

The Assembly met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRESENTING PETITIONS

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I stand today to present petitions on behalf of people in Saskatchewan who are adamantly opposed to forced amalgamation. And the prayer reads as follows, Mr. Speaker:

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 the signators on this petition, Mr. Speaker, are from Middle Lake, Pilger, St. Benedict, Cabri, and also Humboldt, Mr. Speaker.

I so present.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also stand today with petitions for people requesting cellular coverage for Watson and area. The prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioner humbly prays 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.

The people who have signed this petition are from the Watson-Englefeld area.

Mr. Gantefoer: — Mr. Speaker, I rise as well on behalf of people in the Watson area concerned about the current cellular coverage. The prayer reads as follows:

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.

Signatures on this petition as you may expect, Mr. Speaker, are from the community of Watson.

I so present.

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to present a petition on behalf of people in Swift Current who are concerned about the Swift Current regional hospital. 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 plant for the Swift Current hospital by providing approximately \$7.54 million, thereby allowing the Swift Current District Health Board the opportunity to provide improved regional health care services.

And the petition is signed by people in Swift Current and Stewart Valley, Mr. Speaker. And I so present. Thank you.

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also rise to present a petition from the citizens of Blaine Lake with their concerns of lack of medical care in the town of Blaine Lake:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to overrule the Parkland Health Board to change its decision and allow the Blaine Lake Medical Clinic to have a permanent physician with consistent hours and days.

From the citizens of Blaine Lake.

Mr. Hart: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to present a petition on behalf of concerned citizens of Saskatchewan concerned about the municipal amalgamation. The prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to urge the government of Saskatchewan to reject proposals of any forced amalgamations of municipalities.

This petition is signed by citizens of Guernsey, Southey, Cupar, Earl Grey, Weyburn, and Bulleya.

I do so present.

READING AND RECEIVING PETITIONS

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

Of citizens of the province praying the Assembly to cause the government to halt any plans to proceed with the amalgamation of municipalities in Saskatchewan; and

Of citizens of the province praying the Assembly to cause the government to ensure reliable cellular service to Watson and area; and

Of citizens petitioning the Assembly to cause the government to provide funding for the Swift Current regional hospital; and

Of citizens of the province petitioning the Assembly to not expand the provincial sales tax.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Hon. Mr. Hillson: — I thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is with pleasure this morning I introduce to you and ask all members to join me in welcoming Mr. Rod Gopher of Saulteaux First Nation in my constituency.

I must say I am not sure that Rod is entirely enthusiastic about all aspects of our budget, but we remain close personal friends.

I'd ask all members to welcome Mr. Gopher.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Stewart: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I wish to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly, the grade 6 class of Avonlea School and their teacher, Evelyn Sillers, and also escorted by Mr. Phil Neudorf.

Mr. Speaker, Ms. Sillers' class is situated in your gallery. I ask that they stand and be recognized, and I'm sure that all members of this Assembly hope that they have an educational and enjoyable visit with us today.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wiberg: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I wish to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly, my mother, Clara Wiberg, who is seated up in your gallery.

Mr. Speaker, it is with a great deal of pleasure that she's here today; after all this is the woman who gave me life. And I appreciate that very much, Mother.

Would the Assembly please welcome my mother.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Through you and to the rest of the House, I would like to introduce someone who is well known to most of us in here, in your gallery, Mr. Bernie Collins.

Bernie as you know was the former Liberal MP (Member of Parliament) for the Souris-Moose Mountain constituency and is well known throughout the area regarding the fight against gun control.

And I'll ask everybody to welcome him here today.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Hon. members, I too have some special guests in my gallery that I would like to introduce to you: Mr. Bruce Cheston who's a voice from the past, a gentleman who from a long time ago had a great deal of involvement in the original crop insurance program here in this province; and with him are Kim and Kenny Craib from Ellon, Scotland, who are here to visit and watch our proceedings this morning. Please welcome them.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

A Bike Trip for Cancer Research

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to recognize a remarkable young woman from my constituency, Renee Stuckel of Lake Lenore.

Renee's aunt, Arlene Meyer, was scheduled for a bone marrow transplant in Vancouver to treat her leukemia. However, she died in November of 1998 before she could have this operation.

Renee decided to honour her aunt and in the fall of 1998 she made a commitment to bike 2,500 kilometres for cancer research. She would complete the journey for her aunt.

The name she chose for her trip was, Finishing the Journey: a Bike Trip for Cancer Research. Renee spent many hours planning, promoting, and organizing her trip, and with the help and co-operation of volunteers, she organized a fund-raiser in Lake Lenore to kick off the journey.

On August 3rd, 1999, Renee left Vancouver General Hospital. She biked through British Columbia, Alberta, and into Saskatchewan, arriving in Humboldt on September 3. She had maintained a gruelling pace of 100 kilometres per day. The support for her untiring efforts was overwhelming. In the end \$32,534 was raised for cancer research.

One person can make a difference — Renee Stuckel did.

So we congratulate Renee Stuckel today, and certainly congratulate all the people around Lake Lenore and area who supported her so wholeheartedly. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Jobs to Saskatoon

Mr. Addley: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As my colleague from Saskatoon Southeast said on Wednesday, I am delighted but not surprised with our vibrant economy — particularly in Saskatoon. She mentioned several examples, Mr. Speaker. Let me mention one more.

DirecTEL of Minot, North Dakota is locating its newest call centre in Saskatoon. With this opening comes 225 new jobs. Two hundred and twenty-five jobs, Mr. Speaker, for the province that already has the lowest unemployment rate in Canada. Two hundred and twenty-five well-paying jobs with benefits. Two hundred and twenty-five jobs for Saskatchewan people who have no intention of moving to Alberta — jobs, jobs, jobs.

Additionally, DirecTEL is so impressed they're scouting other Saskatchewan locations for a second call centre.

Why choose Saskatoon? Well, Mr. Speaker, Buzz Stitzer, CEO (chief executive officer) of DirecTEL said it was because of the quality of Saskatchewan's labour force. He obviously didn't consult Conrad Black.

Also he said it was because of the commitment and fast action by the Saskatchewan and Saskatoon governments, and business agencies. These set us apart from the other 28 locations being considered. I would say that suggests we are competitive.

This is more good news, Mr. Speaker — but we're getting used to that. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Stephanie Miller Rink Wins Silver Medal

Mr. Allchurch: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it is

with great pleasure today that I rise before this Assembly to talk to you about accomplishments of a young lady from my constituency — a lady from Shellbrook-Spiritwood constituency.

Mr. Speaker, at the recent world junior women's curling championship in Germany, the Stephanie Miller rink captured a silver medal.

Mr. Speaker, whenever someone from Saskatchewan does well on the international stage, it fills us with a great sense of pride. For me, this is especially true in this case of Stephanie who grew up in the town of Shellbrook. Stephanie, along with her sister, Marliese Miller, as well as Stacy Helm and Amanda MacDonald, went to the world championships after winning the Canadian title in February in New Brunswick.

Mr. Speaker, Stephanie is no stranger to the curling world. She also won the Saskatchewan junior women's title in 1999 and again in . . . and 1997.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to invite my colleagues to join me today in congratulating Stephanie Miller and her team on winning the silver medal at the world junior curling championship. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Saskatchewan Indian Federated College Powwow

Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen: — Mr. Speaker, we have in Regina a unique educational institution, the Saskatchewan Indian Federated College at the University of Regina, the only First Nations owned and operated post-secondary institution in North America.

This week at SIFC (Saskatchewan Indian Federated College) has been designated cultural week. Each day during this week has highlighted activities designed to promote understanding and appreciation of the values of First Nations culture. The goal of culture week is to, quote, "encourage understanding and respect among people."

Events have included a lecture by First Nations author Tomson Highway, pipe ceremonies and feasts, art exhibits, poetry and prose readings, drumming and dancing demonstrations, and several other events.

To wrap up the week, SIFC will hold its annual powwow tomorrow and Sunday at Exhibition Park. Dancers and drummers of all ages from far and wide will be taking part in this very colourful and very loud event. The powwow is open to the public, and I encourage all of us to have a look and a listen.

And, Mr. Speaker, I congratulate SIFC for a successful week. I assume, and I hope, this becomes an annual and an expanded event.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

SaskPower Board Appointment

Ms. Eagles: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a congratulatory

message for one of my constituents, Mr. Speaker; and also a word of congratulations for the Liberal leader as well.

Neil Collins, my Liberal opponent in the last election, has been appointed to the Board of SaskPower. Mr. Speaker, I suppose this is Mr. Collins reward for supporting this NDP (New Democratic Party) Liberal marriage. So congratulations to Mr. Collins for this patronage plum.

But I also want to congratulate the Liberal leader. Mr. Speaker, for the last couple of weeks we have heard the leader of the so-called Liberal Party, or NDP-lite as they are now known, bragging to anyone who will listen about his influence in this coalition government.

Well for sure the Liberal leader's opposition to immediate tax relief for Saskatchewan citizens has been heard loud and clear by the government. The so-called historic tax cut has been turned into a huge tax increase, and the people of Saskatchewan have the Liberal leader to thank.

But, Mr. Speaker, we can see that the member has influence in other areas of government as well. He has ably elbowed aside any number of NDP patronage appointments, including the former NDP member from Estevan, to find a taxpayer-funded job for one of the few provincial Liberal supporters left in this province.

We tip our hat to the Liberal leader for his influence on this NDP patronage machine. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Alcatel Canada Wire Contract

Ms. Higgins: — Mr. Speaker, I would like to inform the House of some very exciting news coming out of the city of Weyburn.

Alcatel Canada Wire has signed a new seven-year multi-million dollar contract with SaskPower.

Alcatel which began operating in Weyburn in 1956 manufactures underground, overhead, and secondary cables, overhead transmission conductors, control cable, and medium-voltage power cable. The Weyburn plant employs 110 workers and runs at 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Under the new contract, Mr. Speaker, Alcatel will continue to provide transmission and distribution cables to SaskPower until 2006. The deal is worth an estimated 40 to \$50 million. This agreement will also assist with a \$20 million plant expansion that will in turn create an additional 60 jobs.

SaskPower has a 44-year history with Alcatel and is one of its biggest customers in Saskatchewan. SaskPower recognizes the important role businesses such as Alcatel plays in the vitality and economic health of this province. Since 1991, SaskPower has purchased almost 1.6 billion in products and services from suppliers in Saskatchewan.

By buying from companies in Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, SaskPower contributes to Saskatchewan's economy which improves the quality of life for all people in Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

**Canadian Cowboys' Association
Person of the Year Award Recipient**

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to recognize a person who has shown to be a fine example of rural people at work for their community. He has been recognized for this community spirit with the Committee Person of the Year award given by the Canadian Cowboys' Association. Mr. Dale Whitford of Rose Valley has been chairman of the Rose Valley Rodeo Association since its inception in 1995. Its beginnings were in response to a need in the community.

The Rose Valley sports day committee was challenged by the need for a fundraiser to keep the skating rink operational. Mr. Whitford was instrumental in setting up and researching the event. Other communities were less than optimistic as to the longevity of the venture and the committee was told that three years was all that could be expected.

With the dedication and hard work of Mr. Whitford and other committee members, the Rose Valley Harvest Rodeo Roundup has been a successful community event for five years. Having attended this rodeo with its sold-out crowds and the experience excitement, it's easy to see why the event was named Rodeo of the Year by the Manitoba Cowboys' Association in 1998.

Let us join in the enthusiastic praise of the event and congratulate Dale Whitford on his achievements in developing and sustaining this worthwhile event for the betterment of the community of Rose Valley.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ORAL QUESTIONS

Gas Tax Reduction

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Minister of Finance. Yesterday wasn't a very good day for the Minister of Finance and for this budget. The realtors waded in yesterday, Mr. Speaker, and trashed the budget. They pointed out that for the average homeowner or in the case of people wanting to buy a home or sell a home this budget would increase taxes by about \$400 on an average purchase.

Not to make too fine a point on it, Mr. Speaker, but that is a tax hike, not a tax cut. The minister says though that this budget will be good for the real estate industry. No wonder you don't want to cut gas taxes, Mr. Minister — you think high taxes are good.

Mr. Minister, it's not too late. You can still take some action today. Use some of your \$700 million slush fund, provide some much-needed and emergent tax relief at the pumps, and trigger some federal tax relief, Mr. Minister, at least on a temporary basis. Will you do that? Will you cut gas taxes today?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — First of all, Mr. Speaker, I want to offer an apology to the members opposite with respect to something I

said yesterday. Yesterday I pointed out that the member from Kindersley and the member from Moosomin campaigned in the 1991 general election along with Grant Devine to harmonize the PST (provincial sales tax) with the GST (goods and services tax), but I neglected to mention that the member from Cannington also campaigned for that, Mr. Speaker. I don't want the member from Cannington to feel left out.

But I want to say, Mr. Speaker, that the problem with the members opposite is that they have learned nothing from the past. Because two words come to mind when we listen to the members opposite, Mr. Speaker, and those words are Grant Devine.

We had this in the 1980s, a promise to do away with the gas tax. And what happened, Mr. Speaker? Well they did away with the gas tax. Next headline was, "Devine slashes major programs." And finally at the end of the day, Mr. Speaker, the gas tax went back on.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I don't know whether to laugh or cry, Mr. Speaker. This is all very interesting. It would seem if you took the minister's logic to its own paranoid conclusion, that Grant Devine is somehow pulling the strings of the federal Liberal Minister of Finance, because that's who started this whole discussion about a gas tax cut, Mr. Minister — it was the federal Liberal government.

