a moment and just sort of reflect. As I walking up to the Chamber today, I walked through the Saskatchewan gallery which is just below the rotunda. Many of us will know that. And I know yesterday it was incredibly crowded. This room and the galleries were all filled; and the Saskatchewan gallery was full of visitors, guests, watching the budget as the Minister of Finance delivered it. They were watching the budget on a big-screen TV.

And as I walked past that crowd yesterday, I was struck with how much anticipation there was for the budget that was coming and how they actually expected that we were going to be introducing great tax relief and great support for the various government departments — if I can describe it that way.

I also . . . Right next door to the Saskatchewan gallery is the Assiniboine gallery which has the portraits of a great many First Nations leaders — historic First Nations leaders — and I was so proud of them, of their part of history, if I can describe it that way, Mr. Speaker. The ability that those great leaders had to provide the leadership that their people needed at a very, very critical juncture in the creation of Saskatchewan and as we developed into the Saskatchewan that we can all enjoy today. And I know that we deserve . . . We must always honour those people that came before us and help make our province what it is today.

Speaking of those who came before us, I also want to take a moment and reflect that I also went into the basement, into what is the Souris gallery just before I came into the legislature . . . into the Chamber today. In the Souris gallery is the portraits of former MLAs and former governments. And the one of course that I took the most interest in, Mr. Speaker, was the 1944 government of . . . Many people will think it was the government of Tommy Douglas but in the Trew family we know that it was really the government of Beatrice Trew, who was the first CCF woman elected as an MLA in the constituency then known as Maple Creek. And I can assure you, Mr. Speaker, that we are just intensely proud of my grandmother and her contribution to this great province. This is one of our . . . people that came before us.

Then of course I couldn't resist, before I came in, sliding then into the Churchill gallery and seeing the portraits of this administration, 1991, when we came in having soundly defeated the former administration. The Devine government of the '80s was in a different part of that Churchill . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . They were in the rogue's gallery.

Mr. Speaker, it was good to see faces that have come and gone, people that participated. And I think of John Penner, I think of Ned Shillington, and I'm already regretting having started naming former members because there's just so many that deserve to be remembered and named for their great contribution in helping get us to where we are today.

Now I want to come in on the budget and it is a pleasure to have followed not only the Minister of Finance, and the Leader of the Opposition, the member for Saskatoon Southeast who did just a terrific job of outlining parts of the budget and issues that are very near and dear to her. I was very, very pleased with that. But it's also a pleasure for me to follow the hon. member for Saskatchewan Rivers, but it would be safe to say, Mr. Speaker, that I have some dispute with some of the things that the member said.

And I just want to say, early in his speech — I think I heard it right, tell me if I'm wrong — but early in his speech the member for Saskatchewan Rivers said people are leaving Saskatchewan. He said, I think his words were something like right after the budget was delivered you could hear the sound of cars starting as people left the province. I think he said that early in his speech.

But then late in his speech — and tell me if I'm wrong on this — I know that I heard the member for Saskatchewan Rivers say, and I wrote it down here, he said people are coming from all across the world to what? To fill jobs. He did say that. I did hear that.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Trew: — Oh, I see, doesn't have to be consistent. On the one hand people are fleeing the province; on the other hand — in the same speech not 10 minutes later — people are coming from all around the world to fill what? Jobs. Jobs. Because we've got job growth in record numbers, Mr. Speaker. We've got the highest number of people working in the Saskatchewan workforce that we've ever had.

We've got a very low level of unemployment. Last month and the month before — the lowest level of unemployment in all of Canada. Is it good enough? Well not quite good enough yet, Mr. Speaker.

