

The Assembly met at 1:30 p.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRESENTING PETITIONS

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present petitions on behalf of people throughout the province who are adamantly opposed to forced amalgamation of municipalities. And the petition reads as follows, Mr. Speaker:

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

And the signatures on these petitions, Mr. Speaker, are from Plunkett, from Humboldt, St. Benedict, Middle Lake, Cudworth, and many places throughout my constituency, Mr. Speaker.

I so present.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also have a petition to present today to reduce fuel tax by 10 cents a litre:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the federal and provincial governments to immediately reduce fuel tax by 10 cents a litre, cost shared by both levels of government.

The people that have signed this petition are from Macoun and Midale.

I so present.

Mr. Gantefoer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too rise on behalf of people from my constituency concerned about the high tax on fuel. The prayer reads as follows, Mr. Speaker:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the federal and provincial governments to immediately reduce fuel taxes by 10 cents a litre, cost shared by both levels of government.

Signatures on this petition, Mr. Speaker, are from the communities of Beatty and Melfort.

I so present.

Mr. Peters: — A petition in regards to the amalgamation of municipalities. 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 the proposal of any forced amalgamation of municipalities.

I so present and it's from the towns of Burr, Humboldt, and Guernsey.

I so present.

Ms. Eagles: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I stand today to present petitions on behalf of Saskatchewan citizens regarding the 10 cent per litre reduction on fuel tax. And the prayer reads as follows, Mr. Speaker:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the federal and provincial governments to immediately reduce fuel taxes by 10 cents a litre, cost shared by both levels of government.

And this petition is signed by people in Macoun and Torquay. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I so present.

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again I rise to present a petition on behalf of people in my hometown of Swift Current concerned about funding for our hospital. And the prayer reads:

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

This petition is signed by people in Swift Current.

I so present. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also have petitions to do with the Minister of Municipal Affairs putting another stake in the heart of local governments in rural Saskatchewan.

The Speaker: — Order, I just remind hon. members not to initiate debate while presenting petitions.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And the prayer reads:

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

The communities, Mr. Speaker, are Guernsey, Bredenbury, Saltcoats, Esterhazy — a number of communities from around the province, Mr. Speaker.

I so present.

Mr. McMorris: — Mr. Speaker, I too rise in the Assembly to present a petition regarding forced municipal amalgamations. And the prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon.

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

And these are signed by people from Cabri, Oungre, Tribune, and the Weyburn area.

I so present.

Mr. Weekes: — Mr. Speaker, I too rise to present a petition from the citizens of Blaine Lake who are concerned about having a full-time position in the Blaine Lake Medical Clinic:

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 position with consistent hours and days.

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

From the citizens of Blaine Lake.

Mr. Brkich: — Mr. Speaker, I also have a petition opposed to enforced municipal amalgamation:

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

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

Signatures are from Cabri, Abbey, and various other places throughout Saskatchewan. Thank you.

Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also have a petition against amalgamation of municipalities. And the prayer reads:

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

The petitioners are from Plunkett, Humboldt, Guernsey and Muenster and Burr.

I so present.

Mr. Allchurch: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I too stand today to bring concerns of forced amalgamation in the province. And the prayer is:

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.

And I have petitions from Lanigan and Guernsey.

I 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 petitioning the Assembly to overrule the Parkland Health Board decision with regard to the Blaine Lake Medical Clinic; and

Petitioning the Assembly to halt any plans to proceed with the amalgamation of municipalities in Saskatchewan; and

Petitioning the Assembly to ensure reliable cellular service to Watson and area; and

Petitioning the Assembly to cause the government to provide funding for the Swift Current regional hospital.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To you and through you to my colleagues in the Assembly, it's a great privilege to introduce my uncle and aunt who are seated in your gallery, my Uncle Frank and Aunt Maxine Wall of Swift Current.

Mr. Speaker, for those people who are familiar with my ethnic background, they'll know that I have a number of uncles and aunts. These are special though, however. My Uncle Frank and my father started into business over 40 years ago. They're still in business today together investing in Swift Current and creating jobs. And they claim to have done so without an argument and I guess there's no one to dispute that.

Mr. Speaker, I would just ask all my hon. colleagues to join with me in welcoming them here to the Assembly.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Weekes: — Mr. Speaker, I would like to introduce to you and through you, a group of great grade 12 students, 13 in number, from the Maymont School. And I would like to thank them for coming. And it's very encouraging to see students come to the legislature and see the politicians at their work. And join me in extending a welcome to these students.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Sexual Assault Awareness Week

Mr. Prebble: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I would like to inform members of the House that this week has been proclaimed Sexual Assault Awareness Week. The aim of this week is to raise awareness about sexual assault and sexual abuse as a means to preventing it.

We all know from our experience that women are at significantly higher risk of sexual assault and sexual abuse than are men. In fact, a 1999 study from the Canadian Centre for Justice points to the fact that one out of every four women is sexually assaulted at some point in their lives — an entirely

unacceptable situation, Mr. Speaker.

Furthermore, 60 per cent of sexual abuse and assault victims are children and youth. In particular, girls were identified as being at higher risk of sexual assault by a family member.

Mr. Speaker, this government recognizes that sexual assault and abuse is best addressed by working in co-operation with communities, families, and individuals; and by undertaking a multi-faceted approach to addressing and preventing its continuation. Zero tolerance of sexual assault and abuse is the goal of this government, Mr. Speaker.

By providing funding to and working in partnership with community-based groups, we're making progress in developing a range of integrated services to address the needs of those who have endured sexual assault or abuse.

Mr. Speaker, I urge all members of the Assembly to join with me in recognizing the importance of this week. Thank you very much.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Courageous Youngster from Hafford

Mr. Weekes: — I would like to acknowledge a courageous young girl from Hafford — five-year-old Chantel Marie Saccucci. Chantel was diagnosed on February 11 with acute monoblastic leukemia. This is a rare leukemia that affects only 15 to 25 per cent of children and is usually found in people over the age of 60 and Down's syndrome kids.

When diagnosed, she was given only a 20 per cent chance of beating it. She has undergone two chemotherapy treatments to date, and has needed platelet and blood transfusions between treatment. She is feeling pretty good, however she has her good and bad days.

Her doctor has informed the family that Chantel has to go into remission within the next two treatments. When she does go into remission, it will be off to Vancouver for a bone marrow transplant.

Her 15-month-old brother, Travis, was 100 per cent match and will be her donor. The efforts and support of the Hafford school, her family, community, and surrounding area cannot go without recognition.

It was an honour for me to be invited to take part in a perogy sale and coin drive held by the Hafford school which raised \$1,200; and a dance put on by Chantel's uncle and neighbours as a show of support for Chantel, her parents, Eric and Annet, her two brothers, and one sister.

The Mayfair area is holding a cash raffle to help with the expenses incurred by the Saccucci's.

I would ask that the members of the House pray for Chantel's speedy recovery.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Meadow Lake Spartanettes Win Provincial High School Championship

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Tonight sports fans all over North America will be watching the last game of the US (United States) college basketball season which should be a good game, I am told, and a game that features two teams that only lost between them, about 15 games this season.

You will excuse me, Mr. Speaker, if I say, big deal. In the town of Meadow Lake in my constituency, we have the Meadow Lake Spartanettes, a team that has not lost all year long and a team that won the provincial high school championship.

A team that defeated teams from Lake Lenore and from Moose Jaw last month at the Hoopla tournament in Saskatoon. A team, Mr. Speaker, that in its final game, had to hold its composure and conditioning into an overtime period before finally winning the championship. I owe the member from Moose Jaw North I think probably a meal of consolidation. Mr. Speaker, a consolation I should say. Mr. Speaker, consolidation has already taken place.

Mr. Speaker, for a team at any level to reach the top and to do so undefeated is a remarkable achievement and I want to congratulate head coach Carla Waterman, her staff, and especially her team for this season. I also should recognize the tremendous support the team received from their school friends and relatives throughout the season and especially at the final tournament.

Not only did the Spartanettes win the provincial championship, Mr. Speaker, the team has 11 players returning for next season — the beginning of a dynasty. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Sexual Assault Awareness Week

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to rise on behalf of the official opposition in recognition of Sexual Assault Awareness Week. Mr. Speaker, sexual assault, and particularly sexual assault and exploitation of children, is considered to be, unfortunately, one of the fastest growing industries in the world and it continues to be one of the most rapidly growing kinds in our country.

Mr. Speaker, rape is a violent crime. It's a violent invasive crime and a very frightening experience. This type of violent crime affects all women, no matter what their age, race, or economic status, and all women are potential victims.

Recent statistics have shown that one out of every four women will be sexually assaulted at some point in their life. But what is even more disturbing, Mr. Speaker, is that young girls are at a significantly higher risk of sexual assault by a member of her family.

Mr. Speaker, no one asks to be sexually assaulted. Nor does anyone's behaviour justify or excuse the crime. People have the right to be safe from a sexual violation and it is the offender, not the victim or the survivor, that must be held accountable for their crime.

Mr. Speaker, speaking out about sexual assault may be an essential part of the recovery process for survivors. However victims should not be forced to speak publicly or privately before they are ready. Every survivor is the expert of their own recovery and for many recovery becomes an ongoing process of healing, change, and empowerment.