Maybe, Mr. Minister, if we looked hard enough, we could determine that Grant Devine is actually the power behind OPEC (Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries). Maybe he's the reason that world oil prices are so high. He may even be controlling world wheat prices just to get back at all you guys, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — Mr. Speaker, we're proposing a very reasonable and affordable measure to help taxpayers, where every \$2 of tax savings for Saskatchewan people would only cost us 1.

Why won't you do that, Mr. Minister? Why won't you cut the gas tax now?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Mr. Speaker, in case the member opposite doesn't know, gas taxes have not gone up in Saskatchewan since 1993. The increase in prices, Mr. Speaker, are going to the oil companies.

And what this member is really saying is that the oil companies should get all of the money from the gas prices, the people of Saskatchewan should get none of the money, which money, Mr. Speaker, we need to repair the roads.

And I want to say to the members opposite, Mr. Speaker, that the federal government . . .

The Speaker: — Order, please. All hon. members, please. I would ask for your co-operation to allow the question to be

heard and also, please, to allow the answer to be heard, for everyone's benefit.

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Mr. Speaker, I think the member opposite should explain to the people of the province why the federal government, which contributes nothing to the maintenance of the highway system in Saskatchewan, should be talking to us about cutting our taxes when, Mr. Speaker, we're contributing \$250 million of the tax revenue we take in to road construction and maintenance, Mr. Speaker.

What we should be talking about is responsible, reasonable public policy that would say we should have federal money and provincial money going into our highway system as we are doing in the province, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We all know how good a job this government is doing about fixing the highways. The minister was talking about that in his answer. That's pretty clear.

Mr. Speaker, the minister talks about lessons from the past. I think the most important political lesson that all political parties should remember is that when governments grow fat and arrogant, they will be headed — destined — for an electoral horsewhipping of biblical proportion, Mr. Speaker. That's the lesson that they haven't learned over there.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — Mr. Minister, for months farm groups and members of this Assembly, all members — the Premier, the Deputy Premier, members of this side — banded together and struggled to get federal farm aid . . . federal money. It was like pulling teeth.

Now overnight the federal Minister of Finance has put potentially millions of federal tax dollars on the table for Saskatchewan motorists, but you won't meet them halfway. Taxpayers expect you to cut taxes now.

Mr. Minister, the Saskatchewan Party is proposing a \$120 million tax cut that would only cost you \$60 million. You don't need a provincial income tax review committee to tell you that that's a pretty good tax cut. Why won't you even consider the proposal?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Mr. Speaker, two days ago I delivered a budget which represents the largest tax cut in Saskatchewan history, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — On July 1 of this year, the Saskatchewan flat tax brought in by the Grant Devine government is going to be cut in half. On January 1, Mr. Speaker, it's going to be eliminated.

And this kind of thinking, Mr. Speaker, leads us to this. I'm

quoting from *The Leader-Post*, March 6, 1990, where the former leader of the members opposite, Mr. Devine, said this. He said:

You know, when I was first elected Premier in 1982, I said Saskatchewan people would not have to pay provincial tax on gasoline at the pump as long as I was the Premier. Tonight I have to tell you that I can no longer deliver on that promise.

Mr. Speaker, this kind of thinking did not add up in the 1980s; it does not add up today. It leads to deficit, it leads to debt, and it leads to mortgaging our children's future. And we're not going to do that, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Funding for Education

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Minister of Education. Mr. Minister, everyone in Saskatchewan shuddered when you told reporters that you were the vision — you were the driving force behind Roy Romanow and the NDP government.

Mr. Speaker, I don't know who should have been more worried — the NDP government or the people of Saskatchewan. After all, before the Education minister joined the NDP, he used his political vision first of all to destroy the Liberal caucus and then embarrass the Liberal Party with the most brutal provincial election campaign anybody had seen.

And now, Mr. Speaker, the good doctor is bringing his same vision to his job as Education minister. Just ask the SSTA (Saskatchewan School Trustees Association). Thanks to this guy's so-called vision, school boards are saying they're going to have to close schools and fire teachers and cut programs.

Mr. Minister, is that your vision for education? Is your vision to close schools and fire teachers?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Melenchuk: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly a very interesting preamble from the member opposite who has no list of accomplishments in a second-term career. But let's just talk about Education for a minute here.

This year, budget over budget, 7.2 per cent increase on the foundation operating grant.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Melenchuk: — This year an additional 5 million for capital projects — an increase of 20.7 per cent.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Melenchuk: — New funding recognition for curriculum actualization — an increase of 25 per cent.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Melnychuk: — And, Mr. Speaker, the basic pupil rate increases by \$262 so every division that has enrolment increases will get more money. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Draude: — Mr. Speaker, maybe the member doesn't remember that not every division has enrolment increases.

Mr. Minister, the SSTA said that you're not telling the truth. They said your government slashed 300 . . .

The Speaker: — Order, please. Now just . . . All hon. members, order, please. I would ask members to please choose their words judiciously in requesting questions and in the responses, please.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The SSTA said that you were misleading people by exaggerating budget numbers.

An Hon. Member: — And that's a quote.

Ms. Draude: — That's a quote.

The Speaker: — Well it still . . . It borders on language that may impute a member's character. And I'd ask the hon. member to please choose the words again judiciously.

Ms. Draude: — Okay. Mr. Minister, you spent budget day bragging that school boards were happy with your so-called vision for education.

Well, Mr. Speaker, to quote the present of . . . president of the SSTA, quote: "nothing could be further from the truth." School boards are saying your education budget forgets children. They say your vision is devastating education in Saskatchewan.

Mr. Minister, what advice do you have to school divisions who are right now forced to close schools and fire teachers just so they can try and live within this budget that you've given?

Hon. Mr. Melnychuk: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It seems the only confusion on this budget is in the minds of the opposition. The fact of the matter is, the fact . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker . . .

The Speaker: — Order, please. I once again would appeal to all hon. members to allow the questions to be heard and the responses to be heard as well, for everyone's benefit.

Hon. Mr. Melnychuk: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly I'm pleased that now the members opposite will be able to listen to the answer.

The budget . . . the budget-over-budget increases — \$28.5 million. The increase on the foundation operating grant for this year is \$18.5 million, an increase of 4.7 per cent.

So what per cent do you want to argue — the 4.7 or the 7.2? The 4.7 is three times the rate of inflation; the 7.2 is six times the rate of inflation. Significant increases for our schools.

And with the capital projects that will be announced in the next

two to three weeks, there will be significant improvements for the children in this province, and we are very proud of our education budget. Thank you.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well during the provincial campaign the minister said that he was going to put \$50 million into education — \$50 million. What he actually put is one-third of that.

But, Mr. Speaker, the SSTA president, Gary Shaddock, raised some serious and legitimate concerns for school divisions. And you know what he said — the minister didn't know what he was talking about.

And Mr. Shaddock said that you . . . You said Mr. Shaddock didn't understand your visionary leadership. That's what you said. He said school divisions have had bad news for so long, they just don't recognize good news when they see it.

Mr. Minister, school divisions have no problem understanding that your government has turned your back on education. So what's your advice to school boards when they have to close schools and fire teachers after you break just another election promise?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Melnychuk: — Well, Mr. Speaker, after answering the first two questions, there seems to be still confusion in the minds of the opposition.

You know, Mr. Speaker, when we talk about improvements over the last several years with regard to education, certainly we can talk about funding issues. And this is a special year and I'll try to explain to the members opposite why this is a special year, but I will go very slow.

This is a transition year. We are moving — we are moving — from a calendar year to a fiscal year. Now let's . . . I'm going to ask a question to the members opposite. In this particular calendar year, there is a three-month transition on the front end — amounts to an increase of close to 20 per cent over a fiscal quarter last year. The increase in the foundation operating grant this year has been worked out with the school trustees and they will receive 7 of the 10 equal payments this year. But they will get a bonus next year on the quarter.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Draude: — School divisions are not worried about a transition period. The school divisions are worried that they didn't get enough money to fund their school divisions right now. You've cut \$380 million from the Education budget since 1991.

The president of the SSTA described what your vision is for education like this, and I quote:

Some government comments would lead the public to believe school boards should be pleased with the budget. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Mr. Minister, just in case you don't get the gist of what the

school divisions are trying to say, I want you to hear what they said about the result of your vision, quote:

That means school boards will be left with very tough decisions. Cutting programs, closing schools, or cutting staff is what faces many school boards in the future. Once again it's the children in the classroom who will suffer.

Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Education has failed the children of Saskatchewan. Mr. Minister, do you think school divisions just don't understand, or will you admit that your so-called visionary leadership is what the problem is?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Melnychuk: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It seems that the members opposite are a little slow in getting the points this morning. In any situation where you're a little slow in getting the message, I'll just repeat the message for them: \$28.5 million increase, an increase of 7.2 per cent in the foundation operating grant budget over budget; 18.5 million this calendar year, an increase of 4.7 per cent; 5 million extra dollars on capital, an increase of 20.7 per cent; increased funding on a per student basis to the tune of well over \$200; and additional money for pre-kindergarten programs, community schools, community coordinators in northern Saskatchewan.

A tremendous budget. Our children will not suffer; they will be enhanced by this budget. And the members opposite, what would they do for education? Not one penny — frozen.

Closure of Court Houses

Ms. Bakken: — Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Justice. Mr. Minister, just hours after the budget announcement on Wednesday the communities of Weyburn, Humboldt, and Assiniboia were informed their court houses would be closed.

Mr. Minister, this news came as a sudden shock to these communities and the surrounding area. They're upset because there was absolutely no consultation. They feel angry and they feel betrayed.

Mr. Minister, these are busy court houses. On Tuesday this week, there were 19 cases on the court docket. Just two years ago, Weyburn Court of Queen's Bench scheduling went from once every three weeks to biweekly because of the high caseload. Yet you say they're closing because of a low caseload.

Mr. Minister, I ask you today on behalf of the citizens of these three communities, will you reverse this decision and reopen these court houses?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Axworthy: — Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for her question and to indicate that none of these decisions are made gladly. We understand that this poses an extra burden on individuals and lawyers in those communities.

But, Mr. Speaker, government's responsibility is to use tax dollars wisely, efficiently, and effectively. And sometimes this

means difficult decisions, something the member opposite perhaps doesn't understand.

I suggest to her that she look at the context of this decision in the context of the budget as a whole, with major significant, extra commitments to rural Saskatchewan. Let me just mention the education tax deduction and the gas tax rebate as two, Mr. Speaker — \$35 million alone. Not to mention the biggest tax break in Saskatchewan history.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Bakken: — Mr. Minister, Mr. Speaker, the minister says this measure will save half a million dollars. That's exactly the amount you increased your budget in your administration office by. You closed down court houses to spend more money on bureaucracy. Mr. Minister, the people of Saskatchewan believe it's time you got your government and your department's priorities straight.

I also wonder why there is an increase of \$4 million in your budget for court services. You are closing down the court house in three communities. I raised the issue of losing a judge in Weyburn during the election campaign. Judy Bradley said, I was fearmongering. Not even I could have imagined that you would close the entire court house.

Mr. Minister, is there no limit to your government's assault on rural Saskatchewan?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Axworthy: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, let me reiterate that none of these decisions are made easily. But as usage reduces in court houses and in government services we have to reassess the availability of those resources.

Mr. Speaker, the savings of a quarter of a million dollars this year, a half a million dollars next year, will ensure that these resources can be better allocated to serve the people of Saskatchewan — including the member's own . . . the member's own constituents.

For example, Mr. Speaker, more police officers, more help for legal aid, Mr. Speaker, and more facilities . . . more resources for courts whose business have increased. Let me say, Mr. Speaker, that the member should understand that these decisions have to be made on the basis of economic efficiency and common sense.

Does she want us to go back to the days of her old Devine-buddy times, Mr. Speaker, when taxpayers' money was spent without fear, without thought of the consequences?

The Speaker: — Order. Hon. members, before the next question is posed, just a reminder to direct your questions and comments through the Chair, rather than directly to the members opposite. I thank you for your co-operation.

Ms. Bakken: — The people in Weyburn-Big Muddy pay taxes the same as everyone else in this province and they deserve to have the services in their community.

Mr. Speaker, the court house in Weyburn is a community landmark — such a proud symbol of the community that SaskTel, a government corporation, chose to put it on the cover of this year's Estevan/Weyburn phone book.

Mr. Minister, this is what you have done to the people of Weyburn — you have ripped the court house out of their community, and you . . . just like you've ripped the hospitals, and you've ripped the schools, and other essential services.

The Speaker: — Order, please. Order. I appreciate, hon. members, the enthusiasm for this . . . Order, please. Order, please. Order. Order, order, please.

Ms. Bakken: — The NDP take great joy in the demise of rural Saskatchewan. Well the people of rural Saskatchewan are sick and tired of having their hospitals, their schools, and their essential services ripped out of their communities.

Mr. Minister, the people of Weyburn are not going to take this from your government. Today I am asking everyone in Weyburn to rip the front off of their phone book and send it to me to protest the way the NDP has ripped the court house out of our community.

Mr. Minister, will you reverse this decision?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Axworthy: — Well, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker, the member's Tory friends in the past — and she was very close to those Tories, Mr. Speaker — ripped the heart out of this province and we'll still trying to pay for it.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Axworthy: — Mr. Speaker, I want to assure the member that provincial court services will remain in the three centres she talked about, Mr. Speaker, and those court days will be adequate to meet the demands of the citizens of that area.