And that's part of what the budget that was introduced yesterday was all about. We have to do more, we have to create opportunities, we have to help create jobs, we have to grow our economy and continue to grow it. And part of how we're doing it is seven consecutive balanced budgets. Seven in a row. Lucky seven.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Trew: — One of my colleagues wants me to go back to the story of people both leaving and coming at the same time. But I just . . . The only thing I want to remind the member, the hon. member for Rosthern who's chirping across the way. I was asking my colleagues here if I'd heard it right, and one of my colleagues very wisely said: you know, I know the difference. She said: I can recognize the difference whether people are coming or going.

And I think it's very good that — at least on this side of the House — we do recognize whether people are coming or going. And we've got a record population, record jobs, and people are in fact coming to Saskatchewan to fill those jobs. It's just wonderful, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Trew: — As a member, Mr. Speaker, who first came in here in 1986, in the second term of the former Conservative administration, I was reflecting on how it was that we got to this budget. Because it's really important. If we refuse to learn from history, then we're doomed to repeat it, absolutely doomed to repeat it.

I should say that the former Devine administration, the former Conservative administration, got elected in 1982 by saying things like, well we're going to eliminate the gas tax — eliminate the gas tax — and they were going to do some things with interest rates.

Well at that time the leader Grant Devine said, the then leader said, Saskatchewan's got so much going for it that we can afford to mismanage it and still break even. Remember that? Remember that? That's probably what attracted you to that party — that statement. That, and things like never say whoa in a mudhole. Remember that? Your leader saying that. That's the thing that attracted each of you to that party. Remember that? So much going for it, we can afford to mismanage it and still break even.

What was the result? What was the result? It was 10 consecutive deficit budgets from your group — 10 in a row. You ran up a huge, huge deficit. Huge deficit. They changed their name . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Yes, I know, changed the name. But that fools absolutely nobody. I didn't even mention the change in name because it fools nobody.

The thing that attracted you to that party was what that former leader Grant Devine said. What that member said: never say whoa in a mudhole. He said . . . he got elected on a promise to what, Mr. Speaker . . .

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

Hon. Mr. Goulet: — Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask leave to introduce guests.

Leave granted.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Hon. Mr. Goulet: — Yes, Mr. Speaker, it's indeed a tremendous pleasure for me to introduce staff of Northern Affairs coming in from La Ronge. And we have over here Ken Dueck and we also have Dean Desjarlais and also we have Mandi Sandhu and we also have Ruth Baxter.

Now I might say that, to Dean I will say because he's Cree, I will say, tansi. And also to say thank you to everybody in Northern Affairs for the outstanding work in regards to working with people in Northern Saskatchewan. And in Cree, of course, we say . . . (inaudible) . . . in Ruth's language we say, migweth, and also marsi choo.

And so with that, thank you very much. And I'd like a good welcome from all members of the House to the staff.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

SPECIAL ORDER

ADJOURNED DEBATES

MOTION FOR COMMITTEE OF FINANCE
(BUDGET DEBATE)

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion of the Hon. Mr. Cline, seconded by the Hon. Mr. Romanow that this Assembly do now resolve itself into the Committee of Finance, and the proposed amendment thereto moved by Mr. Hermanson.

Mr. Trew: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And I welcome the guests. I'm glad to have . . . always glad to have people visiting us here in the legislature.

As I remind people about what it is that the Devine government got elected on in 1982 — eliminate the gas tax. What did we hear, what did we hear, what did we hear today? What did we hear today? A blast from the past. What we heard is back to the future. A party that absolutely refuses to learn from its own history. A party that is so mired, so stuck in a mudhole, you will never form government in Saskatchewan. And nor do you deserve to, because you refuse to learn from the past.

We have a party . . . we have across the way, Mr. Speaker, a party that is saying, cut, cut the gas tax. They're saying cut the gas tax. They're saying we're really close, we were really close in the last election. And you were. And you were. Absolutely you were very close to forming government. No question about that.

What's happened since the election in September? Sask Party has gone downhill. And there's a reason, and there's a reason for it. And there's a . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Mr. Speaker, the hon. member for Saltcoats says, call an election. I'm just going to urge that he be careful what he asks for, because he just might get it. And it would just be great fun.