Mr. Speaker, as legislators in this province we all have a responsibility to ensure that everyone is kept safe, particularly our children. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Rendezvous 2000

Mr. Kasperski: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker it was my pleasure to attend this past weekend, Rendezvous 2000, an important conference of the francophone community in Saskatchewan, on behalf of the Premier and the Minister of Aboriginal and Intergovernmental Affairs.

Vendredi soir, la réunion a marquée officiellement le passage de l'association culturelle franco-Canadienne de la Saskatchewan à leur nouvelle entité représentative l'Assemblée communautaire fransaskoise.

Samedi soir, Rendezvous 2000 a honoré les bénévoles, ces artisans du développement communautaire qui ont consacré leur temps and leur énergie à l'épanouissement des communautés francophones de notre province.

M. le Président, la Saskatchewan est reconnue pour le dévouement de ses bénévoles et nos francophones comptent parmi les plus actifs.

Les communautés francophones de la Saskatchewan savent dialoguer dans le but de créer des partenariats entre elles, avec d'autres communautés et organismes, et avec les gouvernements.

Le gouvernement de la Saskatchewan attache une très grande valeur à ces efforts pour renforcer les liens entre les communautés et établir des partenariats dans le but d'atteindre des objectifs communs.

Grâce au rôle de liaison accru de l'Office de coordination des affaires francophones, nous prenons présentement des mesures pour resserrer nos propres liens avec les francophones de la Saskatchewan. Je suis optimiste.

Merci, Monsieur le Président.

(Translation: Friday evening, the meeting officially marked the transition from the Association culturelle franco-canadienne de la Saskatchewan to their new representative body, the Assemblée communautaire fransaskoise.

Saturday evening, Rendezvous 2000 honoured volunteers, the artisans of community development as they were called, who sacrificed their time and energy to the vitality of the francophone community of our province.

Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan is well-known for the devotion of

its volunteers and our francophones count among the most active.

Saskatchewan's francophone communities know how to reach out to build partnerships between themselves, with other communities and organizations, and with governments.

The Government of Saskatchewan attaches a very large value to these efforts to reinforce the ties between the communities and to establish partnerships with the goal of reaching common objectives.

Through the improved liaison capacity of the Office of French-language Co-ordination, we are presently taking measures to strengthen our own ties with the francophones of Saskatchewan. I am hopeful.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.)

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Canadian Bible College and Theological Seminary Moving to Alberta

Mr. Hart: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I was very disappointed to learn this morning that the Canadian Bible College and Theological Seminary have decided to move to Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, there are approximately 375 students in the college, 110 students in the seminary, and roughly 100 employees that have found greener pastures in Alberta.

I find this very disconcerting that yet another successful organization is leaving our province, particularly when Saskatchewan is suffering from the brain drain. We can ill afford to have our young minds leaving.

Mr. Speaker, the Canadian Bible College and Theological Seminary has been providing high quality educational opportunities since 1941. Not only is this a major loss for Regina, but Saskatchewan as a whole, as students who were interested in attending the college will now have to leave Saskatchewan and move to Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, this is happening after a so-called historic budget. But now we find out that it's a day late and a dollar short.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ORAL QUESTIONS

Provincial Sales Tax

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well the Minister of Finance has had a weekend to reflect on the terrible budget that he brought down last week. Perhaps he's realized he's made a terrible mistake.

The front page of today's *Leader-Post* is a graphic illustration of how your PST (provincial sales tax) tax grab is hurting

Saskatchewan seniors.

Anne Finnik of Regina spends \$205 a month on non-prescription drugs. She says:

If I stop taking the drugs and vitamins I won't survive and if I take them I won't have any savings.

Oh, what an awful choice you've given her, Mr. Minister.

Mr. Minister, why are you attacking low-income seniors like Anne Finnik? How can you sit there and not take action while seniors are being hurt by your PST tax increase?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Mr. Speaker, I want to say to the member opposite in answer to the question, that if there is any individual in the province — I don't want to speak about this particular case — that is taking a lot of painkillers to control pain and a lot for stomach relief, we do want to hear from that person, and perhaps working with the medical community want to see what prescription alternatives may be available, because there's a lot of medication being consumed there, Mr. Speaker.

But I want to say to the House that I find the Leader of the Opposition's response to be quite surprising today, because he's been complaining about the PST package, Mr. Speaker. But according to *The StarPhoenix* and *The Leader-Post* of Saturday when he was asked if he would commit to changing the tax package that I presented in the budget, Mr. Speaker, he would not commit to changing the package, Mr. Speaker. And the reason is because he knows it's the right package.

So in the House he's against it; he goes out of the House, Mr. Speaker, and he says if you elect me I won't change it.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hermanson: — Well, Mr. Speaker, the Finance minister says to this senior, come and see me and maybe we can work out a deal. Well all that he's offering right now is a new sales tax credit. However, Anne Finnik qualifies for only about \$77 a year — that's about half of her tax bill for non-prescription drugs. And that's not even considering, Mr. Minister, your tax grab on other items and your hundred dollar a day tax grab on SaskTel and SaskEnergy bills.

Mr. Minister, this is a real life example of a low-income senior who will pay more tax under your new system. This is a living and breathing example of how your PST tax grab is hurting low-income seniors. How many more low-income seniors will you hurt in this PST tax grab?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Mr. Speaker, on July 1 of this year the Saskatchewan flat tax is going to be cut in half.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — And that tax, Mr. Speaker, is a tax that seniors have been hit very unfairly with.

And on January 1 of next year, Mr. Speaker, the Saskatchewan flat tax is going to be gone, the high-income surtax is going to be gone, and the debt-reduction surtax is going to be gone, Mr. Speaker.

And I'll say to the member opposite that this is a tax package that will put every taxpayer in Saskatchewan in a better position than they are now, Mr. Speaker. And that's why when the Leader of the Opposition left this Chamber the other day, he would not commit to reversing the tax package, Mr. Speaker. Because he knows that this package is in the long-term best interests of the people of Saskatchewan. And so it is, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hermanson: — Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm hearing just as the Finance minister is hearing from people all over Saskatchewan who are very, very upset with his budget. You know, he only tells half the story. He tells about the tax cuts but he hasn't been talking about the tax increase.

In fact he told us that the PST tax grab exempted family necessities. I think those were his words. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Mr. Minister, non-prescription drugs are a necessity for many people, including seniors on fixed incomes and families with young children. Are you trying to tell us that when your two-year-old or our two-year-old has a fever, that a children's Tylenol is a luxury item that they don't really need?

Mr. Minister, your PST tax grab is another attack on Saskatchewan families, and it's also an attack on low-income seniors. And what's worse, it wasn't necessary. You didn't have to do it. Every other province is cutting taxes without raising other taxes like the PST. Only the NDP (New Democratic Party) and only this Finance minister thinks that the way to cut taxes is by raising them.

Mr. Minister, my question: why don't you just cancel this unnecessary tax grab?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Well, Mr. Speaker, I say again that this is very curious — that the member opposite stands up in this House and says he's against our tax package which is going to cut the Saskatchewan flat tax in half on July 1, bring in a supplementary senior's tax credit of \$1,000 on top of a basic tax credit, Mr. Speaker, of \$8,000, and on January 1, eliminate the flat tax, the high income surtax and the debt reduction surtax and, Mr. Speaker, bring about the biggest reduction in personal income taxes in the history of this province, Mr. Speaker.

And I don't know why the Leader of the Opposition says that he's opposed to that, Mr. Speaker. But moreover, as I said before, when he leaves the House and he's asked if he will commit himself to reversing the tax package we're bringing in, Mr. Speaker, he says no, he will not commit himself to doing that. Very curious, Mr. Speaker.

But I want to say something else, Mr. Speaker, and that is this

legislature has been sitting for three days and do you know how much the spending promises of the opposition add up to so far? \$1.27 billion, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Funding for Health Care

Mr. Gantefoer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Health.

Madam Minister, we've heard a lot over the last few days about the NDP's vision. Well let's talk about the NDP's vision for health care. You yourself have been going around the province preaching gloom and doom and talking about the need to look at privatization of some services and which services to leave alone.

Surgical theatres are shut down, hospitals are closing, nurses and doctors are leaving the province, and a health care system that you're in charge of, you yourself describe as being, quote: "on the ropes". Is this the NDP vision of health care, Madam Minister? What's next?

Madam Minister, will you clarify for the people of this province what your vision for health care is? What services are you going to privatize and discontinue from public service? What hospitals are you going to close, Madam Minister?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As the members will know in this budget that was delivered by the Minister of Finance last Wednesday there was an increase of \$113 million, or an increase of 5.9 per cent in real money. Mr. Speaker, there's no question that if you look at the budget that was delivered last Wednesday, if you include the health transition fund, health spending in this province represents 40 per cent of all program spending in our provincial budget.

Mr. Speaker, what I have been talking about to the public is the need to have a public dialogue. We need to have a discussion about medicare in this province. And in fact, Mr. Speaker, I've been talking to my colleagues all across the country in order that we can clearly understand what is working in health care, Mr. Speaker, and what we need to improve.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Gantefoer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Madam Minister, the people of this province are very nervous about your comments about dialogue, because most times when you talk about dialogue they understand it means closures or shutdowns. Madam Minister, you talk about how much the budget has been increased for the local health districts, but you have to remember that last year 32 districts were running deficits totalling over \$50 million. So the actual real increase in the base spending of your budget was very little; certainly not enough to meet the increased costs that all divisions are going to be facing.