Mr. Speaker, I'll say that if those days which are presently allocated are not enough, then of course we will reassess it to see that those services are provided to meet the needs of the citizens of the three centres the member mentions, Mr. Speaker. So provincial court services are available and will continue to be available in those three centres.

Mr. Speaker, when it comes to Queen's Bench services it is simply the case, Mr. Speaker, that these three points are three of the lowest service points in the province. It is the case, Mr. Speaker, that the citizens are not using those services and they don't need to be provided in the same way.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Bakken: — Mr. Speaker, it is the NDP's only answer to most questions is to blame someone else because they cannot give an answer, a straight answer, to the people of Weyburn-Big Muddy. There is absolutely no reason for this court house being closed. The lawyers in Weyburn are outraged, the community is outraged, and you are going to have to answer for it.

Mr. Minister, will you reverse this decision?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Axworthy: — Mr. Speaker, the decision was made by careful analysis of the usage of the Weyburn court facilities, Mr. Speaker. And in order to use our resources efficiently and effectively, the decision was made that those resources did not warrant the continuation of those services up to date.

Mr. Speaker, the resources . . . the dollars that will be saved from this reallocation will be used to better the services of the people in Weyburn, Assiniboia, and Humboldt. The member knows that. More police, more legal aid, more things that the people of rural Saskatchewan need, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ORDERS OF THE DAY

WRITTEN QUESTIONS

Mr. Kowalsky: — Mr. Speaker, I am very happy, in fact the government is very happy to supply this answer, especially in the fact that it comes from the member from Cannington.

The Speaker: — The answer is tabled.

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. McMorris: — Thank you very much Mr. Speaker. It's again a privilege to resume my reply to the budget speech. I believe I left off somewhere in the PST, and the expansion of the PST had taken me about 10 minutes to name all the items that the PST has been expanded to. And there have been a lot of different items. I believe I left off on pet food, of all the things. Isn't that right, member from Yorkton, pet food?

There's also dry cleaning and vet fees and a number of other things. And that's only what came into effect two nights ago. There are a number of other items that are going to be coming into effect July 1, which I don't think the minister made quite as clear as what I think he should have made it clear.

All professional fees, such as legal and accounting fees, architectural fees, consulting and engineering services, building services, advertising services, and employment services. The PST has done nothing but expand.

This government, only about a month ago, had the nerve to raise SaskTel rates about 18 to 23 per cent. They also looked at SaskEnergy rates and they raised them 10 to 11 per cent. And

then have the gall to say that this is a historic tax cut. I don't see how they can stand there and say that.

If you look in the last six months of this NDP government, not only have they broadened the PST to collect a whole bunch more money, they've also increased services such as SaskTel and SaskEnergy.

I was talking to a fellow, an older fellow that was talking about this PST expansion. And they talk about the income tax reduction, and that's going to be in a couple of years. But with the health care system that we have got in this province that, as the minister explained herself, is on the ropes, the chances of some people making it to that tax cut aren't very good. And all they can see themselves doing right now is putting more money out; more money out before they see any sort of tax cut in the future. And I think it's a real shame.

The other issue that comes to light on this PST expansion — not only on the expansion but also putting it on the First Nations people — was . . . I was talking to a drug store owner that is in the northern part of my constituency, and she was just absolutely outraged in the response that she got yesterday. There was no pre-work done with them. All of a sudden they're the front line workers that have to do the dirty work of this provincial government. And they have had nothing but problems with it all day yesterday, and I'm sure it's going to be going on for weeks and weeks to come.

And it's just the typical — keep it quiet. When we campaigned, we campaigned on that very issue — the PST on First Nations. These people said they'd never do it; never do it. And then their first budget, come in with something like that.

Other issues that I wanted to address in this historic budget — I really hesitate to call it that — is the lack of funding for highways. I was talking to a number of the people in the highway construction industry — road builders themselves — and they really had to laugh that they've gone up to \$250 million. And the government is selling this budget on \$250 million into road construction.

When they looked at their increased costs of the added PST, when they looked at the increased costs of fuel that they're going to have to be paying in the upcoming construction season, they feel that the budget increase is going to amount to about five to ten kilometres of road, new road construction. That's not enough for this province. That's another group that's upset with the budget.

Health care. I'll talk about health care for a . . . just a few minutes here. Health care. The budget did increase in health care, and that is great. But when you look at . . . I guess what I would like to say about health care, if the government and the minister would take that money and put it to front line workers. Or are they going to build more hospital operating rooms just to have them lie vacant because they don't have enough front line workers?

I really wish and ask the minister to take the money that they have put into health care and put it into front line services so we can use the facilities that we spent millions and millions and millions of dollars to expand to. And then leave them closed

because we don't have anybody to man them.

Municipal Affairs has critic . . . when I first got, when I was first asked to be the urban Municipal Affairs critic, I thought, well this shouldn't be too bad. What is going to be, what is going to be taking place in municipal affairs?

Well after the budget, I've sure been getting a lot of phone calls. After the tax revolt meetings I've been to, a number of phone calls over that. One of the issues . . . I was looking through the budget, and in the *Estimates* on page no. 91, I see in the *Estimates* that policing costs restructuring assistance is, as what the opposition likes to say or as the government likes to say, zap, it's frozen. Well unfortunately in this case, zap, it's gone. There is no money for policing in this area. They've taken it away completely. And that's going to affect rural residents hugely.

You take to an RM (rural municipality) with roughly about a thousand people, it could be an increase in their mill — they're going to have to find the money and make it up in the mill rate — of about \$15,000 per RM. It's huge. It's not zap, it's frozen; it's zap, it's gone. And that's the way this government operates.

The millennium fund of about \$30 million a year over the next three years. They've talked about that and they have hung their hat on that, on what a great program it is. But again talking to municipalities and different organizations, by the time you weed that down into all the different areas that that \$30 million has to cover, whether it's school construction, whether it's infrastructure, whether it's whatever it might be that this money is supposed to go to, most RMs feel that it's absolutely minimal. It's not going to do them really one bit of good.

Amalgamation. I have attended a number of meetings recently on municipal amalgamation, and it's really interesting. I wish some of the people in government would attend a few of those because they're hopping mad out there. They don't want to see it.

But unfortunately when this provincial government keeps forcing their hand and forcing their hand, it really becomes a forced amalgamation through government. We really feel it's got to be from the bottom up.

The other area I just want to touch on briefly is the fact of them patting their backs . . . selves on the back for the last seven years of balanced budget. Well when you take the \$700,000 they took out of the slush fund to balance this budget, they say they're going to run a \$400 million surplus. That means they're taking 2 to 300 million out of that slush fund to balance the budget. To me that's a far cry from balancing the budget.

I remember a number of years ago as a farmer when the GRIP (gross revenue insurance program) was ripped up and they took all the money out of that to balance the budget.

They keep talking on how wonderful they are on balancing the budget, but it's always on the backs of . . . for one time it was farmers, now it's through the liquor and gaming fund. That's not what I call a balanced budget.

I guess what concerns me most about this budget, Mr. Speaker,

is the fact that we know that people are leaving our province. We know that people are moving to Alberta; they're moving to Manitoba, Ontario, down to the States, on a regular basis. I know of a number of people in my community, in my constituency, that are in the process of moving.

It used to be we'd lose our young kids because the young kids are moving out of our province to find greener pastures. And there's always going to be a certain amount of that.

But unfortunately, what's happening now is a lot of people that have lived their life in Saskatchewan, finding they can not make a go with the tax structure this government has imposed on them and they're taking all their savings and moving out too. So it's not just the young people we're losing, we're also losing a number of our retired people because they can't handle the tax structure that this government places on them. And there's nothing in this budget that I see will keep people in this province.

Mr. Speaker, the last comment that I want to make is to the Minister of Finance. You know, I liken this budget to a bit of baseball game. You know, he was up to bat and he had the pitch coming in. It was called the budget and he missed that one completely. He struck out on the budget.

We are offering him another pitch. Just a nice slow softball coming in, and I wish he could envision it. It's called a tax cut on gasoline. And it's coming in nice and slow. It's coming in nice and slow and I wish he could envision it. I wish he could see making contact with that because, Mr. Speaker, it may not be a home run pitch but maybe it's something that will keep us in the ball game for another inning or two, because right now we are not going to remain in the ball game.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McMorris: — Mr. Speaker, it gives me a great pleasure to support the amendment put forth by the member from Rosetown-Biggar, the Leader of the Official Opposition. I thank you very much.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Well thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wasn't sure that I was going to get up and speak to the budget, but it's so inspirational listening to everybody talk that I couldn't resist the opportunity.

I have a bit of a special advantage over some of my colleagues in addressing the budget because I do sit on Treasury Board and some of the important parts of a budget are the details. And certainly for myself, the details have a lot to do with how I feel about this budget.

But there are four general themes, Mr. Speaker. One is tax relief. Another one is vastly increased opportunities for jobs and education. Another one is a balanced approach for both the economy and families, and more effective services.

And I'm just going to spend a little time describing for you some of the detail because I know you may not have read through the entire budget yet to find these things.

There's many new opportunities in developing sectors of the economy. Now one of the things as Minister of Labour that I'm always concerned about is not just growth in jobs. It's wonderful that we have the highest number of jobs in the history of the province, but what's important is the quality of these jobs. And the kind of work that's being done by the Minister of Economic Development and Minister of Agriculture is to develop those high quality jobs in developing sectors of our economy.

For example in the environment, in the forestry sector, not only is there the tree planting going on for reforestation, but there's a lot of work being done in CO₂ capture to deal with the carbon issues in the environment. And one of the commitments in this budget has been to vastly increase the amount of money put towards reforestation and CO₂ capture in the environment. And that's going to create a lot of new jobs for northern people and other people in the forestry industry in Saskatchewan.

Now our Department of Labour, we've gotten increased money because the industry has asked us to do more on occupational health and safety training so that we can make sure that these new forestry developments are very positive for everybody and that people have the education that they need to work safely in these industries.

Another area is the development of high-tech research jobs in the province. Both at Innovation Place in Saskatoon and at the Research Park in Regina we're seeing a substantial growth in high-technology jobs and research jobs that will certainly have that quality job we're looking for and the high-income earner that will contribute to the provincial economy. And these things have been growing extremely rapidly in the past few years, and I'm pleased to be part of a government that has supported those developments in Saskatchewan.

In the agricultural area there's been a lot of talk about diversification. And actually just recently on the CBC (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation) discussion about oil prices. And I guess the approach that the members opposite are taking is one approach. But there's other people talking about new fuels and certainly ethanol is an important part of rural diversification and an important part of some of the options for looking at alternative fuels of the future. And in this budget we do support the production and use of ethanol in the province, as well as food processing, new crop production, and agricultural research generally.

(1100)

So I think there's a lot in the budget to build for the future in terms of high-quality, sustainable incomes in jobs in the rural areas, not merely being dependent on areas that have not done well in world markets, particularly with the European and US (United States) subsidies.

The other one is the deep oil initiative where we're recovering a lot more of the oil, even from existing mines, and able to . . . I was actually pretty pleased to find out that there's a lot of oil in the Regina basin area.

An Hon. Member: — And the hot air across the hall too.

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — And yes, that'll complement the hot air across the way.

But this deep oil initiative of course is important to us because the new fuels that are going along — they'll be a few years in development and a few years before people's vehicles and gas stations and whatnot adapt to the new fuels that are available — but certainly the deep oil initiative is an important one.

There's also, Mr. Speaker, new opportunities in communications and transportation. I'm sure most people by now are familiar with the LAND (Land Titles automated network development) project which is a high technology project for people with land use information, land titles, and the GIS (Geographic Information System) systems that people depend on very much today when they're doing any kind of exploration or development work.

And I think this new Crown is going to again boost up the high quality jobs in the high-tech sector in Saskatchewan, as well as providing people with the important information they need for development.

The other one is technology-enhanced learning. Perhaps we might at some point have a computer on every desk in the legislature and then it would be possible to actually deliver some information to the members opposite, seeing as their ears don't seem to work particularly well.

The technology-enhanced learning — there are agricultural students at the university in Saskatoon who are receiving their education through distance education — many of the students with the SIAST (Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology) and technical schools. There are engineering students who are in co-operative programs between Calgary and Saskatchewan that are receiving technology-enhanced learning.

This is a big area for people to be able to do some extra learning without having to travel to a different destination to do that learning. And in an era when people have to be retrained several times during their lifetime, there's no question that the ability to do that from your workplace or your home is a big advantage over having to pull up stakes and move to Toronto or someplace else to take a specialized course.

So I was glad to see the commitment, extra commitment to technology-enhanced learning in this budget.

In highways, the twinning of the Yellowhead, that's been an outstanding commitment and that's proceeding along.

So I think there's a number of things to be pleased about in the communications and transportation area.

In the learning area, we heard the Minister of Education during question period speaking to some of these matters but there's the additional new capital fund on top of the already increased fund to the capital base. And that's of course the fund that we're having in honour of the centenary. And this is going to give a much increased opportunity for a lot of school districts to do some of the capital work they need to do, and again in the K to 12 system, distance education.

But a particularly important one for myself and my constituents is the community schools and the community education component, because a lot of the people in parts of my constituency require additional support at home and in school in order to have a successful educational experience. So I'm pleased to see the work there, Mr. Speaker.

The other one that's very important too, just a block from my office — in fact not even a whole block — is the Saskatchewan Independent Living organization, and I'm sure that they were very pleased to hear the announcement about the increased educational opportunities for the disabled.

When somebody is born into a society, and whether that be a disabled individual, an Aboriginal individual, an immigrant or refugee — any of the people who typically are not well included in our society — sometimes it's necessary for special initiatives to occur to make sure that everybody has the opportunity for full citizenship.