(1630)

So, Mr. Speaker, as I'm . . . I think it's time to move on from the gas tax. At least for now, at least for now. 1982 — we had a government elected on the gas tax and interest rates. What they did is ran up deficit after deficit after deficit after deficit — and I could continue — every single budget. Every . . . I could say it 11 different times and be accurate.

And they left us a legacy where the government that took office in 1991 had absolutely no choice, no choice but to close the gap. We had to eliminate the annual deficit, first off, and then reduce the total debt. And, Mr. Speaker, I'm delighted to say that we have. I'm delighted to say that after nine and a half long, sorry, Tory years, we formed government.

The people of Saskatchewan pulled together. The people of Saskatchewan paid higher taxes post-1991 — after 1991 — paid higher taxes. Why? Because they demanded, they valued services like medicare; services like a quality education, both K to 12 and post-secondary; they value government services and want them funded. The only problem of course is there's . . . money is not absolutely unlimited, Mr. Speaker. I wish it were,

but money is not absolutely unlimited.

So we've balanced the budget seven budgets ago. This one is now the seventh consecutive balanced budget and we're projecting that to go for four more.

We have reduced taxes in — strategically — in every single budget there's been at least modest, targeted tax relief. We've reduced the PST from 9 cents to 7, and then to 6. We've reduced income tax on several consecutive budgets.

All of which though, Mr. Speaker, was setting us up for today . . . or yesterday's budget. I keep saying today because today's the day I'm speaking. But it set us up for yesterday's budget where the Minister of Finance was able to stand up, congratulate the people of Saskatchewan for putting the building blocks in place for having our economy solid, for growing the economy, for making the Saskatchewan treasury able to not only sustain — although sustainability is important — but for the Minister of Finance to stand up and announce that the average Saskatchewan family is going to be paying \$1,000 less taxes four years from now than they are now. And those tax breaks start right away, right away.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Trew: — Mr. Speaker, we hear the Saskatchewan Party talking about well, we should spend, we should spend, we should spend. I want to say . . . I'm going to actually quote from the Leader of the Opposition on April 5, 1999 — this is a year ago — April 5, where he says and I quote — I guess I should tell you this is in the *Shellbrook Chronicle* and the article is titled "Goodbye budget" — April 5, 1999 from the Leader of the Saskatchewan Party, quote:

Thanks to the second highest taxes in Canada, a drain of the liquor and gaming fund, and massive welfare payments from Ottawa, the NDP has managed to balance another budget, Hermanson said.

Well, Mr. Speaker, isn't it interesting. He says a drain of the liquor and gaming fund. This is a year ago, this is a year ago, this is a year ago. This is April 5, 1999.

And then earlier today I heard the same . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Well, Mr. Speaker, earlier today I heard the same Leader of the Opposition — and I wrote it down — he said, and I quote: "The Minister of Finance admits he has \$700 million in the liquor and gaming fund."

At least we recognize, at least we recognize on this side whether someone's coming or going, I remind the hon. member for Rosthern. We recognize whether someone's coming or going. We don't say one thing before an election and something else after.

You know, Mr. Speaker, this reminds me of a hiring situation. I can just picture the Saskatchewan Party hiring its questioners, you know, its researchers.

And it kind of reminds me of a hiring situation that I heard of where there was three people being interviewed. The first person being interviewed was asked a question: what's two plus

two? Well the engineer, the engineer pulled out a slide rule, says well two plus two is four. So then that was fine. The second person being interviewed they said: so what's two plus two? And he says, well you know, in the case of Devine . . . people versus Devine, it was proven unequivocally two plus two equals four. So the lawyer got the answer right. Then the third person that wanted the job as the question writer says, well . . . he's asked what is two plus two. And he says, well, do you have any specific number in mind?

An Hon. Member: — I think you're going to have to get a new question writer over there.