Madam Minister, your wellness model is suffering a terminal illness. And what you are saying across the province is that it's

hit the wall, the whole process. Those are your words, not mine; it's some vision, Madam Minister.

Madam Minister, will you stand up in the House today and tell people specifically, are you going to take MRIs (magnetic resonance imaging) out of the public system? Are you going to take ultrasounds out of the public system? Because that's what you were speculating about. Are you going to privatize the public system?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Mr. Speaker, I can assure the members that this government is not interested in going to a two-tier health system, nor is it interested, Mr. Speaker, in going to a private health system. That has been suggested by the member from Weyburn, has been suggested by the member from Rosthern, that we look to Alberta for our system, Mr. Speaker.

What I can tell the members, having spoken with my colleagues from all across the country, is that this province is spending more as a percentage of our budget than practically any other government in this country, Mr. Speaker.

What I can tell the members is that every government and every health system across the country is under huge pressure because of growing costs of prescription drugs, because our population is aging and they're using more and more health services. In fact, Mr. Speaker, in this province 14 per cent of the population uses close to 45 per cent of our health services — and I'm talking about people over the age of 65.

Mr. Speaker, we do need to have a discussion, and I welcome that in the future.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Gantefoer: — Mr. Speaker, the minister talks about two-tier health care in this province. Well isn't this ever wonderful because today it was announced that you've hired two-tier Harvey to be a special adviser to Executive Council.

Madam Minister, will you confirm that indeed you've hired the former member, the big Liberal candidate from Arm River, to be a special adviser to Executive Council and the Premier. Is it your adviser as how you're going to two-tier the system in Saskatchewan?

And while you're at it, in talking about all the Liberals, the Liberal leader takes great pride in quoting from his letter to the editor in saying how much accessibility he has to the federal government. Madam Minister, are you putting two-tier Harvey and the Minister of Education in charge of your programs?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, what I find so interesting about the member's question is, if I look at the Saskatchewan Party pamphlet that was delivered to all of our households in the last provincial election, what the Sask Party was committing to was a steady, gradual reduction in government spending and taxation, and a firm commitment to balanced budgets.

Well, Mr. Speaker, this coalition government has a balanced approach to governing where we will have tax reductions that are affordable, program spending that is affordable, and debt reduction, Mr. Speaker. Those are the principles of this coalition government.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Partnerships Program

Mr. Hart: — Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Post-Secondary Education.

Mr. Minister, it isn't a very good day if you happen to be a student in Saskatchewan today. The SSTA (Saskatchewan School Trustees Association) is saying that the budget forgets children.

Now we find out that university students are also victims of the NDP budget carnage. Apparently when your Finance minister read the budget speech the other day, he forgot to mention that the NDP was cutting the partnerships program.

You remember that program, don't you, Mr. Minister? That's the program that helped create summer jobs for students — jobs that are desperately needed to assist students struggling with skyrocketing tuition costs.

Mr. Minister, would you explain to our students why cutting summer . . . student jobs is a good idea when your NDP government already has the second worst job creation record in Canada?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Hagel: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. And I thank the hon. member for the question.

I think what the people of Saskatchewan would want to know is that their provincial government is spending its money very prudently in the best interest of the people of Saskatchewan. The fact of the matter is, Mr. Speaker, is that the summer employment program, which provided a subsidy of a dollar twenty an hour, is substantially less than the federal government provides in their subsidy program.

We're not in the business of competing with the federal government, Mr. Speaker, and we simply believe that the money is best spent in other ways in order to meet the objectives and to make post-secondary education accessible to the students of Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hart: — Mr. Speaker, I find the minister's answer to the question very interesting. My question, my second question, is to the Minister of Post-Secondary Education. Mr. Minister, when we called the telephone number for the partnership program, we got a recording. The recorded message announced that the program had been cut in the NDP's budget on March 29. The message goes on to say that employers and students should contact Human Resources Development Canada.

But the news only gets worse from there, Mr. Minister. You see the deadline for the federal government's student employment program was March 31. That means students lose out both ways thanks to the NDP.

Mr. Minister, why did you keep your plan to chop the summer student employment program a secret? Why didn't you tell the students and employers so that they could act on the federal program before it expired on March 31?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Hagel: — Mr. Speaker, again if the hon. member would care to address the response, what he would recognize, Mr. Speaker, is that we have no intention of competing with the federal government. Employers understand both programs, Mr. Speaker. They understand both programs and will make use of the federal program as they see it available.

But it should be noted, Mr. Speaker, that when one looks at the Post-Secondary budget overall that it was considered a priority by this government . . . an increase of in excess of 5 per cent at a time when inflation was 2 per cent — substantially more than inflation, Mr. Speaker. And I think that the president of the University of Regina, David Barnard, summed it all up when he said:

. . . there are "positive signs" in the budget . . . the critical issues for Saskatchewan universities is to strive for sustainable quality.

And, Mr. Speaker, that is what is happening in this budget this year.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hart: — Mr. Speaker, I have another question for the Minister of Post-Secondary Education. Mr. Minister, you are spinning an interesting cover story but it isn't going to help a single student. You intentionally left any message that the partnership program was going to be terminated out of the budget. There was no news release, no public announcement of any kind.

I guess your Finance minister was too busy introducing his \$160 million tax increase to come clean with the students. So students who desperately need summer jobs are out of luck. And employers willing to create jobs through the partnership program are also out of luck.

This is typical NDP solutions to a problem: everybody loses.

So what advice do you have for students who are looking for work this summer. Should they follow their friends and family members who have already left for Alberta?

Hon. Mr. Hagel: — Well, Mr. Speaker, this is an interesting point put by the hon. member for Last Mountain-Touchwood. When the last campaigns were held, Mr. Speaker, there were two parties in that election campaign that said post-secondary education was a priority. They sit on this side. There was one party that sat on their tongue when it came to priorities for post-secondary education and it is on that side, Mr. Speaker.

The fact of the matter is, the fact of the matter is that there are a number of employment opportunities that are available to Saskatchewan students. There is a federal program which is richer than the provincial program, Mr. Speaker. We're not in competition with the federal government to spend taxpayers' dollars.

We are committed to spending the most prudently we can in order to achieve the objectives of making post-secondary education as accessible to the people of Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Funding for Education

Ms. Draude: — Mr. Speaker, if post-secondary education is a priority then why did you cut the program? My speaker is for the Minister of Education.

Mr. Speaker, following the budget speech last week the minister stated how proud he was of the Education budget. He said critics of the Education budget just didn't know good news when they saw it.

Teachers, school trustees, and taxpayers are not blind, Mr. Speaker. They know the difference between good news and bad news. What the education system in this province received last week was bad news.

Mr. Speaker, the minister is totally out of touch with the people who deliver education services in this province. He's totally out of touch with taxpayers who are protesting tax levels across the province.

Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Education has insulted educators and taxpayers by suggesting if they don't like the budget, they can just go ahead and raise the mill rates. Mr. Minister, can you please tell the school boards and property taxpayers how this is a good budget for education when you also suggest they raise local taxes to maintain programs, schools, and staff.

Hon. Mr. Melnychuk: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The member opposite talks about the roles of boards of education. And let me just state that this government strongly believes in the autonomy of the boards of education who are responsible for matters relating to the delivery of education programs within their own division. This includes the responsibility for establishing their budgets and mill rates locally in accordance with their local needs and priorities.

But let me just say that we believe school divisions have been treated more than fairly in this budget — 28.5 million, budget to budget; 18.5 million, 4.7 per cent increase in the foundation operating grant; an extra 20 per cent for capital projects. And you know what? More for special education; more for the handicapped; more for community schools; more for northern communities. And you know what? Nothing from you. Zero. Frozen. Not one dime. And we will not let that happen ever again.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The one thing the

minister forgot to talk about is they also talk about more taxes — that's the more that you're talking about. In the last campaign the minister promised to add \$50 million to education. Such is his formidable power within this coalition government, Mr. Speaker. And now he's only able to deliver about one-third of that amount.

Mr. Speaker, the minister also promised to increase the provincial share of education costs in his election campaign, and he failed on that front too. The overall picture for K to 12 education is dismal in this province. The school boards cannot maintain the status quo with what's provided in this budget, let alone the other challenges they are facing.

They face utility rate increases; they face increased busing costs; they face the teachers' contract and the out-of-scope contracts as well. And you say, just pass the cost on to the taxpayers.

Mr. Minister, in light of the inadequacies of funding in this K to 12 budget and your support for the mill rate increases, how much do you suggest the boards should increase the mill rates?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Melnychuk: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly when we talk about increases for education I would just like to remind the member from Kelvington-Wadena about her election platform in her pamphlet. This does not even mention education. Not one word.

And you know what? When we talk about education . . .

The Speaker: — Order, please. I'm having difficulty hearing the answer. Please allow the member to respond. Allow members to be heard and allow members to respond. Please co-operate.

Hon. Mr. Melnychuk: — Certainly I can tell you that if there was an Education minister from that side over here, there would not have been 1 cent for K to 12.

But let me tell you what we're doing. A 4.7 per cent increase over 1999 grant — more than twice the Saskatchewan inflation rate; 25 per cent more for curriculum actualization — an increase of \$262 per student.

And not only that, for the designated disabled program, an additional \$300 for level 1 and an additional \$3,000 for category 2 for our disabled special needs students.