And I just want to say that I think that these increased educational opportunities for the disabled are half of the equation. The other half of the equation is making sure the opportunities are there for them once they finish their education. And that's something that all of us have to work on is making sure that we don't relegate somebody to the back row merely because they have some kind of a disability.

And finally, of course, in the education area the tax credit for post-secondary graduates. I think that they'll be very pleased with having that reward at the end of their course of studies.

Another area that's been important is the working for safe and healthy communities. And of course this budget saw an increase to legal aid as well as the additional money in alternative measures and in policing. So I certainly know that that will be important to the legal aid community to have that extra assistance.

I lived for many years, as you know, Mr. Speaker, in the North, and sewer and water of course is one of the key issues for health in the North. There's a lot of illnesses connected with polluted drinking water and potable water for cooking and other uses. And certainly in this budget again we'll see improvements to sewer and water for the North.

And as well the centenary capital fund will provide that extra \$5 million for capital projects in the North. So I think the people of the North have a lot to be happy about in this budget as far as the kind of basic services that we take for granted here.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — In the area of health care there is improved support for health care providers. And we're in a difficult situation in Canada where not only is the financial ability to respond to health care a challenge for everyone, but also very high expectations that people have of the health care system. But I believe that we've got a lot of good people working in the system and I believe that we will get this worked out.

And I believe we'll get the attention of Ottawa. And I wouldn't

be at all surprised if in the next federal budget we see some response from Mr. Chrétien and Mr. Rock in the health care area. I'm certainly counting on them to come through for Canada on the issue of health care.

For early childhood services, again that's considered to be one of the most important hallmarks of our government, the early childhood intervention programs which we've again increased support to.

In the Department of Labour, we are commencing this year with further work on our balancing work and family initiatives so that people can go to work and still be able to meet their family obligations, and not have to feel constantly torn between home and work.

And we're hoping to work closely with employers on being successful on these kinds of initiatives, because of course you can't do it without an employer who's interested in working that out. But I think most progressive employers would agree that to have happy employees who aren't distracted by worries from home creates a much better workplace and a more productive workplace.

As well, there's increased funding to daycare in this budget. Every year we've attempted to make improvements to the daycare envelope in Saskatchewan, and there's another 500,000 again going into improvements to day care. And, as a grandmother who has part-time care of my granddaughter, I've certainly started paying a little more attention to daycare again than I did for a few years, and I'm very pleased with the arrangements that we have. But I do think this is an important area that we need to look even further at in the future.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — As you know, part of this budget finances the labour standards review that will be coming up this year. And having labour law keep pace with modern changes in the workplace is very important, because the whole idea of labour law is to give people basic protection in their working lives.

It's not unlike fire laws, or health laws, or any kind of laws that provide some basic standard for society. So when we go through the labour standards review, we'll have to think about the changes there's been in the workplace and how we can give people that basic protection in the workplace of today. And I know that the members opposite will no doubt want to be supportive of that kind of thinking.

The other aspect I want to speak to just a minute is the cost-effective government services, but also the government accountability project that's taking place through the Finance department.

Often, I think, when people pay taxes and some of this cry for tax cuts, some of it is because there has been a growing tax burden over the years, but part of it is because people become unsure what they're purchasing with their tax dollars.

And I think this accountability project will be very important for setting out some guidelines as to what people are trying to

achieve in the different departments, what progress they've made in the past year in achieving those things. And certainly I look forward to having those measurable standards within our departments.

And obviously some things are difficult to measure but I think we can get to a point where we have a better idea about the effectiveness and people will then perhaps be a little more satisfied that the dollars that they part with are being spent wisely and in the best interests of the public at large. So I'm very supportive of this project.

The other thing I want to mention is this fund that's been created in this budget which is targeted to be 5 per cent of budget. And I do find it passing strange that the members across the way would object to this because any responsible family, any responsible municipality, any responsible institution, would try to set aside at least 5 per cent of their budget to deal with urgent or emergent matters; and I think that's only financially wise and responsible to do that and I certainly have a hard time understanding why they would be opposed to that.

The other thing I want to mention is when they're raising concerns about taxes raised, taxes lowered, the fact of the matter is when we designed our tax package, we took all of that into account. When we give you the figures of the tax savings, that's deducting the increased PST from the total tax cut and what you get at the end is the total saving that you're going to have.

So for a single-income family which is two adults, two children, at a taxable income of 37,000, they will save \$1,351. For a two-income family, two adults and two children with an employment income of 80,000, their net saving after the PST, after the income tax cuts, will be 1,312. For a single senior, of which there's certainly many in my constituency, with a taxable income of 20,000, their net savings will be \$540. For a single, part-time student, their net savings will be 228; and of course for students every little bit helps, there's no question.

So those are the net savings. This is after the PST, after the tax cut. And certainly it averages out to the thousand dollars a year promised in the election. But for individuals who have larger families, obviously the savings will be greater than that.

I guess the last thing I want to say is there's two things that contributed the most to the reprehensible debt that was left behind by the previous government. And I know people get tired of hearing about it, but when you sit in Finance and realize that it's going to take many, many years yet before this burden is lifted from Saskatchewan — maybe a couple of more generations — you do have to take very seriously the repercussions of irresponsible financial management.

And the fact of the matter is there was two things that contributed largely to that debt, that were policies of that government. One was the home repair program, and the other one was the gas tax program. And so here we have a group today that's proposing the same foolishness with the gas tax that got us into so much trouble before, and that Devine couldn't sustain and had to put that tax back on. So I please ask the members opposite to learn from the past. And I speak against the amendment and for the budget.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's good to have an opportunity to respond to the budget and some of the things that were in it and some of the things that weren't or aren't in there, as well as to some of the comments that the NDP democratic socialists over there have been spewing forth over the last day or two.

And I guess they're hoping that the people that are watching are ignorant. They're not. And that's why, in the last election, the NDP over there received less than the most votes in this province. And that's a bit of arrogance that they thought they had caught on to the day after the election. They seem to have forgotten a whole lot about that.

Anyway, this is an interesting budget. It's an interesting budget because it reminds me a whole lot of figure skating. And unfortunately in my home when figure skating is on, the television gets turned to that. And I'm not a fan of it but my spouse is so I do get to see it from time to time. And you will see the skaters skating around the arena getting ready to do a quad or something of that sort. And they get to their particular location, and they're up and they're high and they come down and it's been just beautiful, and then they fall on their tush. And, Mr. Speaker, I think that's exactly what's happened with this particular budget.

(1115)

There was a lot of lead-up to it. It had some good directions as they started down. And when we look at the thing at the end of the time, what are the final results for the taxpayers of this particular province? It was a total failure. They fell on their face. We've given them a few chances to recover, and I'll say a bit about that later on, but they're lying on the ice shivering.

It's a cold, cold day in Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, from this particular budget that's been sent down to us. It hasn't been pretty in any stretch of the imagination.

And let's deal with these issues that were in the budget as they sort of came up.

First of all, we've had in the last number of months two major increases in utility rates. Major increases in utility rates that the cabinet from this NDP democratic socialist government, Mr. Speaker, voted to maintain.

They had the opportunity, they had the opportunity to say no, we're not going to put that tax on the people of Saskatchewan because, Mr. Speaker, it is a tax. Because when you check the books you see that there's money. The profit that those Crowns made, this government takes to run the government. So it's a tax. They got the money from the people; they didn't print it. They might have wanted to, but they didn't.

Those particular utility rate increases equal \$41 million. They've already started taking those, a couple of weeks before the budget came down. They've already started to collect those. So there's a tax increase that's been going part way through this

winter, fully in place on budget day — \$41 million.

Yes, but then we heard the Minister of Finance get up on budget day and say how they've paid attention and there is going to be a tax cut. That particular tax cut, Mr. Speaker, comes out to about \$43 million. Awfully close to the grab they just took out of the utilities. Very, very close to it. So at the end of the day, just balancing those two things off, they're virtually equal — virtually equal.

So what have the people of Saskatchewan gained from this particular government dealing with just those two issues? Essentially, nothing.

I think if you figure it out, we figure it out . . . and we've got the member from Yorkton saying, what kind of math? It's very easy math. We're not down to even three-digit numbers yet, Mr. Speaker, and the member from Yorkton is confused. No wonder he got confused when the numbers got a little larger.

So we look at that and we see that with the best news possible it could amount to about \$2 a month per person in Saskatchewan — that's if absolutely everything turns out right — \$2 per person. And they call that a major tax cut of historic proportions.

You'd think that Charlton Heston or someone had come in here and delivered that, of the grandeur that was built around this particular budget that was supposed to save the people of Saskatchewan so much money.

So we've got about \$2 a month per person in Saskatchewan — from only that particular part, only that particular part. Then along comes another part that we have to pay some very definite attention to, Mr. Speaker.

We had this government, just like that skater that skates around the arena a few times to get ready for the jump, well they sent around the Vicq commission to go ahead and sort of get ready for the big jump. Well the Vicq commission came up and said yes, there has to be a major tax cut in this particular province.

This government knew that, Mr. Speaker, because the Sask Party campaigned on tax cuts in the last election and we got more votes than they did. We'll get more votes next time. And some of those people back there that are squeaking away in the back rows will be gone next time, because this was not a tax cut. This was not an answer to what the people of Saskatchewan said they wanted. It wasn't.

So they sent around the Vicq commission to get this whole thing ready. Vicq commission says, major tax cut needed in income tax. So they granted a . . . they went down that road a fair distance. I'll give them credit for that. And then they said, oh, but so help us. We are democratic socialists. We can't cut tax. We've got to get it back some place. So the socialists over there got it back.

The Vicq commission said, cut the sales tax and expand it. Well, we didn't agree with that because there's some taxing that takes place there. This group of New Democrats said, heaven help us if we're going to cut the sales tax. We're going to leave it where it is, and now we're going to expand it.

Now if that isn't cherry-picking. They picked the biggest, the ripest one. Something everyone's got to do. It's a consumption tax. We've got to stay alive; we have to spend the money. Every home has to do that. Okay, let's tax them on that. When they've got to spend the money, let's get them where they can't avoid it in any way, shape, or form. So they taxed it on them — \$155 million out of the pockets of Saskatchewan taxpayers.

So now what have we got at the end of the day? What do we have? We had that close balance that was created between the utility tax grab and the income tax thing that they said they were going to give to us, and did to some extent. Then comes along the sales tax and they take \$155 million more from the people of Saskatchewan.

And I hope the people that are watching out there pay close attention to that when they start paying some of these extra costs that they will be paying, that they will be paying. They'll be going out and getting their income tax done — there will be fees on that. They'll want to do some building repair — there will be fees on that. They've even got goofy things like when employers want to have their employees fix their own building, they're going to have to pay income . . . or pay a sales tax on that amount. Hard to believe.

An employer says to his employee, well today it's a little quiet; I'd rather not lay you off for the day or send you home; why don't you just paint that wall out there? Oh, but the socialists say we've got to tax the guy for that. We've got to tax him for that. That's fine thinking, that's fine thinking. The only place we'll get it is through people over there. They're the only ones that will dream up something like that. So at the end of the day this is a tax grab.

Now the budget has other components to it, and that is the various areas in the particular budget in the province. What kind of money is going to come down for that.

Well I think this has been a government that traditionally has said our key areas of concern are always health and education. Well let's look at those, and let's not get it from the politicians over on that side who have been busy, you know, going around the rink getting ready for this jump. Let's see the people who are going to be receiving that particular help.

Health boards have been running in the red in the last numbers of years — we know that — to the extent that this government's had to step in and just fire the lot of them. They said, we're going to take over and try and run it. Well that's going to be a scary scene on its own.

The amount of money they're putting into it is not even going to cover the amount that these particular hospital boards have been running in the red. So hospitals in essence will have lineups that are longer than they are right now. And they've already been doing the most bizarre things in health.

I had a call from a lady in Saskatoon about a week ago. She fell in her home and had to be taken to Royal University Hospital by ambulance. There was no bed there for her, so they had her on a cot out in the hallway for about half a day and said, we have no room for you. So they shipped her off to another hospital by ambulance, but charged her for the ambulance.

Where else but in Saskatchewan with an NDP government, sir, would that ever happen?

So she ends up at home eventually with a stack of ambulance bills set out by this government's policy as she's shipped from one hospital to another. It's bizarre — it's bizarre. That's just a very simple example of the sickness that exists in the health care system that this government has created.

Let's look at education, and it's been interesting. Over the years the SSTA has always been very quiet and very gentle when it comes to budgets. They've always kind of hunkered down and said, well let's go home and see if we can somehow manage to live within the less money that the NDP has given.

And so what have they done — what have they done? Well, sir, they've refused to fix windows. They've said, well we'll have longer bus routes. We'll have longer bus routes. And you know, sir, as you can tell that already most scores, you know, out of 2.5 the people over there are giving me 2.3, 2.4 out of 2.5. So, sir, I feel I'm quite well on this.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Heppner: — There's a saying that comes over from that side very often that if you throw a stone, you hear a yelp, you know what you hit. Well they're not yelping but they're writing it on big sheets of paper, sir, and so I must feel that we're on the right track here.

Okay, so what would school boards do? They would go home and they'd lengthen the bus routes, might have to cut one and have a driver cover it all. They'd say we can't fix those windows today; can't fix them this year; we can't do the roof; we can't do this; we can't do that. They've done that year after year after year. On top of which they've had to go back home and raise the property taxes.