Mr. Trew: — Mr. Speaker, I need a new question writer, no doubt about it. What was it you say? If you throw a rock in the dark and it yelps, you probably hit a dog. I think that maybe happened.

Mr. Speaker, in this budget debate we had the Leader of the Saskatchewan Party complaining that taxes aren't going down. Well, I look at Tuesday, March 14, *Maple Creek News*, and I'm going to quote from the Leader of the Opposition. And it says in this *Maple Creek News* of March 14, 2000, it says . . . I'm not going to read his name but it's the Leader of the Saskatchewan Party has written to Finance Minister, and I won't use his name, urging that his NDP government to:

- (1) adopt all personal income tax cuts and reforms as recommended in the Vicq report; (2) reject the Vicq report recommendations to expand the PST; and (3) hold the PST at its current six per cent level.

Well, Mr. Speaker, the . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Well the member for Saltcoats says what did we do? The people of Saskatchewan are by the hour realizing more and more what it is we did.

The tax cuts are so large it takes a while for it to settle in, but what did we do? We adopted the personal income tax cuts and reforms Vicq recommended, largely, almost all of that accepted. Some changes, and those changes, Mr. Speaker, took place. Why? Because government and coalition members, government members, were out consulting with our constituents and with the people all across this great province.

We asked, what is it you like? We put out the Vicq report. Invited comment. I know I put out an MLA report in which I took . . . Let me describe it this way, Mr. Speaker. My MLA report is four pages and the Vicq report was, I forget, 68 or, you know, some significantly larger number of pages.

Obviously I couldn't send the Vicq report out to all constituents, but I took an executive summary, put it out to my constituents and said, please do tell me what is it you like? What is it you don't like?

I'm telling you that I got a significant number of letters, a significant number of letters from people who said, we value chiropractic services. Please do keep chiropractic services insured. What did we do, Mr. Speaker? Kept them insured.

An Hon. Member: — Oh did you? I didn't know that.

Mr. Trew: — Well, Mr. Speaker, this place just gets more absurd by the minute. I hear one of the members opposite saying, oh did you? I didn't know that.

Well I'd invite members to try and have a peek at the budget, try and understand what it's all about.

All we hear is people are leaving; oh no, they're coming. We're for it; no we're against it. We're hearing all kinds of things. Consistency is not the strength of members opposite, Mr. Speaker; consistency is not the strength there.

Mr. Speaker, I was taking some notes as the budget was being delivered yesterday, and I noticed for instance when the Minister of Finance announced that the farm fuel tax was being completely eliminated for the next two years, we had one, one member, one member, one member applauded. One member opposite applauded — gas tax — one member opposite applauded. Mr. Speaker, it's really interesting; they don't like to hear good news, don't like to hear good news.

When the Minister of Finance was announcing that we're . . . spending on Highways is going to \$250 million this year — which is a 6 per cent increase I think it is from last year — no joy.

An Hon. Member: — Six point six.

Mr. Trew: — Six point six per cent increase. Thank you, hon. minister. There was no joy; no two hands met across the way. When there was an announcement that 26 . . . there was \$26 million in municipal revenue-sharing, no two hands clapped over there. When there was an announcement of 30 million a year in an infrastructure program, there was no joy on the opposite side.

When there was an announcement of a minimum of 5 million per year from the centennial fund going to northern Saskatchewan, there was no joy on that side. Mr. Speaker, small wonder that both northern seats are represented on the NDP government side. Small wonder, small wonder; they know what's good.

Mr. Speaker, when the exemptions, the \$8,000 tax credit personal exemption was announced, when the \$8,000 spousal tax credit was announced, the \$2,500 per dependent child, and the \$1,000 boost tax exemption for seniors, there was no joy on the other side.

Well this is a party over there that's main claim to fame has been one of tax reduction. So when the biggest tax reduction in Saskatchewan is announced, there's no joy. I kind of have to wonder, well what is it that they really want? And it boils down to . . . I can assure you, having been in this legislature for a few terms now, I can tell you it boils down to just crass politics, crass politics.