That is a huge increase, Mr. Speaker, and we're very proud of it.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Draude: — So, Mr. Minister, the question is, what is your thoughts on the mill rates? You avoided the subject completely.

Mr. Speaker, all the NDP government has done in this provincial budget is downloaded the educational responsibilities to school boards and to taxpayers. The minister can go on and on about this budget and about the tax cuts in one minute, and

the next time he says just raise the mill rate. Which is it, Mr. Minister?

Mr. Minister, this budget is about the Minister of Education and his NDP government trying to whitewash school boards and taxpayers, and it's not working. Mr. Minister, you can rearrange the Education budget into operating funds and capital funds and any other funds you want. But in the end the funding to schools means that they're going to have to cut schools or staff or programs.

Raising the mill rate is not an option for school boards that are facing tax revolts in their community. Mr. Minister, in light of inadequate funding by your NDP government, do you endorse school boards cutting staffing or programs or closing schools? Which one do you think we should do?

Hon. Mr. Melenchuk: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It seems that the members opposite again are having a little trouble hearing the answers to the member's question.

The fact of the matter is that the budget over budget increase is 7.2 per cent. The operating grant increase is 4.7 per cent. There's an over 20 per cent increase in capital and there is an increased \$14 million for special education, as well as increased funding for community schools.

And do you know what? I haven't even mentioned yet the \$25 million rebate on ag land in rural Saskatchewan.

Now when you add all that together, that's 20.4 million, that's an additional 5 million on capital, an additional 25 million on property tax rebates. You know what? We're getting close to \$50 million overall. Thank you very much.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Draude: — Mr. Minister, I'm sure that the taxpayers and the school boards across this province are going to be shaking their heads tonight trying to figure out how you came up with nearly \$50 million like you just said. Fifty million dollars to education; that's what we needed. That is not what you are giving.

What we've asked you right now is what kind of a mill rate do you think we should have to give so that schools can keep their schools open and keep their teachers and keep programs? What are you suggesting we do out in Saskatchewan to provide education to the students in this province?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Melenchuk: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member opposite talks about what, you know, we should do for education. And I've told her what we're doing for . . . I've told her what we're doing for education.

And when you add it all up — and you can add it up — 7.2 per cent, \$28.5 million new money for K to 12 budget over budget; 4.7 per cent increase or 18.5 million on the foundation operating grant; an additional \$1.9 million in grants in lieu for a total of 5.3 million; an additional 14 million for special education.

And you know what? When you add in the 25 million, you add up the numbers, but I don't trust that you'd ever come up with the bottom line because you've never been right with the numbers ever, and you'll never be right ever in the future. Thank you very much.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Hillson: — Mr. Speaker, if I may, I rise requesting leave to introduce guests.

Leave granted.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Hon. Mr. Hillson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the government gallery this afternoon we have been joined by Harold Henderson and other members of the Pasqua First Nation who are visiting the legislature this afternoon and who I had a chance to chat with outside before the commencement of the session. I'd ask all members to kindly welcome them.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Ms. Julé: — With leave, to introduce guests, Mr. Speaker.

Leave granted.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to join with the minister in welcoming the members of the Pasqua First Nations on behalf of the official opposition of Saskatchewan. Welcome.

And I too hope to talk with some of you today before you leave. Thank you.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Hon. Mr. Goulet: — Yes, with leave, of course, to introduce guests.

Leave granted.

Hon. Mr. Goulet: — Yes, with due respect I'd like to, along with the colleagues, be able to give welcome. And, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to do it officially, of course, in the language which I speak, which is Cree.

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

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 13 — The Education Amendment Act, 2000 /Loi de 2000 modifiant la Loi de 1995 sur l'éducation

Hon. Mr. Melenchuk: — Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 13, The Education Amendment Act, 2000 be now introduced and

read the first time.

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

**Bill No. 14 — The Film Employment Tax Credit
Amendment Act, 2000**

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 14, The Film Employment Tax Credit Amendment Act, 2000 be now introduced and read the first time.

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

STATEMENT BY THE SPEAKER

Use of Props and Exhibits in the Assembly

The Speaker: — Before orders of the day, hon. colleagues, I want to remind hon. members of the long-standing practice of this Assembly prohibiting the use of props and exhibits.

Last Friday, members on both sides of the House used documents as a prop or as an exhibit. Order. Order please. Neither incident is in keeping with this Assembly's practice. I draw members' attention to page 520 of the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* which summarizes the practice as follows:

Speakers have consistently ruled out of order displays or demonstrations of any kind used by Members to illustrate their remarks or to emphasize their positions. Similarly, props of any kind, used as a way to make a silent comment on issues, have always been found unacceptable in the Chamber. Members may hold notes in their hands, but they will be interrupted and reprimanded by the Speaker if they use papers, documents or other objects to illustrate their remarks. Exhibits would also be ruled inadmissible.

I ask all hon. members for their co-operation in respecting this long-standing practice of the House.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

WRITTEN QUESTIONS

Mr. Kowalsky: — Always a pleasure, Mr. Speaker, to supply information to the opposition. Here are the answers to question 40, and by leave of the Assembly, also the answers to question 41 and 42.

The Speaker: — Answers to questions 40, 41, and 42 are tabled.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

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. Yates: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise again today to reaffirm my position on the budget and to once again talk about a number of the issues that I think the hon. members opposite failed to recognize, or failed to hear in the budget speech.

For one hour last week — or approximately one hour — we talked about the very good things in this budget. And then again today, I hear the questions coming across — they obviously didn't recognize the good things in this budget, Mr. Speaker.

So I'm going to take a few minutes and go over a few of them again.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Yates: — It's very, very important, Mr. Speaker, that people understand this budget. So I want to talk about this budget, Mr. Speaker.

It's a budget about growth and opportunity. It's a budget about hope and prosperity — not just today, but in our future, Mr. Speaker. It's a budget that gives an opportunity for our children in the future, and it gives an opportunity for the people of Saskatchewan today, Mr. Speaker.

It had four main elements. Fiscal responsibility and good government — Mr. Speaker, this was the seventh consecutive balanced budget delivered by this government.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Yates: — Mr. Speaker, because of the operation of this government and its past practice as a good government, this was also the seventh consecutive year of economic growth.

Mr. Speaker, economic growth like oil drilling up 31 per cent last year — 31 per cent; gas drilling up 63 per cent last year are just a couple of the major illustrations.

Mr. Speaker, this government has dealt with a debt. This government, before dealing with a debt, dealt with even a more significant issue — the deficit. Since 1991, we have brought the debt down from 72 per cent of gross domestic product to 38 per cent today, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Yates: — And by 2004, Mr. Speaker, it will be 31 per cent of the provincial budget. Mr. Speaker, this is a sign of a good government.

I just want to hit each of the items very shortly. I'm not going to go through it in the depth I did the other day.

The second element of this budget was a sustainable, effective health system. Well, Mr. Speaker, I want to talk about some of the elements of that, that system, Mr. Speaker.

We hear the members opposite talking about it's not enough. Well, Mr. Speaker, it will never be enough for people who want everything. There is nothing that any government could do to meet all the demands of the public. They must make difficult choices, and that's what this government has been faced to do over the last number of years.

But, Mr. Speaker, I want to talk about the fact that in the last two years we put 17 per cent into the Health budget — 17 per cent. That doesn't include what we put in this year, Mr. Speaker. And in that same period of time, inflation rose by about 3.5 per cent. And, Mr. Speaker, that is thirteen and a half per cent greater than inflation in the last two years.

On top of that, Mr. Speaker, this year and this year alone, we're putting in 213-million-new dollars into health care — 213-million-new dollars into health care, Mr. Speaker.

I don't know what I hear from the opposition, Mr. Speaker. I don't know what we could do to make them happy. I don't know.

Mr. Speaker, I want to talk about the third element of our platform — economic growth and opportunity. Mr. Speaker, in the last five years the people on social assistance rolls in this province have decreased by 6,000. That is due to good government, Mr. Speaker. It's due to putting in the student employment supplement program, Mr. Speaker. It allowed us to start training people who were in the past dependent upon social assistance to get jobs in our community, to move off the social assistance rolls. That is what this government has done to help people, Mr. Speaker.

This is the only province in Canada, Mr. Speaker, that there are fewer children living in poverty today than there were 10 years ago.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Yates: — That's good government, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I want to talk a little bit about education and training. We've increased K-12 funding, by more than the rate of inflation, each and every year. Capital funding to complete 115 projects this year alone. Capital funding for post-secondary infrastructure improvements. I don't know, Mr. Speaker, but I think that spells good government.

Mr. Speaker, I want to talk for just a minute about two or three other major items, other opportunities. This year there is \$250 million dollars in the Highways and Transportation budget — the largest expenditure ever for the highways infrastructure.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Yates: — This government also has put forward \$120 million centenary capital fund to help deal with infrastructure needs within this province, Mr. Speaker — \$120 million.

Mr. Speaker, this is a good budget.