This year, this year the cuts to education, by the time all the chickens come home to roost, are so large that the SSTA has come out strongly and said, this is a disastrous budget for education. They talk about having school lunches. Tell if their budget carries out the way it's been going there won't be any Dick and Jane books for the kids to read out of. They may have a lunch but there won't be any textbooks. They've totally decimated the education budget of this particular province.

Now what was interesting is that the Minister of Education, Mr. Speaker, in talking about how good a budget he thought this was in education. He's talking about the budget and he talks about the tax relief that's given to farmland. And yes, there is some relief to farmland, and it's very welcome. And you deserve some credit for that, the people on the NDP side.

Now, now that you've applauded, all four of you have applauded yourselves on that one, what did the Minister of Education say was good about that? He said, now what's good about that is the boards of education will have some place to get some more money. So what he basically said is this budget cut the education dollars. Now the school boards can go home and rip it back out of the pockets of the property owners again.

Just shuffle it around. Call it a shell game, call it looking for the

little pea, call it smoke and mirrors. Whatever it is, it's a bad game and it's hurting Saskatchewan at all levels. It's hurting Saskatchewan at all levels.

It's been interesting, Mr. Speaker, over the past two days as we've had discussion on the budget, particularly when we've asked the questions in question period. About all that particular government side, the NDP side, Mr. Speaker, can come up with is going back through history.

We haven't had an answer to, why did you do this. We haven't had an answer to, will you take this opportunity presented to us by the federal government of matching a cut on the cost of gasoline. When the Minister of Finance was asked about that, he didn't say yes, he didn't say no. He went back through the annals of history and tried to get the answer out of that. He took his time to answer, but he didn't answer the question. We still don't know whether he will or he won't.

The federal government puts cold, hard cash on the table and says to the provinces, if you will match this to give some relief on the cost of . . .

The Deputy Speaker: — Order, order, order. I apologize to the hon. member for Rosthern, but I invite . . . there's two particular members that are engaging in a rather boisterous conversation and I would urge those two members to take that conversation outside. I'm sure it's a very interesting conversation but it is disruptive.

Order, order.

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm not sure I needed that help; I thought I was doing quite fine. I received good marks.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Heppner: — I would suggest though, that you might have some validity in the concern about people taking this outside. I'm sure the people back at Yorkton would like to hear their MLA (Member of the Legislative Assembly) and see what he has to say on some of the tax moves that were made out here. So that was . . .

The Deputy Speaker: — Order, order. I just wish to remind all the members, particularly in this case the member for Rosthern, it's inappropriate to make comment on any ruling from the Chair. The Chair will make a rule and then you just carry on with your speech.

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The budget is hitting all sorts of people in very hard ways. Right after the budget came out, Mr. Speaker, I had a call from a person in my constituency that runs a greenhouse — I think virtually every community in my constituency has a greenhouse; some of them even have two or three — and saying that what's happened in the last number of months from this government is really more than he can essentially handle.

Because utility rate increases hit them very hard — hit them very hard. Especially the cost of heating. And so that was one that he had a very difficult time to be able to see how he'd be

able to financially deal with it.

(1130)

Then along comes this tax increase. So now he's had to pay tax on the things that he's purchased, the sales tax. Now he's supposed to collect it from the people that he's selling it to, raising the cost of his product, in essence, reducing the sales that he's going to have, putting some very serious hardship on his particular business. And he's not sure whether he will be able to stay in business.

It's those kinds of stories that are coming from throughout my constituency. I talked to my constituency assistant this morning. Phone calls are coming in. Not one of them, Mr. Speaker, not one of them in favour of this budget, in spite of the number of turns the NDP did around this arena before they tried to do their quad and fell flat on their face.

Mr. Speaker, one or two more things about the budget. Seven hundred million dollars from a government that not long ago said they had no money for people in need. They had no money to help those people who were suffering. They had no money for those people who were going to lose their farms. They just had no money. And bingo — \$700 million — they found it. It would be amazing to know where it was. Hopefully they dug it out of Tommy Douglas House, but we couldn't be so lucky.

Seven hundred million dollars. And after having found that, they're prepared to turn down the offer from the federal government to say, we will match you dollar for dollar on a savings that you want to put in the cost of gasoline for all the people of Saskatchewan driving our roads and our streets and our highways. And this minister's not prepared to take them up on that. Just to see the money on the table, and he's prepared to walk away from it.

Mr. Speaker, we just had a number of questions asked in question period about the closing of some court houses. An absolute shame. These court houses are busy. What was the best answer that the Minister of Justice had for it?

He said, well we just cut the bottom few feet off the bottom legs. The question wasn't, these are not being used. He just said, these are the least used. What a ludicrous answer, Mr. Speaker.

In any situation where you have more than one, where you have more than one organization, more than one building, one will be the least used. So is it, well we'll just chop the three that were used the least?

It would be very much as if the minister from Social Services went to get a haircut, and his barber said, well, sir, in the process now for the next number of hours, I will only cut off the longest hair. And he works his way around his little head and he keeps cutting off the longest hair. And after about an hour or so, Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Social Services would be bald.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Heppner: — And that, Mr. Speaker, is exactly how the people of those three communities feel today. For absolutely no

valid reason whatsoever, they've had taken out of their communities those particular three court houses.

And what's interesting is, that comes from a government that made a promise about a year or so ago, that they put 200 more peace officers on the roads and streets of this particular province. They haven't done that. They haven't done that.

So maybe I guess the logic that the socialists have over there, is let's make sure we don't catch the crooks, then we can close down the court houses because we have no need for them. That's fine socialist logic over there. And if people sort of wonder and raise their eyebrows at that bit of an idea, it's exactly what they're doing.

They refuse to give the resources to the law officers that are needed. And then they say well, there isn't much use for the court houses. Well the crooks are out on the street, they're not in the court houses and the jails where they ought to be. That's the logic of this government.

Well, Mr. Speaker, it's interesting going through this budget. Like I said, it came off as a very interesting budget. It had some good directions. It started off well and it fell flat on its face. And I think we're going to see from the general public that has demanded some substantial tax cuts from this government over the past while, what they're going to tell this government about this particular budget. And for that particular reason, Mr. Speaker, I cannot support this budget but I will be supporting the amendment. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Hamilton: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to personally respond to the province's first budget of the 21st century. It's also a pleasure to say I'm back again to participate in this first session of the 24th legislature. And it's nice to be back here with many familiar faces in the House and I'm looking forward to once again working with them and the new members that are here today as well.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I know you will also know how hard our Speaker has been working to present himself to this legislature in a fair and impartial manner, and to allow all of us on both sides of the House the opportunity to meet with him and to voice any concerns we might have or to raise issues that might help to make the House run more smoothly.

And I congratulate him and want to say that that also adds to the processes here that work well for the province of Saskatchewan. It increases the responsibility to a democratic process. And I'm sure that all of us are very thankful that the House is run in such an efficient manner.

And you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in the chair also lend that air with your years of experience in this House. And I congratulate you as well.

Before I respond directly to the hon. member's balanced budget for this year, I would like to take a few moments also to say a few words to the people who helped me get here, and the members of the constituency who now provide support to me. I

wasn't able to respond to the Throne Speech, and it's traditional that we might be able to do that then, so I want to take a few moments to tell people about Wascana Plains.

I am now the MLA for Regina Wascana Plains for the third term in government and I'm pleased to represent them once again. I've developed many strong liaisons with the local governments there, with the people who are providing services there, and with the strong, hard-working people of my constituency. And I want to thank them for making it possible for me to be here and address you today.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Hamilton: — Since 1991 I've had many opportunities to meet with people and to talk with them either at their kitchen tables, at meetings about their schools, at social events, and this spring, as a long-standing tradition that I've had in the constituency, to arrange four public consultation meetings to allow people a chance to come out and receive copies of things such as the Vicq report, the Garcea report, and other reports that they'll be able to read and respond and consult with government on, issues that are extremely important to them as they affect them in their daily lives.

It's through this valuable discussion that I learned what their concerns were, what their plans are for themselves and for their children's future. And it's through this input then I'm able to take that back and play my role in putting together a budget — another balanced budget — because they voiced that as an extreme concern to them, that we do not want to see a return to people who don't know how to balance a budget.

They feel that's the key to shaping the opportunity for solid growth and for the opportunities that will present themselves to their children.

Mr. Speaker, I have the privilege of having both an urban and rural riding. Many of my constituents live on farms and villages in and around Balgonie, Pilot Butte, and White City, just to name a few.

Those that live in the city are actively involved in the community as well, Mr. Speaker. They maintain small or medium-sized businesses, and many of them hold strong professional qualities.

In short, Mr. Speaker, Wascana Plains is a vibrant and growing constituency. It provides a fine example of community spirit that is the creation of many things that we see positive in our area.

Most recently I'd say one that's very exciting is the multi-purpose educational facility that combines the opportunities for public school students, separate school students, combined with city educational opportunities and community opportunities to come together in a strong new facility for Southeast Regina.

So close to a year ago I had the pleasure of announcing to Southeast Regina the educational community complex with the Hon. Minister of Education at that time, the member from Yorkton. As a former teacher and a parent, I'm proud that we

have the opportunity to hold one of the very few state-of-the-art educational complexes in this province.

Throughout the communities that I visited, I also noted that there are many opportunities for our students in the area of distance education. They're now working on computers; they're working through new curriculums; they're being resourced in the way that the Minister of Education outlined today in his responses.

Saskatchewan's a place where not only students can benefit from more opportunities, but so will their teachers, the parents, and their entire communities. The partners that made this particular project possible deserve congratulations for the co-operative approach they've taken to developing this wonderful facility.

And I can say that they're part of a school district in the urban area that works together co-operatively in many approaches to education, integration of services, and other strong components that make education work for us.

Buffalo Plains School Division is also one that has taken the opportunity to work with their surrounding divisions to do the same kinds of things. And I'm looking forward to what the SSTA and the school divisions can do in the future to bring together their divisions to provide better services to the students and more opportunities in those ways.

Mr. Speaker, this new school is also not very far away from Regina's knowledge corridor where thousands of students and teachers will benefit from the new facilities being developed there. In addition to the knowledge corridor, there's an endless stream of opportunities that'll be developed at the University of Regina, opportunities that will be further enhanced by additional funding announced in this week's budget.

Announcements such as \$18.5 million more for school boards, \$29.2 million more for capital projects for K to 12 which would provide for about another hundred and twelve schools to be upgraded and refurbished. The people working in the schools have told me those projects are very necessary and needed and they're very thankful for those dollars that are now allocated in this balanced budget.

It also means that there are a number of post-secondary education students who will benefit from the \$27 million that is set aside in this budget for post-secondary education, up 6 per cent.

They will also benefit from the research dollars that are set aside in the new innovation and science fund, and that can attract up to a pool of an additional hundred million dollars in research funding over the next four years. Exciting, exciting opportunities for growth in this province when we talk about research and development and innovation.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the establishment of the new innovation and science fund also provides opportunities for Regina. This money will also enhance the two new facilities at the Regina research park, dedicated to petroleum and information technology research.

My constituents know well the issues challenging them as they develop their family life, raise their children, and prepare them for the new millennium. That's exactly what education dollars do and there are more education dollars than ever before in this budget. There's more monies for innovation and research.

Another concern for my constituents, Mr. Speaker, and I have to say a very strong one, is the tax system. They wanted to see one that was fairer, much more simplified in its application, and very competitive. They agreed with the proposal that we would put forward, that we would de-link from the federal income tax rules, so we could develop a system that allows for us to set our course and our direction. And so we have provided that opportunity.

At the end of last year we said to the federal government we would be taking that opportunity they'd presented to de-link from their system, and we are now presenting to the Saskatchewan people a system that does indeed allow us to set our own course. I stand before you today happy to announce that we've established such a system for here in Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(1145)

Hon. Ms. Hamilton: — As a matter of fact, Mr. Deputy Speaker, a constituent of mine was instrumental in doing some of the background work for the development of this system. Charlie Baldock was a member of the Vicq committee, along with Shelley Brown and Jack Vicq. And I'd like to personally thank Charlie for the hours and hours of work, the effort and dedication he put forward to give us one kind of a view and snapshot of what that might look like.

We took that background and information out to people. We heard from them. We made the adjustments that were needed to develop a system of taxation that will be competitive, that will be providing the valuable support to families that they need, and that will be certainly fair to all Saskatchewan people.

When fully implemented, the tax rates in this province will be significantly reduced. When fully implemented a family of four will receive about a thousand dollar tax benefit. And we will know that 70 per cent of Saskatchewan taxpayers will pay income that's comparable to the tax rates that are paid to residents of Alberta.

Now that doesn't always seem fair to make a comparison there, but we are neighbours, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and we need to look at how we can become more competitive in the new global economy.

The key here, Mr. Speaker, is that the tax system will remove 55,000 low-income residents in this province off the tax rolls altogether. People who crept into the tax system during the '80s, and now we say we can develop a system the Saskatchewan way that not only provides the tax credits, that provides for the refunds, those kinds of things to support low-income people, but will take those people off the rolls, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Hamilton: — The tax reform announced this week will be sustainable and funded from new growth and new revenue in our economy. It will be managed through a balanced approach that recognizes the competitive tax rates, but also that this province asked for and says that we want good public services as well.

This balanced approach allowed us to invest in important public services and reduce taxes every year. We've already reduced taxes in targeted ways every year since we balanced our budget in 1994 and '95.

What does this say to my children? It says that we will also in this budget look at reducing debt from 70 per cent of the gross domestic product — 70 per cent. That's what we were looking at for our children to inherit — nothing but debt. Two, a debt that now is going to be looking at more like 38 per cent of the gross domestic product, and by the end of four years, 31 per cent.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Hamilton: — That's the kind of thing we want to say we are leaving for our children — less debt.

Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I guess through the years depends where you serve and what your perspectives look like from where that service begins. And it may have a slight impact on how your sense of humour changes, but I did pick up over the last few weeks a humorous story I wanted to share with you about a little dog that was the mascot of the neighbourhood bar, the neighbourhood pub.

And little Scotty, when the patrons would come in, would wag his tail and he'd help them to feel . . . or uplift their spirits and feel more cheerful about their impact in life. And over the years Scotty was getting older. One day he passed away and everyone was quite broken up about losing their little mascot, Scotty.

The bar owner determined that everyone was so familiar with that wagging tail that as a memorial to the little dog, they would take that tail and they would frame it and hang it above the bar. And that made everyone feel like there was a memorial to this little dog.

Well Scotty went up to heaven. St. Peter said, no, Scotty, sorry, we don't allow dogs in here without a tail; we'd like you to go back and collect it. He says, well, you know, it's going to be hard because many people see that as a memorial to me and I've left it behind, you see. And St. Peter says, no, you'll have to go back and get it.

Well Scotty came back down. Sometime after midnight he's rummaging around in the little neighbourhood pub and looking for his tail. The owner came by and looked in the door and he said, well there it is, the spirit of my little dog, Scotty. And he said, Scotty, what are you doing here? He said, well St. Peter won't let me into heaven without my tail so I'm looking for my tail. Oh, I'm sorry, Scotty, we're not allowed to re-tail spirits after midnight.

Your humour changes. You know, Mr. Speaker, you pick up maybe a little bit of a different perspective, but a strong sense of

responsibility remains not only to that bar owner but also to myself, Mr. Speaker.

And I contrast that with the noise that the members opposite are making about the new Fiscal Stabilization Fund. As you would know, the joke comes for the work I do with Liquor and Gaming Authority, but this was the old Saskatchewan Liquor and Gaming Authority reserve.

And what was that, Mr. Speaker? No more or no less than something that the cities, the municipalities do, set aside some money in reserve.

For us we look to that and we said, you can't rely on that being any stable fund over the years because you don't know how much you will receive in that fund. It's based on people's habits and attitudes and what they're doing to put money into that fund. So you don't want to use it in any year and say you can rely on this. But we did use it as a reserve fund.

Good management. We had a reserve there. We knew if there were times that were more difficult — the economy here is very volatile; everyone knows that — we could rely on that fund. So like a municipality would say, we have a snow removal fund; one year there's not a lot of snow, the next year you know what Saskatchewan can be like.

In the same way we have a hard time predicting what forest fires will be in our northern areas and we have to protect our forests, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

One year we heard from the members opposite saying there's a nursing shortage. People told us that, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We used that fund for additional nurses in this province, over 200 additional nurses.

We know the volatility of the farming economy, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and we set aside monies for the farm income in the times that they're in crisis. It's been used for many things, Mr. Deputy Speaker. But one thing it hasn't been used for is to spend that dollar over and over and over again; to spend \$1 billion more each year than you have coming in. That's one thing, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it's not been used for.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Hamilton: — How can the members opposite stand and say they're against a fund that's designed to strengthen our capacity to respond to emergencies, to respond to the unpredictable fiscal pressures on this province's finances? Because they don't really care. They just go out and borrow when things get tough.

Another priority that my constituents talk about a lot is how health care will be provided into the future. They like this government's support of what this government's past and ancestors developed, is publicly funded, publicly administered health care.

Now the only reason I can see that the members opposite attack reforming that system to make it responsive to today's needs, to make it to the point that we can afford the new technologies and we can treat people in this province, is that they don't really

believe in a publicly funded, publicly administered system, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

They say, well, if we get spending too much and the system collapses, we'll privatize it anyway, and we'll look like a shadow of the American health system. This is very troublesome to every resident in this province because certainly that means that we're one health problem away from poverty.

The way they would approach health care is we're one health problem away from either seeking to try and get private insurers to cover that, which we know, Mr. Speaker, many times they don't cover, or we're without coverage at all. That's not the system of the future. For us, it's a system that adjusts to the changing needs that we have in this province.

And I'm proud to stand behind a budget that not only last year committed \$195 million more to the health budget, but also this year establishes an additional \$63 million to base funding for health care, and sets aside \$150 million health transition fund to talk about the system of the future for this province that will keep it in the realms of medicare.

In the past two years I'm proud to be able to stand here and say to the people of Saskatchewan we've increased health spending by 17 per cent in this province. That's all in the face of the kinds of things we've looked at federally, and the disappointment we had in this federal budget, that didn't see much more dollars injected into the system, many more dollars.

What it did see was a federal government that at one time pulled out \$6 billion in one year, put that for health care and education over four years, about \$2.5 billion. What does that mean for Saskatchewan in health care? About three days to fund our system.

Where at one time the federal government provided 50-50 dollars to the health system to support medicare in the country, we now see them giving this province 13 cents on the dollar. It's no wonder, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we need a health transition fund to help us get to a system that can be sustainable, that's publicly supported and publicly administered.

One thing I know when I'm driving throughout the rural part of my constituency is that my rural constituents work very hard to adjust to the changes that are happening in the area of agriculture in this province. We look at the removal of the transportation subsidy, we look at the changes in the support that the federal government is willing to provide to a province that feeds the rest of this country very reasonably with a fine, fine product.

The rural residents work very hard and I know that they are glad in this budget that we're supporting their efforts. They participate in area transportation committee work that they're very pleased to be a part of. And I know that the Department of Highways finds their input extremely valuable. And we know that this year this budget will invest a further \$250 million to prepare our Highways and Transportation network for the challenges of the future.

Another way we're trying to support and provide additional supports to agriculture in the province is retroactive to January

1 of this year, the cap on farm fuel rebate program will be eliminated. This is also on top of . . . And I heard on the television, people talking about their use of diesel fuel. This province does not tax diesel fuel for farm purposes so this is already on top of that program. And the province will reimburse farmers with the property tax rebate program.

Now some people can say that's not very much. But other people told me that any amount that you can support rural Saskatchewan is greatly appreciated.

All of this on top of about \$300 per capita, per man, woman, and child, that we put toward agricultural programs, Mr. Deputy Speaker. That's more than any other jurisdiction, not only in Canada, but any other jurisdiction in the world, we support with tax dollars from urban and rural people in this province to go to a strong industry here — agriculture.

Mr. Speaker, I wanted to first outline to you all of the reasons why optimistically I support a budget that provides for growth and opportunity for the future, not only for my two grown children but for the rest of this province.

But I have to tell you for all of those positive reasons, Mr. Deputy Speaker, there's also the compelling reasons that the members opposite provide to me, especially during the last number of days when they've had their response to the budget.

Their responses are very, very worrisome, and should be worrisome to every taxpayer in this province, but also to children of any age in this province who are looking for a future here. Why is it worrisome? Because it's right-wing voodoo economics.

It's the kind of economics that says, you want money today, here, have it out of this pocket. You need money over here, have more out of this pocket. Where will we get it? We take it out of our children's pockets.

Mr. Speaker, that's not the way to do a budget. The people of this province know that they don't want the members opposite preparing a budget like that for their future.

But let's look at . . . and what I would contemplate their budget might look like if they were presenting it based on the responses they've provided so far. They campaigned on a 20 per cent tax reduction now — 20 per cent across the board. No reform of the system, no tax credits for low-income people, no removal of the debt-reduction tax or the flat tax — just 20 per cent across the board and let's do it now.

Well what does that mean? Let's see, that means if you're an income earner of about \$35,000 and you pay on average \$3,600 in provincial income tax, your benefit is about \$720 today. If you make about a hundred thousand dollars, your taxable income's about \$8,000, you receive a benefit of \$1,600.

(1200)

That's the kind of economics we're talking about here. More for low-income earners to pay, more for other people to pay, and breaks at the higher income bracket level. So there's no progressivity in their system and there's no looking after those

people who are greatest in need in our province.

What do their own economists say about this scheme? What do they say that a 20 per cent tax reduction across the board right now means? Well they like to quote WEFA, so I quote WEFA and say:

Their own economists say that their scheme means job losses, higher unemployment, and program cuts.

Well that's what their budget would look like.

But wait a minute, they're also talking about reducing gas tax. Well we've heard that before. We've heard that before — take the money out of the roads; leave the roads in disrepair; put the money back on the roads, too late to do anything about it; sell out the Highways equipment, and say that somehow, someone else will look after that for them.

It just doesn't add up. And that's why we say that kind of a tax cut scheme is very scary to the people of this province.

Well let's look at fiscal responsibility and, I talked about earlier, stabilization and reserves. They just don't care about having a reserve. They don't care about fiscal responsibility because they've got examples of how this works in the past. You just borrow about a billion dollars a year, you use your Crowns to get more and more into debt on that hand, and you use your health boards and other people who want to deliver services to get more and more in debt on that hand. Debts, debts, and debts and debts — piled up by the time we got here to try and straighten things out.

Let's see, we're going to give a major tax break that means loss of jobs; means higher unemployment; means cutting of some services. But somehow in the same breath, they're going to spend \$600 million more and assume the education tax at the provincial level.

They're going to find \$700 million more for farm programming even if the federal government doesn't come in and support them.

They're going to spend more money for schools, more money on school capital. Wonderful. At the same time, they're not going to take it out of the Education budget because they're going to freeze that. They're going to find it somewhere.

More money for health care. More money for the health budget, but it's not going to come out of their health budget because they've said that they're just going to maintain that at a level for five years while they do an audit. So there's not money to cover that.

More money for highways. They don't know where they're going to get that money from, but it's going to come from somewhere.

Where does this thinking come from?

The Deputy Speaker: — Order. Order. Friday is generally a more boisterous day than other days, and this Friday is no exception. But I do ask the co-operation of all hon. members in

lowering . . . I ask the co-operation of all hon. members in lowering the level of volume and allowing the member for Regina Wascana Plains to continue.

Hon. Ms. Hamilton: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Well, the thinking comes from what we've seen in the past. It doesn't think to the future.

What it does, it thinks about taking money out of the pockets of our children tomorrow to give and respond to everything today. It's not a balanced approach. It's not an approach that keeps the books balanced; that sees us paying down the debt for the next generation and future generations. It doesn't come from thinking about expanding programs and services if you're going to maintain health care and education the way they are while we wait for some kind of audit results.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, where does this leave our children? Those economics leave our children to pick up where they left off — bills, bills, bills. That's not the Saskatchewan way. My grandparents taught me the Saskatchewan way is to think beyond your years — sometimes even lean years.

The Deputy Speaker: — Order. Now I just wish to remind all hon. members that this is the budget speech. A certain amount of time is set aside, and all hon. members will have an opportunity to rise and enter this debate. For the moment the member for Regina Wascana Plains has the floor.

Hon. Ms. Hamilton: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. This is not the Saskatchewan way. This is their way. I don't cut money today to have my children pay the bills for the future, and neither should they when they assume a responsible chair in this Assembly.

Now we could also talk about well, once you get to that point there are some desperate measures you can use. Desperate measures like let's just sell off the assets and that will cover some of it, but there won't be any income coming in to help offset that in the future. We know what that's like. We could desperately borrow, like they did in the past, from every place they could find money to borrow from.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, that's not what our forefathers taught us, our foremothers taught us, when they said let's look to the future. Well this budget does that. This budget provides the biggest tax break in the history of this province, but it also reforms the tax system to be fairer. It supports families. It supports our low-income people. It takes people off the tax rolls that don't belong there, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

This budget provides more money for education, more money for research and development, more money for students to stay home here in Saskatchewan, with an income tax break if they find a job here after they graduate and were going to be a part of the Saskatchewan economy. It provides more opportunity for more people to be involved in a wonderful growing economy in this province.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Hamilton: — Mr. Speaker, I want to close as I began by thanking the constituents that have provided for me

information to use in providing a voice to the input to this budget. I want to thank my caucus colleagues and cabinet colleagues who have spent countless, countless hours in preparing a budget for growth and opportunity, a positive direction into the future that will provide for growth, equality, opportunity — the virtues that I learned in this province from my past generations, and ones that I want to pass on to the future generations to come.

Mr. Speaker, there are many, many more reasons why I stand very proudly in my place to support the motion before us. There are many reasons why the worrisome, scary part of voodoo economics allows me to say I strongly reject the amendment that's been placed before us.

I'm pleased to be a part of a future-looking, forward-looking budget in the province of Saskatchewan, a course for the next years to come.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise in my place today to address this budget speech on behalf of the people of Cannington and the 62 per cent of the people in Saskatchewan who voted against that government, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. D'Autremont: — Because clearly, Mr. Speaker, a significant portion of those 62 per cent are not being serviced by the coalition. They are opposed to what happened at the time of the election, and they continue to be opposed to that coalition, Mr. Speaker, and that particular government.

If there is a way, Mr. Deputy Speaker, of describing this budget very succinctly by the people of Saskatchewan, it would be a severe disappointment. And I choose my words carefully, Mr. Speaker, because a good many people across this province would use a lot more vitriolic terms to describe this budget. But because we're in a parliamentary institution, I cannot use those words, Mr. Deputy Speaker. So severe disappointment is the kindest words I can use.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the expectation across this province was that there would be tax cuts in this budget. But what we got the day of the budget speech was tax increases.