If you really thought big . . . that tax cuts were important, then at least salute them when they come. At least, at least show some joy. Take some . . . stand up, take some credit even. I mean that would be not entirely unreasonable. But to not show any joy doesn't make any sense.

When the Minister of Finance announced that 55,000 Saskatchewan people would not be paying any Saskatchewan income tax as a result of measures introduced in this budget, there was no joy at all on the other side. The only joy there was . . . and it's a good thing that you missed it, Mr. Speaker, because guests aren't supposed to participate. But we did have one guest, the former member for Lloydminster, Vi Stanger, couldn't restrain herself at that point, and Vi clapped. Other than that, she was fairly, fairly restrained for Vi.

Mr. Speaker, when the Minister of Finance announced that there was going to be \$32 million that goes out in a PST rebate to the lowest income people, people earning up to \$35,000 a year, Mr. Speaker, I looked at the guests in the galleries — and the galleries were full yesterday — there was many people nodding. Was there any . . .

An Hon. Member: — Nodding off.

Mr. Trew: — Oh, you wish they were nodding off. They were nodding because they were so pleased that, true to form, New Democrats were not forgetting people with lower incomes.

We can't all be fortunate and have the incomes that members of the legislature enjoy, and higher. There are people that are working — and I'll describe it as working poor, although I don't want to capture everybody in that — but there's people, Mr. Speaker, for whom paying bills is a struggle and an ongoing struggle.

(1645)

There was one part of the speech where actually we got a bit of reaction from the opposition and from us, and that was when the Minister of Finance announced that some Saskatchewan people were going to get I think it was \$285 million each. And of course he was our version of Regis Philbin on *Who Wants To Be A Millionaire*. What he was saying was \$285,000 was going to be distributed, and he made that quite clear.

Then we come, Mr. Speaker, to today, today, and the Leader of the Opposition was responding to the budget. The Leader of the Opposition said that in Saskatchewan we're losing taxpayers at a record rate. He said we're losing taxpayers at a record rate. And you know what? He was more accurate than he ever dreamt he was.

In Saskatchewan we lost, yesterday, 55,000 people removed from the income tax roll. Fifty-five thousand of the lowest income people eliminated from the income tax roll in Saskatchewan in one swoop.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Trew: — Member for Rosthern, those 55,000 people will be hard-pressed to think Alberta looks any better. Those 55,000 people, methinks, are going to be very, very pleased; very pleased especially not having to pay a health care premium.

I don't know if it's the right time to announce that that member's the one that recognizes the front end from the back end, whether people are coming or going.

Mr. Speaker, we have across the way the Saskatchewan Party — a right wing party . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Yes, as the hon. member for Saltcoats says, certainly do. And good for you. You've got the courage to say absolutely, I'm a right winger. Good for you. Good for you.

And it's fair that there'll be a difference of opinion. That's what this great legislature is all about. That's what the voters have a choice of electing: right wingers or New Democrats, social democrats.

Mr. Speaker, we've got a government here that knew we had to, we had to provide fiscally responsible government to get us . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Mr. Speaker, I wish that *Hansard* could catch . . . I wish *Hansard* could catch some of the heckling from across the way, Mr. Speaker. Needless to say, the logic somehow comes unravelled. It's just difficult.

Mr. Speaker, we have a government on this side that is absolutely determined to be fiscally responsible. And we have been fiscally responsible in every single budget that we have delivered since 1992, every single one. They've all been building blocks. The people of Saskatchewan have all participated, some more willingly than some others, but have all participated in building our economy.