Mr. Speaker, I now want to talk about tax fairness in our new tax system. Mr. Speaker, this government believes in a tax

reform system that sticks to its major principles, guided by our three principles, Mr. Speaker. It must be sustainable and funded from new revenue, and this is, Mr. Speaker. It has to be matched by investment and priority public services, a balanced approach. This does this, Mr. Speaker. And most important of all, it must be fair, progressive, and putting lower income people first, and Mr. Speaker, this budget does that.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Yates: — Mr. Speaker, 70 per cent of Saskatchewan taxpayers will pay income tax rates equal to the residents of Alberta when this is fully implemented. That is good for the people of Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I don't know what the members opposite are complaining about. This is a balanced budget that advances the priority agenda of the people of Saskatchewan. It's not one that contains Alberta envy, it isn't one that worries about greener pastures somewhere else. It's one that deals with the needs of the people of Saskatchewan today and in the future.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Yates: — Mr. Speaker, I think it's time . . . Mr. Speaker, I think it's time that the people in this Assembly look to what's best in this province and not talk so much about what's better somewhere else.

But, Mr. Speaker, when the members opposite found so much of what they liked in the budget, so much of what they liked in the budget, Mr. Speaker, they didn't know what to say. Mr. Speaker, there was a bigger tax cut than they promised in their election platform and they didn't know how to react to that, Mr. Speaker.

So, Mr. Speaker, with that I want to vow to let all the members know that I am in support of this budget, if it wasn't obvious. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(1430)

Ms. Bakken: — Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak on behalf of the constituents of Weyburn-Big Muddy. They are proud, hard-working people who have contributed much to their communities and to the province. Farming is the mainstay of our area and the people directly and indirectly involved with farming have been experiencing some very tough times.

We have a government that took a year to decide that this problem needed attention, and now another year has passed and most farmers have yet to see even one dime from the programs this government is boasting about.

Mr. Speaker, this government talks about economic development, but when farmers in my constituency wanted to move ahead and develop a pasta plant, the NDP stood in the way by supporting the monopoly of the Canadian Wheat Board. Our farmers want the opportunity to sell their grain to who they want, when they want, and for the best price so they do not have to rely on government.

Mr. Speaker, as if rural people have not had enough, this government has decided they will throw forced amalgamation into the mix. Mr. Garcea is now holding meetings throughout Saskatchewan to get public input; but at the very same time as the meetings are being held, the NDP has already started implementing forced amalgamation.

Mr. Speaker, last week in Weyburn, Assiniboia, and Humboldt, we experienced how forced amalgamation works in the real world. By a simple phone call, a service was eliminated. This was carried out without any consultation with anyone in the communities of Weyburn, Assiniboia, or Humboldt. Minister Axworthy just announced that the courthouses in these communities would be closed, period. He said: oh no problem, the people from these communities can access service elsewhere.

Mr. Speaker, the people in these areas are still paying taxes like everyone else in Saskatchewan, but now they are going to incur extra costs out of their own pockets to receive these services. Did anyone think about access to justice, loss of jobs, costs that will be added to local police budgets, extra cost to the taxpayers who will now have to pay for lawyers and witnesses to travel to other centres, the importance of a judge who lives in a community and cares about that community? And every time a community loses another service the other businesses in that community are also negatively affected.

Mr. Speaker, this is what the NDP calls effective, efficient service while the people of Saskatchewan call it two-tiered justice. We will now not only have waiting lists for health care, we will now have waiting lists for justice as well.

Mr. Speaker, Minister Axworthy said money would be saved by closing these courthouses — 150,000 the first year; 250,000 the second year. What he failed to mention was that he has increased the budget for administration in his own office by 500,000 for one year.

Mr. Speaker, it's time this government got their priorities straight. No money to maintain services in rural communities, but \$500,000 to hire more bureaucrats in his own office.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Bakken: — The NDP owe all the people of Saskatchewan an explanation for their actions.

Mr. Speaker, very alarming to me, and it should be to all people in the Weyburn-Big Muddy constituency, is that in the Stabler report Weyburn is not considered an economic centre. We simply become part of the Estevan economic region. Mr. Speaker, this is not acceptable.

During the election campaign, I cautioned the people of Weyburn-Big Muddy about the winds that were beginning to blow and what they could mean if the NDP were re-elected. The first concern was would we have a judge? Even I never imagined that not only would we lose a resident judge but that we would lose our entire courthouse.

Concern number two: would the school district boundaries become coterminous with health districts and possibly with

RMs (rural municipalities)?

Concern number three: would we lose the Weyburn hospital which is the only remaining acute care facility in our constituency?

Judy Bradley said I was fearmongering. Mr. Speaker, sad to say, the predictions are now coming true. And last week in the budget the new health transition fund was unveiled. What is this fund for — to close more hospitals?

Mr. Speaker, make no mistake all that is happening is part of a plan and the plan is to silence the voice of rural Saskatchewan. Part of this master plan, and probably the real push behind the NDP's plan of amalgamation, is the seldom mentioned part in the Garcea report about eliminating eight MLAs (Member of the Legislative Assembly). If they are cut from rural Saskatchewan, and I am sure that that is the plan, the voice of rural Saskatchewan will be even further diminished. The NDP's plan is one of control at all costs.

As further proof of this, I'd like to quote from an interview Minister Serby held on March 28th with the media.

Media, question: So, no legislation this session?

Minister Serby: I don't know the answer to that question today.

Second media question: Well don't you have to wait for Garcea's final report in August?

Minister Serby: His final report is due in August, and his final report will be reflective of the recommendations of which I would be making at the end of April.

This is what the NDP call democratic consultation.

Mr. Speaker, the people of Weyburn-Big Muddy and all of Saskatchewan know all about this government who brought us health districts with the promise of wellness. What we really have is less service, fewer hospital beds, longer waiting lists, nurses who are overworked and stressed to the limit, 25 of 32 health districts in the red, loss of local control, loss of the Plains Hospital. And for all this we are spending more tax dollars than ever before on health care.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Bakken: — So what does this government do?

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

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

Leave granted.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is an honour to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly, a gentleman who is seated in your gallery, Mr. Speaker, John Froese from Swift Current. John is here attending the

Saskatchewan Regional Parks Association meetings that are happening in Regina. I believe he's on the board of that organization and involved to a great degree with it, and also with the Lac Pelletier Regional Park just south of Swift Current.

John's also an entrepreneur in Swift Current, involved in the glass business. I just ask all members to welcome John here to the Assembly.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

SPECIAL ORDER

ADJOURNED DEBATES

MOTION FOR COMMITTEE OF FINANCE (BUDGET DEBATE)

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

Ms. Bakken: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So now we look at what does this government do about health care. They continue to live in the past and defend old-style medicare. It does not matter that real people have lost access to timely, adequate care. Only the name matters.

But I wonder, Mr. Speaker, what good is free if you are at the back of the line. As one gentleman from Weyburn-Big Muddy constituency expressed in a letter to this government, and I quote:

You people have already messed up our health system with your health boards which are millions in debt, so leave us alone. Remember what you did to the Bengough Hospital? Closed the hospital, stole all their assets, plus hundreds of thousands of dollars, plus \$50,000 they had saved from the ambulance fund. No thanks, we do not want you in our face or our affairs any more.

Mr. Speaker, this is how the people of Saskatchewan feel about this government and they have absolutely no confidence in them.

Mr. Speaker, the people of Saskatchewan have watched while the NDP have systematically destroyed what our grandparents and parents spent a century building. At the beginning of the 1900s, governments were working diligently to populate rural Saskatchewan. Now we have a government intent on doing the exact opposite.

Mr. Speaker, we have lost schools, railroads, elevators, hospitals, and our highways are a disgrace. Communities have been split apart and they now go in all directions to access services. Yet this government budget continues to grow.

Mr. Speaker, the people of Saskatchewan are demanding to know where is our money going. Mr. Speaker, the people of Saskatchewan have had enough and they are not going to sit quietly any longer.

The NDP have closed physical structures and discontinued services, but they have not killed the spirit of our people. The whole issue of forced amalgamation has brought communities together like few issues before it.

Mr. Speaker, last week the people of Saskatchewan were presented with a budget which is full of deceit and doublespeak. We will give the people an historic tax reduction, but first you must pay PST on more items starting immediately, and tax relief will be phased in over four years.

Mr. Speaker, what the people wanted and need is immediate tax relief not more taxation. We must stop the drain of people from our province. I believe the smoke and mirrors of this budget will confirm for people the fact that this government has no intention of giving real tax relief.

Mr. Speaker, the government has infuriated most groups in the province who rely on government for funding because they had been told one thing in the budget speech, but upon closer examination have actually realized the opposite. Mr. Speaker, the NDP say they can't give tax relief now; they can't put more dollars into health and education and farming.

Mr. Speaker, this is the government who never has money for hard-working people of this province, but they have lots of money for the things this . . . for other things. This is a government who gave us Channel Lake, SPUDCO (Saskatchewan Potato Utility Development Company), Guyana, patronage in the Crowns. Remember Jack Messer? Remember the Don Ching deal? And now millions are being spent on deals like SecurTek, virtual office, FleetNet. And Mr. Speaker, they are now sitting on a \$700 million slush fund.

Mr. Speaker, we have a government that makes decisions and changes where the people of Saskatchewan come last . . .

The Deputy Speaker: — Order. Order. I ask all hon. members to allow the hon. member for Weyburn-Big Muddy to continue with her budget debate.

Ms. Bakken: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I believe the people of Saskatchewan are ready to fight for their communities and their democratic rights. Never again are we going to be so naïve as to think that this government is acting in our best interests.

In my address to the legislature last fall I said that if we listen closely we would hear the sound of thundering hooves in the distance. Well, Mr. Speaker, they are a whole lot closer and louder than then. This government would be hard pressed to find support in any corner of Saskatchewan.