Now the member from Regina Wascana Plains was talking about her little dog, Scotty. Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I know what happened to Scotty. The reason he died was because the owners couldn't afford to feed him any more because there was a 6 per cent tax on his dog food now. And every other pet, Mr. Deputy Speaker, across this province faces the same difficulty.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the people of this province, there are a significant number who will no longer be paying taxes. That is true. The reason is though, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is they move to Alberta or they're living on minimum wage, because the only new jobs in this province are minimum wage jobs. The good, high paying jobs, Mr. Deputy Speaker, are leaving for Alberta, because those jobs were expecting those tax cuts to happen and they didn't happen in this budget speech.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. D'Autremont: — There is one thing that this government is famous for, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Promises. They tax now, and promise relief in the future. Promises.

An Hon. Member: — Just trust us.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Yes, that's the term they like to use.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we're from the government; trust us. Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, there is no trust left with the people of Saskatchewan for this particular government and that's why they received 38 per cent of the vote in the last election.

When you look at the numbers, Mr. Deputy Speaker, since 1992 to today, the tax revenues being brought in by this province in the 1992 budget were \$4.4 billion. Today, the minister's budget will bring in almost \$6.4 billion — a \$2 billion increase in taxation by this government.

And what have we received, what have we received for that, Mr. Deputy Speaker? Well what we have got are fewer hospitals, less service, fewer schools. Now they're closing the court houses around this province. And our highways are in terrible shape. We have no money, we have no money to help out farmers when they're in desperate need, but we do have money to create a fancy slush fund. We do have money to create a fancy slush fund.

The member over there from Yorkton wants to talk about the debt. Perhaps he should talk about the six plus billion dollars that Allan Blakeney and the Premier of this province left.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. D'Autremont: — Debt, Mr. Deputy Speaker, at 24 per cent. That's what debt is all about.

When you look at this budget increase, that extra \$2 billion, Mr. Deputy Speaker, was only in tax revenues. There are significant increases in every other fee in this province. Every utility fee has gone up and we don't get the service, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

As one of the critics for highways, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I pay particular attention to the budget as it relates to highways. And there is an increase, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in the highways budget. It's up to \$250 million. The first time in four years that the government has matched their commitment they made to put in \$2.5 billion over ten years, \$250 million a year. The very first time they've matched it.

And do you know what though, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that entire increase will be eaten up by the additional costs imposed by this government. There will not be another inch of pavement laid, there will not be another mile of road built because of the increases. And the fact is in all likelihood it will diminish because the price of asphalt is up, the price of fuel is up, the utilities are up — everything that this government has their little fingers on, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is going up. And there will not be any additional highway construction because of this government's actions.

(1215)

The government is saying, oh if we cut the gas tax as we have been suggesting, Mr. Speaker, as the Minister of Finance for the federal government has said he will put money in. He will put up to, we hope, \$60 million on a 5 cent reduction in the fuel tax. The minister says, well if we do that where are we going to get the money?

Well, Mr. Speaker, the minister's own budget says he's going to collect \$347 million in fuel taxes; he's only spending 250 but he hasn't even included the licence fees, \$112 million for licensing fees. When you lump them together, the fuel tax and the licensing fees, he is only putting 44 per cent of that money into the Highways budget — not even talking about how much road he's building — 44 per cent into the Highways budget. So there's a lot of room there, Mr. Deputy Speaker, a lot of room to cut and still provide every nickel that he already is to Highways. But it's question of priorities and clearly that's not one of his priorities, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

When I listen to the members opposite, I get a clear vision of where they're going and what they're talking about. And I would . . . I think it could be clearly stated, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that what the members opposite have is a rear-view vision. Their whole windscreen is covered over and they're only looking at the rear-view mirror, because all they want to talk about is the 1982 election — 18 years ago, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I really wonder though why they want to talk about the 1982 election, because they took a severe thumping — a severe thumping. But I guess they expected if they could re-fight that one, they might have a chance this time. I think that's what they're hoping. If we can re-fight the 1982 election, maybe we can win it this time.

Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, they couldn't win it in 1982 and they wouldn't win it in 2000 if they fought it all over again.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. D'Autremont: — There are a lot of similarities though, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The government is claiming they're doing well. The Crown corporations are claiming they're doing well, just as they claimed in 1982. But the thing that's sad, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is the similarity to how the people are doing.

In 1982 the people were losing their homes. They were losing their businesses. They were losing their farms. And the government didn't care. Because the government and the family of Crown corporations was doing well.

And what's the situation like today? People are leaving this province. People are losing their homes; they're losing their farms. And the government doesn't care. That's why, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the NDP lost in 1982. And if the election was refought today, they would lose again.

The member from Coronation Park talked about the longest period of growth — the longest period of growth. Well let's take a look, since we're in the rear-view mirror of this government, at the history of Saskatchewan.

In the late 1929 — 1920s, Mr. Deputy Speaker — there was a million people, a million people in the province of Saskatchewan. And where are we at today? After Tommy Douglas getting elected in 1944 and governing for most of that period of time since, we're still a million people. Our neighbouring provinces have grown. Canada has grown. And Saskatchewan has been stagnant under the CCF-NDP (Co-operative Commonwealth Federation) ever since 1944.

So if you have virtually no growth in that entire period, even a little bit of growth is a significant change, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And that's what you're looking at.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have a vision for this province. We have a vision to build this province, to create an environment in which people and businesses want to live here, want to reside in this province, want to raise and keep their children in this province, which hasn't been happening.

We believe that the way to do that is to cut taxes now. Not increase taxes now as this government has done, but indeed cut the taxes right now and that will keep people in this province. It will bring and keep businesses in this province because they can have some growth.

But the members opposite, as I said earlier, have no vision. And that's why, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because there is no view for the future over there. They don't believe in taxing children tomorrow because they have no future; they believe in taxing children today — and that is exactly what is happening.

The taxes are being applied on the families of this province today and there is no tax relief. We do need tax relief and this NDP government has missed that mark very badly. They could indeed provide fuel tax relief that would help everyone in this province.

When the persons living in Regina want to go on a little trip at Easter, they are going to pay significantly at the gas pumps to do so. When they want to go on holidays this summer, when the people at IPSCO get their annual holidays, it's going to be extremely expensive.

So what are they going to do, Mr. Deputy Speaker. They're going to look at the map and say: where is the nearest exit from Saskatchewan; will one tank of gas get me there? And that's what they're going to do. They're going to head for that point in whatever direction it might be because they're not going to pay for gas here. Mr. Deputy Speaker, we need to take the federal government's offer and help in reducing the taxes and utilizing their money.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I will be supporting the amendment. I will not be supporting this budget because this budget does not have a view for the future. It's locked into the past and into taxation today. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Yates: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very proud today to stand before this Assembly speaking about the government's seventh balanced budget. A budget that looks to the future. It's not locked in the past. It's not full of promises of what they

might do if they ever become government but are the promises of this government for the future.

It's a sound foundation for the future. It's a foundation for my children and your children. It's about hope and opportunity for our children. It's not about Alberta envy. Our children don't need to hear about how it's much better in Alberta because the more you tell your children it's better in Alberta, the more likely they are to leave.

We should be talking about the good things of our province. We should talk about our proud tradition as a province and we should . . .

The Deputy Speaker: — Order.

Mr. Yates: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I was trying to say, we should be telling our children about the great opportunity within our province, about our great tradition, and about how Saskatchewan people have always come together to overcome our obstacles. Not about how it's better to go somewhere else, not how it's better in any other province of this country. This is their home and we should talk proudly about our home.

And this government believes very strongly in our province. We don't envy Alberta. We look at our province for the solution to our problems. We put a platform forward in this budget that talks about fiscal responsibility and good government.

We came from a situation in 1991 where deficits were the name of the game and you know what that's about over in the . . . members opposite know what that's about. You played a role in that.

Today, today our children have seen not one, not two, not three, but seven consecutive balanced budgets.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Yates: — My children in elementary school can understand that that's good government. They don't need to be told that it's bad. My son can understand that when we formed government in 1991 for the first time, debt was at 71 per cent of the gross domestic product — pathetic. Today it is at 38 per cent and by 2003 it should reach 31 per cent. That's progress.

We've dealt with the debt of this province. We're not talking about doom and gloom. If that's all we talk about, that's what people believe.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to talk about a number of things, including the new Fiscal Stabilization Fund. Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Yates: — Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker, the members opposite complained when there was a fund in the liquor and gaming. They complain now about the new Fiscal Stabilization Fund. But I'd like to talk to them a little bit . . .

The Deputy Speaker: — Order. Now earlier in the debate it was quite possible for me to announce that all members would

have an opportunity to engage in the debate. Now we have a situation where some members who have engaged in the debate want to re-enter the debate.

I urge all hon. members to say what you want when you're in the debate, and in another year there will be another budget debate and then you can say it during the debate.

Mr. Yates: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to return to the point of the Fiscal Stabilization Fund.

As the members opposite should know — and if they don't, I'd like to just point out a few things to them — our economy is relatively volatile. A good portion of our revenue comes from resources, and they can go up and down from year to year.

Also we receive a portion of our revenue from transfer payments from the federal government. One year it could be at a million dollars . . . or a billion dollars, pardon me; the next year it could be at \$800 million. It's very volatile — \$200 million. In cases it's been as much as \$500 million in a single year.

But, Mr. Speaker, this government wants to make sure that we protect those essential core public services year after year, regardless of those flexibilities or the flex . . . dropping and flexibilities within the income.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the members opposite understand that or they should. So I don't know how they can criticize a fund that is there to stabilize our economy, to stabilize our budgetary resources, and to stabilize and provide those services that we need year after year in this province.

And, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to talk about some good things that have happened in this province. Oil drilling is up 31 per cent — 31 per cent.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Yates: — Now does that sound like a province that's in doom and gloom? Not to me.

An Hon. Member: — Sounds like prosperity to me.

Mr. Yates: — Sounds like prosperity to me as well, Mr. Speaker. Gas drilling up 63 per cent.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Yates: — Mr. Speaker, does that sound like a province that's doom and gloom. Mr. Speaker, clearly, clearly, the members opposite are having difficulty with the fact that we have a plan. It's a plan that people like. And, in fact, it's a plan that they like but they can't admit it.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I want to talk for a couple of minutes about the next element of our plan — a sustainable, effective health system. And I'd like to start by pointing out to the members opposite, a few minutes ago when the issue was raised about an unfortunate individual in the city of Saskatoon that had to go to a hospital, University Hospital, and was later transferred to another hospital. And that they had received an ambulance bill.

(1230)

I would ask the member to pass on to that individual that they should pass on the specific circumstances to the Associate Minister of Health because there are no transfer fees between hospitals in the city of Saskatoon for ambulatory care. And if you would have known that, you could have helped the individual.

Well, Mr. Speaker, what I'd like to say to the members opposite, that if they would pass that information on, I'm sure the Associate Minister of Health would deal with the issue.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to talk about the good things in medicare. Over the last two years this government has increased health spending by 17 per cent — 17 per cent, Mr. Speaker, 17 per cent. The rate of inflation over that same two-year period hasn't hit 4 per cent, Mr. Speaker. Thirteen per cent over the rate of inflation.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Yates: — Mr. Speaker, we have continued to put money into health care. We've continued to fund it. And despite a national crisis in health care, this government is determined to deliver the best possible health care system in the country with an . . .

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Yates: — We built medicare in this province. An NDP-CCF government built medicare and this government will continue to defend medicare. It is our issue; it is our concern; and we will not, we will not let medicare and health services deteriorate. This province will have the best medical system available in the country.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Yates: — On top of the 17 per cent over the last two years, this year there'll be \$63 million added to the base in health care — \$63 million.

And on top of that, Mr. Speaker, we are putting \$150 million into a health transition fund — a fund to help health districts deal with the issues they face in their local communities and to make the health system responsive to the modern needs of our communities.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Yates: — So, Mr. Speaker, the members opposite, they don't have a vision for health care. In their last election platform, they talked about no increases to health care — no increases. And it astonishes me, Mr. Speaker, absolutely astonishes me that the members opposite will criticize, year after year, new and additional money to health care.

We haven't heard a plan of what they'd do. They talk about an audit. They talk about an audit. They don't say what their audit would do; they don't say what it should do. They don't know, Mr. Speaker.

Now unfortunately for the people of this province, health care will never be what some people would like it to be; nor will many other services. But the members opposite say time and time again: spend more money, spend more money, cut taxes, spend more money.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I have to tell them that there is only \$1 in this province that comes to government and inevitably it comes out of taxpayers' pockets. So you can't get more money back and demand spending in every single area and expect it to balance out.

Now my children in elementary school, that's simple math. They can understand that. We're hoping, we're hoping that you understand that.

Mr. Speaker, I want to talk a little bit about economic growth and social policy in our province, the third element of our platform. Economic growth and new opportunities, Mr. Speaker. And we as a government realize that economic growth, strong economic growth is the foundation for a strong social policy.

And, Mr. Speaker, I want to talk about some very good things that have occurred in this province in the last number of years. In the past five years, 6,000 welfare recipients have come off the welfare rolls.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Yates: — They've come off the welfare rolls because we put initiatives like the . . . we put initiatives forward like the student employment supplement to allow people to go back to school, learn new skills, and work their way off welfare. That's good for the people of Saskatchewan. It's good for the people of . . . it's good for the individuals and it's good for their children.

Mr. Speaker, this is the only province in Canada that saw a decrease in child poverty. That's something we should all be proud of regardless what side of the House we sit on. Our children are living better today than they were in the past.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Yates: — It's important that we in fact support our families, and we understand it on this side of the House. And a few minutes ago I heard a member opposite talking about the only jobs that were created were at minimum wage and people couldn't live on that. Are you suggesting supporting a minimum wage increase? Is that what I'm hearing? A support for a minimum wage increase?