We've got a record number of people working. We've got record jobs. We've got low unemployment, lowest in the nation. We've got job growth projected for each of the next four years. We've got the longest consecutive growth, we've got the longest consecutive growth, economic growth in Saskatchewan, than there has been since the Blakeney '70s. Longest consecutive growth since the Blakeney '70s.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Trew: — Yes. Not all to our credit, but we've helped make it so. Yes, my colleague points out that the '80s were Tory times and tough times. That's history. Now is now. We are going to be building.

I am very proud, Mr. Speaker, to see this budget, to see what it's doing. To see that it's offering a thousand dollars tax cut to the average Saskatchewan family. And my constituency has many average Saskatchewan families.

Well, Mr. Speaker, the members opposite say when? Well when? Let me say again, the members opposite are the remnants of a party that in 1982 should have learned a lesson. Certainly by 1991 the lesson should have been very clear. You can't indiscriminately just cut taxes, off-loading those taxes onto the future, onto our children. We will not do that.

I've heard the Minister of Finance, I've heard the Premier, I've heard many of my colleagues say, we will not be the party to off-load onto our children.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Trew: — And I think the applause, I think the applause speaks for itself. This is a party that will not off-load the future onto our children. We're building the future for our children.

We're building economic growth. We're building jobs. We're building opportunity. We've got, as the member for Saskatchewan Rivers says, people coming from all around the world to fill jobs in Saskatchewan. This is what the future is. This is what we're about. This is what we're building. This is why, Mr. Speaker, I am going to be supporting this budget, and it's why I will not be able to support the amendment the opposition put forward.

I am delighted, Mr. Speaker, that we've arrived at this point in our history. With that I will take my place.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McMorris: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a great pleasure to stand in the House today to reply to the budget speech yesterday on behalf of the people of Indian Head-Milestone.

I have a news release here that says that Cline brings down a historic . . . historical tax cuts. Believe me, if they believe that, it will be historical. When you raise the PST by \$160 million, how can you call that a historical tax cut?

Somehow they're trying to make people believe that we are paying less for our taxes now than before he spoke yesterday. And if you ask anybody out on the street right now, they're not paying less, they're paying more. So if it's a historical tax cut, it's very tough to believe.

When I campaigned over the last . . . over the month in September there, leading up to the provincial election, I campaigned on a lot of the things that were addressed in that budget. And I'm going to talk to a few of those things. I also campaigned an awful lot on what I would do as a person if I was elected. And although I am in opposition, I don't feel I can oppose everything that the government says.

I want to see the province move ahead, and some of the things that were addressed in the budget I do believe in, and weren't bad ideas — ideas that we put forth during the election. And it's funny how that is missed so often, that we were the ones that initiated those ideas. We were the ones that had put those forth. So of course I will give the Minister of Finance credit for taking a few of our ideas.

Some of the ideas that I will talk about that I can support in that budget . . . and they're few and far between. I found a lot more ideas and things in the budget that I do disagree with, but a few of the things that I agree with are the property tax rebate. They're talking about reducing the property tax by about 25 million over the next two years.

I don't know how many people on that side of the House have had the opportunity to attend at tax revolt meetings. We have talked on this side of the House many, many times about the different tax revolt meetings we have been to. And I think I have got about 10 notches on my belt of tax revolt meetings that have been held not only in my constituency, but around the province.

I talked to a member that sits beside me who has surpassed me, unfortunately; he's attended more tax revolt meetings than I

have. But when there are tax revolt meetings held night after night after night, there is a definite reason for it.

There have been 83 tax revolt meetings held in this province to this date and another one being conducted tonight.

I think the numbers on those tax revolt meetings are about 98 per cent approval or in other words, of withholding property tax. So I applaud the government yesterday in addressing that issue — an issue that SARM (Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities) has passed resolutions for 30 years to try and get the government to listen to with no success.

A group of farmers in my constituency started this movement and have pushed it throughout the province, and finally this provincial government has listened and has addressed that issue. I'll get back to the property tax issue in a little bit because unfortunately it was offset by a number of the other things that they did in the budget. But at least they listened and addressed that issue.