The Saskatchewan Party is proud to speak for the people of this province who for far too long have been without a voice. We will speak with common sense and we will hold this government accountable. Mr. Speaker, I will be supporting the amendment.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Thomson: — Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is a distinct pleasure to stand in this House today in support of one of the best budgets ever brought down in this Assembly.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Thomson: — Mr. Deputy Speaker, as we listen to the diatribe and the rhetoric from the members opposite, it becomes all the more clear as to the importance of what we are trying to do in this budget, of what we are trying to do on this side of the House, and of what this coalition government stands for.

Let there be no mistake, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that what the member opposite, particularly the one from Weyburn raises today is exactly, exactly what we would see — God forbid that that party ever came to sit on these benches.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Thomson: — The fact that the member from Weyburn, the seat that Tommy Douglas used to represent, the fact that the member would say, and I quote: what does it matter, what does it matter if you're at the back of the line, so what if medicare is free?

So what if medicare's free? What does that mean? That means that she's been watching far too much Ralph Klein, that she's been hanging on to too many of Stockwell Day's dinner functions. That's exactly what that means, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

What does it matter if it's free, if you're at the back of the line? That is exactly the point of medicare: that everybody — everybody — in this province is treated equally. Everybody has their needs met in accordance with the way they've got to be dealt with.

It does not mean what the member for Weyburn alludes to — that if you've got the money in your hip pocket, you can bounce to the front of the line. And I think it is shameful, it is a disgrace, and it is an embarrassment to the people of Weyburn that that representative would stand in the House today to say that. Who does she think she is?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Thomson: — And yet this is exactly, this is exactly one of the bright new stars of this bright new party on the opposite benches. They come forward with this mantra that they were going to do things different, that they were robbed of the election victory, that they should be over here. Well we're slowly starting to see what they would do if they were over here.

What does it matter if it's free if you're at the back of the line, says the member for Weyburn. What does it matter? Where have you been? Where has that member been? What does she believe in?

It's clearly not the medicare that we've fought for on this side. It's clearly not the medicare that was invented here in Saskatchewan. And it's clearly not the medicare that Saskatchewan people, including those in Weyburn, support.

(1445)

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Thomson: — Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is very interesting to listen to what the members opposite have had to say over the last few days as they've entered into this debate. Because it is, I think, no matter what they try to put forward and no matter how much they try to drape themselves in the Saskatchewan flag, it is not what Saskatchewan people believe in.

Saskatchewan people do not believe in that type of right-wing rhetoric. It is absolute right-wing rhetoric. And we know it. It is Ralph Klein times two. It is Stockwell Day and Preston Manning. We don't need to talk about the good old days of Grant Devine, although I noticed the member for Estevan yesterday said, or on Friday, said how pleased she was to have dedicated so much of her life serving him in his constituency office. What a pleasure.

And it's nice to see that this is how this party's come forward. This bright new party with no connections whatsoever, they tell us, to the Devine government. The member for Swift Current claims that, oh he has no connections to the Devine government. But he happened to work for it. Oh but that seems to just escape his mind.

The member for Weyburn who on Friday was a disgrace in ripping up the phone book in here. The only thing she's ripped is another page out of the Tory platform that they ran on back in the '80s and inserted it smack dab in the middle of the Sask Party platform. That's what she's ripped out. It's a rip-off of what Saskatchewan people believe in. And it's shameful. It's absolutely shameful.

But this is what these members opposite believe. Well the member for Kelvington-Wadena chirps from her seat. You'd think she'd know better after four years. But nevertheless, here we go. She says, well, today in question period she asked the Minister of Education, what are we doing for education funding?

The minister outlines very clearly what there is for education funding and points out, very interestingly, that . . . What did the member campaign for in education funding? Zero. Nothing. In fact, it didn't even warrant a mention in her pamphlet.

But this, but this is the member that they have decided, on the opposition side, will speak for them on education matters. Well clearly she's got such an excellent record. Clearly her platform just speaks for itself. What was in the platform again? Nothing. Absolutely nothing. She couldn't even find the space for one line or spend the money to put the ink on it to say what they would do.

That's what the member for Kelvington-Wadena, the education spokesman, the shadow cabinet minister for the Saskatchewan Party — that's her commitment to education, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

It's interesting, absolutely interesting, as we listen to the members opposite talk about these things. We listen to them talk about health care. Well we certainly hear what the member for Weyburn had to say. We listen to what other members are calling for. They're calling for value-for-money audits — value-for-money audits in the health care system. Well what it turns out as we listen to more and more of it, they don't want an

audit of the health care system, they want an autopsy, because that's what will be left of medicare if they ever end up on this side of the House.

And if you doubt it, just listen to the number of references that they make to what Ralph Klein is doing opposite, in their attempt to justify what Ralph Klein is doing in Alberta with their platform.

Even Albertans don't like what Mr. Klein is proposing. Who would have thought that in Conservative Alberta that the Liberals would be seeing huge gains in support of public medicare. Why? Because Albertans, like other Canadians, like Saskatchewan people, like Canadians in every part of this country, support medicare.

I should qualify that by saying Canadians with the obvious exception of the members opposite who seek to destroy it, to undermine it, to drive it out of our national social programs.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, as we look at the budget, you can see where our parties on this side stand. These are the parties that brought this nation medicare. These are the parties that believe in continuing to change, to — medicare.

They don't plan on doing it as the members opposite have, through privatization. How many times today have we heard them ask about privatization of health care. They asked about it because they believe . . . the member for Melfort raised it several times in question period. I don't know whether the member for Cypress Hills was present at the time, but he did raise it. The privatization word was raised many times. Why? Why? Because the member opposite would like to lead us down a path towards privatization in medicare.

As the member for Weyburn says, what does it matter if it's free if you're at the back of the line. What does it matter if it's free. So what would they do? Would they impose a premium? Would they put a fee on? Would they allow user fees? Would it be direct payment? What is it we're going to become?

The fact is, under that party opposite, they will oppose this budget because it puts more money into medicare. Hundreds of millions of dollars more into medicare. That's what it needs. And the member for Kelvington knows full well that that's exactly what it means. By putting more money into medicare, we are making medicare better. Clearly we want the federal government to step back to the plate and add money back in. Clearly we recognize there need to be more changes.

But for the members opposite, that's not the issue. They want medicare to fail. And that's really what the agenda is. And it's not simply reinventing or putting back in what Grant Devine had. They, the right wing in this nation and this province, have found a new way to move, and that's right to the extreme.

Take a look at what Ralph Klein's doing. Take a look at what Stockwell Day is doing. Take a look at what the parties opposite are proposing. It's the same plan to destroy the most important social program in this nation. Why? Because it's good for Canadians? I don't think so.

They want to do it because it is good for those people who

believe that in every aspect of life there must be profit. No one on the opposite side has been able to tell us how for-profit in health care that Ralph Klein's proposing in Alberta — which they champion — nobody can tell us how, by introducing profit into the system, they'll provide better services.

Isn't that the fundamental question? Isn't that the fundamental question? If we were to allow for-profit medicare, which is what the members opposite on the far right want, how by introducing for-profit do you introduce better services?

Well for once the opposition benches have fallen silent. Why? Because there is no answer. They cannot answer the question because it does not work.

Well it's an interesting thing to listen to the members opposite. They're saying . . . The Leader of the Opposition made this statement in his response to the budget speech immediately. He says, the legislation we have which licenses health care facilities, the Bill that we had passed which licenses health care facilities, will keep out for-profit institutions.

Let me repeat that. It will keep out for-profit medicare. Keeps it out of the system. It keeps it out of the system. But in Alberta they've introduced similar legislation. Why? To bring it in. To bring it in.

So the member opposite says it's the same legislation. It's not the same legislation. But the telling part of this is the fact that if those members opposite were sitting in the treasury benches and controlled the cabinet and allowed to approve the regulations, we know they would make it like Alberta's and they would allow the privatization of our medicare system. That's what they're trying to do today by saying this is the same type of Bill. It is not the same type of Bill. The motives are different. The legislation is different. And I can tell you the way that we administer it on this side is different.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Thomson: — Mr. Deputy Speaker, the members opposite know that what we say over here is true — they know it. And they know that if they ever ended up sitting on the government benches, that they would move towards a privatized model of medicare. We know that that's what they would do.

And for the arrogance of the members opposite who sit here day after day and preen as if they were the government, what they are not doing is they are not laying out truthfully what they would do on this side, because we know what they're doing today is simply laying the argument. They're laying the argument for privatization of medicare. They're laying the argument for user pay.

As the member for Weyburn says, what does it matter if it's free? The woman who now represents the seat held by Tommy Douglas says, what does it matter if it's free? Does anybody, anybody in this House believe that that's what the people of Weyburn think? Does anybody believe that that's what the people of Saskatchewan think? And does anybody believe that we would ever, ever allow that to happen? But that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is exactly what those members opposite are trying to put forward.

Yes, they argue that they're going to vote against this budget. They are going to vote against it because it doesn't have provision for us to do an autopsy on medicare like they want. It doesn't allow for the extra billing. It doesn't allow for privatization.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this budget invests in medicare — medicare as we all know it, not as they want to define it. And that is one very good reason to support this provincial budget.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, there's another very good reason to support this provincial budget that does not involve spending. And that is the fact that this budget delivers the largest tax cut in Saskatchewan history — the largest tax cut in Saskatchewan history.