Mr. Speaker, I want to talk for a minute about education and training. This year saw an increase for K to 12 spending.

Well, Mr. Speaker, there are groups out there that say that it isn't sufficient but there's only a limited number of dollars. You have to set priorities. You have to govern. That's a responsibility we have on this side of the House. We have to meet everybody's needs. That's something that you don't have to do on that side of the House.

Capital funding is there to complete 115 school projects — 115 school projects this year. There's increased funding for universities, regional colleges, and SIAST. That's all good news for the students of this country. There's capital spending for projects in post-secondary education, universities, SIAST. There's increased capacity for registered nurses and licensed practical nurses. Mr. Speaker, this is a good news budget for education — a very good news budget for education.

I'd like to speak for a minute about research and development. In this province we take research and development very, very seriously. We believe in a high-tech economy; it's the economy for the 21st century and we want to be active participants in that economy. We are putting \$10 million a year into an innovation and science fund which could generate up to \$100 million in this province — \$100 million.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Yates: — Mr. Speaker, I want to talk for a minute about agriculture. We listened, we listened to the farmers in this province when they asked for a rebate on their fuel tax. And, Mr. Speaker, in this budget there's a gas rebate on fuel . . . a farm-used fuel tax.

And, Mr. Speaker, we heard loud and clear the farmers in rural Saskatchewan talking about the difficulty with property taxes, and this government provided a rebate of \$25 million this year and \$25 million next year, Mr. Speaker. That's good for the farming economy; it's good for this province; and it's good for their children in rural Saskatchewan and it's good for my children in the city because a strong, vibrant farm economy is good for this province.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Yates: — Mr. Speaker, the illusions of the opposition are just that — illusions.

I'd like to talk a little bit about northern development and First Nations. This budget is looking to help the people of northern Saskatchewan. We look to our northern neighbours, to our Aboriginal friends and partners, as a welcome contribution to our society, not as a negative contribution; that they'll be partners in the growth of this province in the future. And a strong, vibrant economy requires the inclusion, not the exclusion, of our Aboriginal partners.

My colleagues that live and represent those northern communities will speak in a great deal more detail. I'm going to talk about a couple of things that are important.

The new forestry management project and development plan is crucial for the employment of Aboriginal people in the North. It's crucial for our development, and it's crucial for those communities in northern Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to talk about highways and transportation. Now, Mr. Speaker, this government is putting \$250 million into the Department of Highways and Transportation, the highest ever contribution or investment in our highway structure. And, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker, that is good for this province. It's good for our children because it's an investment in the future.

And, Mr. Speaker, this government is committed to keeping a strong highways infrastructure.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Yates: — Mr. Speaker, this budget also deals with the centenary capital fund, a fund that is designed to help improve our aging infrastructure. Unlike the members opposite, we see this as a very positive fund.

It will put \$5 million this year into municipal infrastructure. Five million additional dollars into highways and transportation, railroads, and environmental cleanup. Five million a year into capital investment in universities, SIAST, and regional colleges. Five million a year more for school projects. Five million a year more for social housing to help those least fortunate in our society.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Yates: — And \$5 million a year more for upgrading our parks and heritage properties.

Mr. Speaker, this is a budget that provides opportunity both today and tomorrow for our citizens.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Yates: — Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker, I now would like to talk about the final platform in our budget — a new taxation system. Mr. Speaker, this is an item that we had in our platform. We took it out. We talked to the people of Saskatchewan, and we made a promise. And whether the members opposite like it or not, we were elected the government and we are delivering on our taxation promise.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Yates: — We are delivering our taxation promise. And, Mr. Speaker, it was a taxation promise the people of this province told us they wanted, and it's one we're going to deliver on.

Mr. Speaker, I want to talk a little bit about tax reform. As we've stated many, many times, tax reductions must be sustainable and funded from new revenues. We can't take away from those least fortunate in our society for a tax cut, and this government will not do that. Any tax reduction must be matched by investment and priority public services. That occurred in this budget and it will occur in every subsequent budget.

And, Mr. Speaker, most of all it must be fair, it must be progressive, it must put lower income people in a better financial situation. And this tax break does that, Mr. Speaker. It does it for the people of Saskatchewan of both low income and middle incomes.

Official, Mr. Speaker, and at the end of this, every single taxpayer in this province will pay less income tax this year. This year, Mr. Speaker, every single Saskatchewan resident that pays taxes will pay lower income taxes this year.

Effective January 1, 2001, we'll be completely eliminating the

flat tax, the debt-reduction surtax, and the high-income surtax. But more than that, Mr. Speaker, effective July 1 this year, the flat tax will be cut in half to 1 per cent, Mr. Speaker, 1 per cent.

Mr. Speaker, something that the opposition has a great deal of difficulty dealing with is that, when fully phased in, 70 per cent of Saskatchewan taxpayers will pay the same level of taxation as their famed, ideological province, Alberta.

(1245)

Saskatchewan lower- and middle-income people in Saskatchewan will pay the same tax as their counterparts in Alberta. Just one more time, to make it very clear. Seventy per cent of all Saskatchewan taxpayers will pay the same tax rate equal to residents of Alberta.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Yates: — I hope you can understand it. It's extremely simple.

Mr. Speaker, every single adult resident will receive a basic tax credit of \$8,000 — Mr. Speaker, we're trying to help the people of this province — a spousal or equivalent deduction of \$8,000; and every child will receive a credit of \$2,500, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, we're trying to help families; and I hope that you can appreciate we're trying to help families, Mr. Speaker.

On top of that, Mr. Speaker, the seniors in our society will also get a \$1,000 supplement, Mr. Speaker, because we are committed to helping those senior citizens in our community to deal with those increased expenses in health care as they age in our population.

An Hon. Member: — Add it up for them, Kevin. How much is that for seniors?

Mr. Yates: — Seniors, Mr. Speaker — \$9,000 for seniors. Mr. Speaker — \$9,000 for a single senior.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Yates: — And, Mr. Speaker, perhaps the most important, the most important issue, the most important issue, Mr. Speaker, is that 55,000 — can you hear that? — 55,000 low-income earners, the least fortunate of our society, will come off the income tax rolls completely.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Yates: — This government believes in living up to its commitment of helping those who need it most. And we're doing that in this budget, Mr. Speaker.

We're not interested in making the wealthy wealthier. We're interested in helping those that most need it. But, Mr. Speaker, we're also giving every single citizen that pays income tax in this province a tax break. But those that need it most are going to get it first, and those that need it most are going to benefit the most.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Yates: — Mr. Speaker, on top of that, this government is going to eliminate bracket creep. We're going to eliminate bracket creep. We're going to get rid of the creep, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, that is good for the province of Saskatchewan.

Now, Mr. Speaker, we're not about talking about it; we're about doing it. And we have a plan. We've announced it, and the taxpayers of this province will see it.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I want to talk for a little bit about the sales tax. Mr. Speaker, this government has even furthered its commitment to low-income people because we don't want an expansion in sales tax to hurt those most vulnerable in our society, those who need it the most. We have a social conscience.

Now, Mr. Speaker, we have a refundable sales tax credit. And, Mr. Speaker, that's going to help middle- and low-income people in this province; \$32 million will be refunded to Saskatchewan taxpayers each and every year.

An Hon. Member: — How much?

Mr. Yates: — Thirty-two million dollars refunded to Saskatchewan taxpayers.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the members opposite, they talk about how poor this budget is. The members opposite . . . I don't know if they've read the budget. I don't know if they've read the budget.

They should read the cover, Mr. Speaker. The budget says *A Plan for Growth and Opportunity*. It's not called the book of doom and gloom. It's called *A Plan for Growth and Opportunity*, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Yates: — Now, Mr. Speaker . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Well unfortunately somebody said, rip the cover off and send it over for him. I'm a strong believer in not defacing government property, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Yates: — The taxpayers of Saskatchewan paid for this book and I respect it, Mr. Speaker.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to talk a little bit about what this government inherited. Now, Mr. Speaker, I want to talk about \$15 billion in debt. It's a shame. It's a shame that that debt was put on my children and probably on my children's children before we'll be able to pay it off. Mr. Speaker, at the very least, at the very least my children and their children will have to pay this debt off.

Now the members opposite, the members opposite may not want to hear this. Reality is reality, whether they like it or not. Reality is reality.

Mr. Speaker, when the NDP government came to power in 1991, they were paying more than \$800 million a year on the debt — \$860 million to be precise — \$860 million. Mr.

Speaker, Mr. Speaker, that's just about \$3 million a day.

Can you imagine for a second, can you dream about what you could do with \$3 million a day? What could we do to help with the health care system? What could we do with child poverty? What could we do with education? How many improvements could we make to our fundamental basic services? How much could we do to help support our infrastructure?

Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker, if we had that money, we'd have a much different province today. But unfortunately this government was handicapped with a debt. Every single citizen of this province was handicapped with that debt.

And, Mr. Speaker, what bothers me most, what bothers me most is the members opposite think it's funny. A debt created by a right-wing government, that some of the members opposite represented, and they think it's funny. They don't look to the future, Mr. Speaker; they look to the present only.

And we heard this again, Mr. Speaker. They talk about not putting any money in a fiscal fund to deal with the instability of our economy. They don't want to do that, Mr. Speaker. They want to spend every dollar, everyday.

And then they talk about wanting to expand all, all our services — I've heard it from . . . from municipal government infrastructure, education, health care. They'd spend more money everywhere, Mr. Speaker. I don't know where they'd go.

Mr. Speaker, today they talk about nothing is enough. But yet their plan spoke lots about nothing. It said nothing about education, nothing about health care, and nothing about the future for our children.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Yates: — Now, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker, I want to take a couple of minutes and talk about the future. Our children need the opportunity to dream. We need to have an economy that's vibrant, that looks to the future, and is going to deal with the needs of our province, provide employment for our children — meaningful employment for our children — based on a high-tech economy.

Now, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker, to talk about our children moving to Alberta just encourages them and tells them everything is better there. The grass is greener somewhere else. Mr. Speaker, our children learn from us. And, Mr. Speaker, if we talk about the good things in our province, they'd understand them; not about the negative, negative things about our province.

Mr. Speaker, there's a couple of key things that are indicators of a very, very bright future for this province. Our credit ratings are A across the board — right across the board.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Yates: — I can remember meeting with members of the government when I was not elected, talking about the dire straits this province was in. Where we all had to look in making some concessions to get our province out of a very grievous

situation. We did that as a province, Mr. Speaker, and today the Canadian Bond Rating Service rates us an A plus.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Yates: — An A plus, Mr. Speaker. That's a bright future for this province. The Dominion Bond Rating Service rates us an A, Mr. Speaker — an A. The Fitch IBCA, an A plus, Mr. Speaker — A plus.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Yates: — Moody's Investors Services an A 2.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Yates: — And Standard and Poor's an A.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Yates: — Mr. Speaker, that's a straight A student. That's a straight A student. The province of Saskatchewan rated by outside agencies in our fiscal responsibility is all A's. All A's, Mr. Speaker. All A's.

And I think, Mr. Speaker, the members opposite, if they ever went to grade school and I'm sure they did — A's — our students like A's; our kids are good when they get A's, aren't they? Well we got all A's and I think you should appreciate that.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Yates: — Now, Mr. Speaker, the future. The future, Mr. Speaker, is what this government's looking towards. We're not looking at the short-term; we're looking towards the future. And that means, Mr. Speaker, that we have to look beyond the immediate needs. We have to build an infrastructure that meets the needs not just of today, but of 20 years from today. And, Mr. Speaker, this government's going to continue to move down that path, and this budget is about that.

Just a few examples — the centenary fund for infrastructure. And, Mr. Speaker . . . Mr. Speaker, this fund looks to building the infrastructure for the future.

The hundred and fifty million dollar health transition fund, Mr. Speaker, is about looking to the future — it's about looking to the future, Mr. Speaker. It's to provide for a transition for health districts to build the infrastructure required for a new health care system, to get the equipment required for the needs of the future. We're not about living in the past, Mr. Speaker; we're about moving forward into the future.

And, Mr. Speaker, the members opposite talk about how everything is so bad, all the doom and the gloom in this province. Well, Mr. Speaker . . . Mr. Speaker, I think they need, they need to look at things through clear glasses instead of those coloured glasses they're often looking through.

Now, Mr. Speaker, we need to look to the future and this party is going to look to the future. This government's looking to the future and our coalition partners are looking to the future with

us. And, Mr. Speaker, this budget is about the ability to dream, to look into the future, and to provide just as an NDP-CCF government did when it invented health care.

It's about reinventing health care and defining what that should be for the 21st century, and putting it in place so the citizens of this province have the absolute best health care system that can be provided with the money available in this province.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Yates: — Now, Mr. Speaker, it's not about talking about all the negative things. It's about looking at a problem and looking for a solution. Throwing stones is easy, Mr. Speaker. Easiest game in the world.

When you don't have any accountability, you don't have any responsibility. You don't have the responsibility of looking at where money should be spent. You don't have to tell people no. Because you're not in control. That's easy, Mr. Speaker.

But, Mr. Speaker, in the real world somebody needs to be accountable, and that's this government. Now, Mr. Speaker, this is about the future.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Hon. members, it now being the hour of 1 p.m., prior to adjourning the House I want to wish you all a very positive, beneficial weekend in your constituencies with your families and I look forward to you returning with the same enthusiasm when the House reconvenes.

The House now stands adjourned until 1:30 p.m. Monday.

The Assembly adjourned at 1:01 p.m.