I think in all those 83 meetings there has been representation by government at perhaps two of them. One or two of them, that's been about it.

Another area of the budget that I applaud the government on is the fuel tax rebate of lifting the cap on the fuel tax. The cap has been at \$900 of course, and they're lifting that. On most farms, my farm, it won't make a big difference but there are a lot of farms out there that it'll make a huge difference. So I applaud them on that.

Another area that I am glad that they listened to our advice and they are addressing is the personal income tax. They are looking at reducing the personal income tax over a number of years — over the next three or four years. Unfortunately, as I mentioned earlier, I farmed and I was also enrolled in a program called GRIP. Now this government on the other side is saying, like just believe us. We're going to drop your personal income tax. It may not be this year; it'll start next year and maybe the year after, and we'll get to our goal eventually.

Well I remember a GRIP program that was a signed contract that was ripped up. And now I'm supposed to believe this government that they're going to get to their personal income tax goals. And I really have second thoughts. Trust is a tough word when we're talking about this government.

The fourth area that I have to address that I do agree with the provincial government in the budget is the issue of PST on off-reserve purchases. The PST on off-reserve purchases was once again an idea that we put forth and campaigned on. It was an issue that I found resonated very, very well throughout my constituency. And I do have to compliment them on it.

But I think the bigger issue is not just the PST on off-reserves, it's the whole issue of our First Nations people. We need to include them in our economy and not exclude them. And this is just the very beginning of that, of taking part in our economy in the future.

Unfortunately those are about the four areas that I found that I could really compliment the government on, on its recent

budget, because they are moving in the right direction. It just so happens they were the ideas that we had in the last provincial election and we campaigned on, but I applaud them for taking those and putting them into the budget.

There are a number of areas though that I do have a real problem with when it comes to this provincial budget. One of the areas, and I addressed it just briefly on the property tax side, is in education. The burden on property tax owners is incredible to support our education system. And hence the tax revolt meetings that have been held around the province.

After going through the budget and listening to the Minister of Finance speak on what they are doing for education, and then leaving after the budget address and talking to members of the SSTA, a number of school trustees that I have talked to, they felt like they have been cheated in this budget.

I've heard the phrase over there, zap you're frozen, and that's exactly how they feel. Zap they've been frozen.

Now what's going to happen is, there's a new . . . the teachers will be looking to renegotiate their contracts or are presently renegotiating their contracts. The school divisions are looking at the expanded PST and how much that's going to cost them. Combining the expanded PST and the possible teachers' agreement which is going to, of course, probably see some increases in their wages, they're going to find that the school divisions have only one thing to do and that's to raise their mill rate.

In order to keep up with the lack of funding that this provincial government is giving, in order to keep up with the new collective bargaining agreement that the teachers will be receiving, they're going to be forced to increase the mill rate in the next round of tax year.

When they increase the mill rate, most RMs (rural municipality) and school divisions feel that the increased mill rate is going to offset any tax break that this government has given on property.

And so, yes they can say that they've done a real good thing by reducing, by funding the property tax, but I find it's an awful lot like a shell game. They move it from here and it pops up over here.

Yes, they can wash their hands of it — oh, they're not increasing the taxes. No, not at all. But you'll see most school divisions forced to increase the property tax, the mill rate, and hence the property tax on their property.

The expansion of the PST is another area that I'm just amazed that this government went for.

And you know when you look at the number of expanded areas that the PST has been expanded to: whether it's repair services or a number of things like that, real estate fees, non-prescription drugs — you know, there's a lot of people that wanted to go out and get some Anacin and some Aspirin after that budget speech, and I'm glad they did it yesterday because it costs them more to do it today — maintenance contracts, bedding plants — the list goes on and on — pet food, dry cleaning . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order, please. It now being 5 p.m., this House stands adjourned until 10 a.m. tomorrow.

The Assembly adjourned at 5 p.m.