Outside of this House, the members campaigned in this September election saying that they supported lower taxes, saying that we needed to introduce lower taxes. And yet the first opportunity they have in this House to vote for lower taxes, they're going to vote against them.

Explain to me this, I say to the members opposite, Mr. Deputy Speaker, explain to me this: how is it that when presented with a budget that will deliver \$400-and-some million in income tax cuts, a net benefit of \$260 million, how is it that you can oppose that budget and still say that you support income tax cuts? How is it you can say that you are the champions of tax cuts, when you won't vote for them?

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this is the question that many of us are asking. For the five years that I've been in this Assembly and in five budgets we have voted to reduce taxes. Every single budget that I have had the pleasure of voting on behalf of Regina South constituents has reduced the tax burden in this province.

And yet, and yet, the members opposite, and yet the members opposite are having a very important choice put before them in this budget. And that choice is simply this: do you support the status quo or do you support reduced taxes and tax reform?

That's what this budget is. There's no other way to argue it. By voting against this budget, the members opposite will vote against the largest tax cut in Saskatchewan history. There's no other way to look at it.

The members opposite chirp up and they ask about the numbers. The fact is this year there's still \$40 million worth of tax relief — \$40 million in tax reduction. It's called net — a net reduction of 40 million.

Now the member for Kelvington-Wadena is not known for her business acumen, so let's add it up for her. The fact is that it will provide real tax relief for Saskatchewan families now, in the year 2000.

People when they go home and are doing their taxes, as we're getting ready for the tax filing deadline, need only take a look at line 9 of the Saskatchewan income tax form. That's where the flat tax is. A tax introduced by the previous right-wing government that was in this province.

Effective this year, you can knock 25 per cent off of that — a

25 per cent reduction in the flat tax. And this budget lays the foundation to eliminate it all together from January 1; January 1, the flat tax is gone. Come January 1, the debt reduction is gone. Come January 1, the high income surtax is gone. That's what this budget does. It reduces income taxes.

(1500)

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Deputy Speaker: — Why is the member for Saskatoon Southeast on her feet?

Ms. Lorje: — With leave, to introduce guests, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Leave granted.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Ms. Lorje: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And I thank all my colleagues on both sides of the House for giving me permission to introduce a former colleague of mine and of many of ours. I am referring of course to Dale Flavel, a former MLA for Last Mountain-Touchwood, and a very successful farmer, I might add. Someone who very much enjoys living in Saskatchewan, and I understand is here for a long time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I ask all members of this House to join with me in welcoming Mr. Dale Flavel.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

SPECIAL ORDER

ADJOURNED DEBATES

MOTION FOR COMMITTEE OF FINANCE (BUDGET DEBATE)

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

Mr. Thomson: — Thank you. It's always a pleasure to welcome previous members back to this Assembly, and it is a . . . now you see, Mr. Deputy Speaker . . . and it's too bad that the people on television can't hear this. But the member for Estevan, ever so politely, makes rude comments as we are introducing former members — makes rude comments saying, you know, pointing out the fact that they were defeated. We know they were defeated. We got that message. We got that message.

And yet when these members come back to the Assembly, what do the members opposite do? They deride them, and they're rude. This is exactly what we have seen since this session started in December. There is an arrogance that permeates the members opposite.

Listen to it. You've got the member for Weyburn who stands up

in the House yesterday, or Friday, and throws a temper tantrum and rips up the phone book.

The Deputy Speaker: — Order. I am sure that the hon. member would wish to tie this into the budget debate, and I'm very much looking forward to the tying of that together.

Mr. Thomson: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I do welcome the opportunity to make the point, because the point is, is that there is an arrogance on the part of the members opposite. And there is a duplicity in the way that they want to be respected, and the way that they respect others. And we can see it in a duplicity in their arguments in the budget. That's the way that this ties in, because it permeates the entire set of arguments from the members opposite. Campaign on one hand saying they want tax reduction. First opportunity they have, they vote against it.

Campaign saying, well of course we'll protect medicare. First opportunity they have, what do they want to do? Privatize it. That's what the members opposite stand for. That's the problem and that is the side of these people that Saskatchewan voters will come to see over the next four years because there is an arrogance, there is a hatred, and there is a meanness on that side of the Assembly. And we can see it in the way that they deal with their arguments.

What is their argument for not voting for the budget? I've brought the copy of *The Leader-Post* which says that the minister launched historic tax reform but the opposition says the savings are too far down the road. Too far down the road. This year in the year 2000, tax cuts — real tax cuts. In the year 2001 more tax cuts. In the year 2002 more tax cuts. In the year 2003 more tax cuts, and yet the members opposite are going to vote against that.

Why? Because they campaign on one thing and when they get into the House it becomes pure politics. Are they going to vote against the budget because it's bad for Saskatchewan people? No, they're going to vote against the budget because it's bad for the Saskatchewan Party. That's what they're going to do. And I think that we need to remember that.

The fact is that these income tax cuts will benefit real Saskatchewan families. Let's just highlight again what the tax cuts are.

Starting now, year 2000, the flat tax cut by a quarter. A 25 per cent reduction in flat tax. Come next year, flat tax, debt tax, high-income surtax eliminated; abolished. When was the last time a government abolished a tax? I don't know, it's a good question. I guess I should know the answer before I raise the question. But when was the last time a government abolished a tax? We will abolish three of them. Three of them come January 1.

And on top of it, we will de-link our system so that the taxes are levied not on what the federal government sets for the base but will be taxed on what Saskatchewan people earn in a fair, simple, responsive way because that's what people said they wanted. Even the members opposite said that that's what they wanted. The member opposite, the Leader of the Opposition, said that if he were here he would . . . he likes the tax cut plan

but of course he won't vote for it.

Well I think that the real test of members of this Assembly who, in December, stood in this House on the opposition side and said that they were going to salute those things that they thought were good. This is the real first test of it, this is the real first test of it — to see whether members opposite will support the tax cuts that they campaigned on.

And the fact is, the fact is that they didn't. There are more tax cuts than there are tax increases. There are more tax cuts than there are tax increases in this budget — a net benefit to taxpayers of \$40 million in the year 2000. A \$40 million tax cut now. That's what this budget delivers.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this budget also delivers hope, it delivers opportunity, and it delivers optimism for Saskatchewan people.

As I have been around my constituency over the last week since the budget's been down, people tell me that they are happy that we listened to what they had to say on the Jack Vicq report. That they are happy that we have decided to narrow the base from what was initially proposed.

We did that not because we were philosophically hidebound or ideologically hidebound to it; we did it because that's what people told us they wanted. We identified those items and reduced it.

And I think that we need to make sure the people understand on the . . . that people in the party opposite understand this. Good government is about listening. It's about responding. It's about good public policy. And that's what we're delivering in this budget.

The four-year fiscal plan, which is attached, is a document which we are all very proud of — NDP and Liberal members alike on this side — because we've all spent a lot of time working on it. It is a plan which reduces the debt — the debt that you might remember was built up long before we came into office.

The debt that the members opposite would like to add to. The debt that they have no plan to cut.

The debt which eats \$677 million a year out of the provincial budget. It's a huge amount of money if you think about it — \$677 million is what we pay on interest still today to service the debt built up by the previous government.

Money that . . . money that could have been used to further reduce taxes and increase social spending which is what we believe in on this side.

I used to think that the party opposite, I used to think that they could be trusted to carry through what they believed in, which was simply tax cuts at all expense. But as it turns out, they don't even believe in tax cuts at all. Because where is it? They won't support it — \$430 million worth of income tax cuts that this fiscal plan lays forward on an annualized basis, once implemented.

But are they going to support it? No. Why? Because they claim

that it does not — what does the headline say? — the savings are too far down the road. So the fact that on July 1 the flat tax is cut is too far down the road. They've got the blinders on for a three-month focused window, and that's it. Three months. Six months. A year. The fact that this budget lays out tax cuts for the next three years, it's just too far down the road.

But you know one thing, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that we could count on, is if we had simply given a snapshot and said, we're making the tax cut this year, they'd say, oh well we can't support the budget because it doesn't provide a long-term plan for tax cuts.

Well this is the argument that they put forward. You can just hear them. Except they're obviously silenced now because they are starting to understand that we are on to them. We've figured it out.

An Hon. Member: — Boring stupor.

Mr. Thomson: — Well the members opposite may be bored into stupor, but I think that we all know that there is some truth in what we're saying on this side, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The fact is that this budget and this financial plan delivers tax cuts today, tomorrow, the year after, the year after, and the year after. And every year that this coalition government sits on these benches there will be tax cuts as laid out by the Minister of Finance.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Thomson: — But the members opposite, the members opposite have done their fair share to make things difficult. Remember at Christmas as they were spinning up the sense of concern that people felt in the rural communities, rightfully, spinning up that concern about the farm situation — demanding more and more money, breaking from the historic coalition of farm groups, demanding Saskatchewan ante up money.

This budget delivers a large amount of money for farmers. The farm fuel exemption this year is worth \$123 million. If you read in the back of the budget tables, 123 million is the farm fuel exemption . . . or is the fuel exemption, sorry, the fuel tax exemption — it's not all for farmers. But the fuel tax exemption is \$123 million. Not a word about that. There's not a word about that.

Some of the members were at least honest enough to sit here and applaud the minister when he made the announcement. And I think we appreciate that.

It's interesting that one of the members was the member for Kindersley who I know in the past has broken from party ranks to support good budgets that deliver tax cuts. I know that when we cut the sales tax from 9 per cent to 7 per cent, the member for Kindersley broke from his party and supported it.

And I hope that other members opposite, even though that that member is no longer the leader of his party, I hope other members will look at that lead and will vote for measures which truly restore hope, optimism, and opportunity in Saskatchewan as this tax cut does, and, incidentally, as the members opposite

campaigned on.

This is a test on more than simply the future and the next four years. This is a test about the credibility of the members opposite. This is to see whether the campaign promises they made, when implemented, albeit not by their ministers, but when the vast majority of it is being implemented by agreement, whether they'll support it or whether they'll find a cheap political reason not to.

The fact is, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I repeat it again, we know that the members opposite will vote against this budget not because it's bad for Saskatchewan people, but because it's bad for the Saskatchewan Party. And I think that they know that.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Thomson: — Mr. Deputy Speaker, this budget provides spending on a balanced approach. It provides a plan for debt reduction; it provides more money for our schools; it provides more money for our hospitals; it provides more money for ordinary working families; it provides more money and better tax fairness for farmers. And yet we hear nothing positive from the members opposite.

What we hear is the member for Weyburn say that she wants to get yet another diatribe against medicare. We hear her say that there is deceit in the budget. I don't even think that's parliamentary. Not that the members opposite care about it as we've seen in their displays. The fact that twice when the member for Weyburn speaks she referred to members on this side by name. A complete disrespect for the rules. A complete disrespect for their platform. A complete disrespect for what their constituents believe in. That's what the Saskatchewan Party stands for.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, people told me during the provincial election campaign that we needed to do a better job of listening. People told me that we needed to hear what they were saying, which was tax cuts needed to come and it needed to happen in a big way.

(1515)

With all of the spending priorities and all of the pressures that we have, that the members opposite always rightfully identify more money for medicare, more for education, more for highways, more for farmers, for all of that. We hear those concerns too. And we have tried to prevent . . . present a balanced approach, an approach which cuts income taxes by \$430 million when fully implemented, an approach which provides modest expansion of the sales tax to a base which is still narrower than that of most other provinces.

We will still have the second lowest sales tax in the nation including Alberta. Lower than Manitoba. So those who represent ridings on the east side of the province, remember that by voting against this budget you are voting against measures which still make . . . which will help make businesses and consumers in your ridings more competitive than Manitoba. Remember that.

I say to the members who represent seats along the western side

of the province: remember that this budget will allow 70 per cent of people, 70 per cent of Saskatchewan people, when fully implemented, to pay Alberta taxes, income taxes — 70 per cent.

But that's not good enough. Because the members opposite, the pieces that they want from Alberta — they don't want us to have 70 per cent of Saskatchewan people paying Alberta's taxes. Why? Because it's bad for the Saskatchewan people? No. Because it's bad for the Saskatchewan Party.

Do they not want people to be more competitive and have a narrower base than Manitoba? Why? Not because it's bad for Saskatchewan people but because it's bad for the Saskatchewan Party and for the Saskatchewan Party's hopes.

They want to hog-tie this government. They want to hog-tie this government's spending priorities in order to prevent us from keeping medicare alive. That's what these members opposite want to do. We won't let that happen.

Medicare was invented and implemented in this Chamber. It's something all of us should be proud of, and it's something people on this side of the Assembly certainly are proud of. The fact that we have a coalition of progressive electors, a coalition of two parties that can see through the politics to implement change that really works for Saskatchewan families is what this government's about.

But the members opposite have a chance, a very real chance, to join this coalition, and they have a real chance to do so by voting in favour of this budget, a budget which implements the vast majority of what they campaigned on.

The question is this: will they vote in favour of their constituents; will they vote to protect medicare; will they vote so the 70 per cent of Saskatchewan people can pay Alberta's tax . . . income taxes; will they vote to maintain the lowest sales tax in the nation next to Alberta? Or will they vote for self-preservation of the Sask Party?

We know what the answer is. We know that they can't get past their agenda of privatization, their hatred for trade unions, their dislike of working people, their absolute abhorrence — abhorrence — of anything progressive. We know that they can't get past that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and the proof will be in the vote that we cast on this budget on Wednesday. That is when the proof will be.

As members on this side rise to support a coalition budget when we vote in favour of a budget which reduces income taxes, which provides a record number of health care spending, which provides a large amount more for school divisions, when this . . . when we vote in favour of a budget that protects programs that support the poorest in our province, we will vote with pride, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And we will vote knowing that this budget is hopeful and optimistic.

We know that when the members opposite vote that they will be voting opposed to the tax cut, opposed to more money for medicare, opposed to more money for education — despite the fact that those are the various issues they raise in question period saying why aren't you doing more?

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the fact that the members opposite — and I've heard this several times — they talk about \$700 million in the liquor and gaming fund being a slush fund. What we have done is provide a complete transparency for this fund. What we have done is we are reducing the amount of money, which will be held in reserve, to keep taxpayers' shock from changes in resource revenue, as this province is known of, to be able to maintain the social programs that we sometimes don't have the same amount of control over that we would like in terms of federal revenue.

That amount of money will be reduced down to 5 per cent of our budget — a fair amount. There's no slush fund. There's no slush fund. And it won't rise above that.

Two hundred and fifty-some million dollars this year will be spent to . . . be set aside for forest fires, which we know have had a huge impact on our budget. I don't know if the members opposite are better about predicting them, but we don't seem to be able to know when there's . . . how much the forest is going to burn because we can't predict the weather.

The 50 million that is going to be set aside for forest fires will ensure that we can protect our natural resources — \$50 million set aside for forest fire fighting in reserve.

Now, the member opposite . . . my advice to the member opposite who says that she wants to talk about Native taxation, and we know why she wants to talk about Native taxation, my advice to her is stay tuned, stay tuned because there will be an excellent speech later on this evening . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . The member opposite says that she can't bother coming to the House tonight to listen to the speech.

The good news is that she will be able to tune into television and . . . Unfortunately the home shopping network will be bumped off. So if you were planning to tune into that, it'll be bumped off in order so that we can listen to speeches by members who've been elected to come to the Assembly during the regular hours and to vote and debate the budget that has been set forth.

I invite the member from Kelvington to come join us tonight at 7 o'clock so she can listen to a speech from the Minister of Northern Affairs, who will explain to her why the changes that we have made are fair and the reasons we've gone about making those changes. So I would invite her to come join us tonight in her seat which is at the front of the Sask Party's benches — 7 p.m.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I was saying about the transparency we were building into the liquor and gaming fund by moving the profits of those operations directly over, by moving the retained earnings directly over, and by setting a ceiling on the amount of reserve.

This has long been a concern of people because they don't understand what the liquor and gaming reserve was there for. We've listened to that concern and we have gotten rid of the reserve. The profits will now move over. We've got a clear, transparent rainy day fund — a stabilization fund is really what it is — put in place.

But I can tell you, regardless of what we may call this fund, I will tell you what it is not. It is not a slush fund that the members opposite seem to think it is. It's interesting that when the Sask Party members talk, they talk about a slush fund. The only party that we have ever seen operate a slush fund is their predecessor.

We know full well about the slush funds of the previous government. What I fear is that if they ever came back into office, these would become flush funds. Because they'd go straight down the drain into some supporter's pocket.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to tell you that we have put in place the mechanisms that will ensure that this fund is transparent; that will make sure that expenditures are voted by the Assembly; that'll make sure that the taxpayers are protected; that'll make sure that there is money available to fund our social programs.

This is responsible government. This is responsive government. Mr. Deputy Speaker, this is good government.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Thomson: — I won't take up much more time today, Mr. Deputy Speaker, except that I do want to recap why I will be casting my vote in favour of the budget proposed by the Minister of Finance, on behalf of the residents of Regina South that I am pleased to represent again for the second time.

This budget is a plan for growth and opportunity. This budget reduces income taxes substantially; provides the single largest tax cut in Saskatchewan history. It will provide record funding for health care. It will increase the amount of money to our schools.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this is what I campaigned on. This is what we believe in. This is why this coalition government is focused on moving forward. We've listened, we've responded, and we are prepared to act in order to make sure that lower taxes, better health care, more jobs, and healthier communities are a part of Saskatchewan today, tomorrow, to the end of this term.

And I would say, as the first budget of our new century, that this budget more than any other deserves the support of all members. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, Hear.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It's a real honour today to stand here representing the people from Kelvington-Wadena in response to the first budget in the new millennium. It's also the first budget from the combination socialist and want-to-be socialist conglomeration over there.

I'm thankful for the opportunity. I had to go home to my constituency this weekend and speak to the people I represent before replying to this budget speech. Sometimes we forget that it's not what we think that matters in this House, it's what the people that we represent think. And that's why we're here. We're the voice of 15 to 17,000 people out there and it's their voice that's being heard here in this Assembly.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I've got to tell you, the people I represent are not at all amused by this shell game the government is playing. In fact, I think it's safe to say they're downright angry.

I met many people at the four different functions I attended this weekend and a lot of them gave me their opinion of the budget. And some of it can't be repeated in public but some of them are pretty cute, things like the plumber who told me that he was PST'd off.

But the very best analogy I heard was from a government employee who told me the whole budget was sort of like a cartoon he used to watch when he was a kid. The cartoon was Popeye the sailor man. Remember Wimpy? His favourite saying was I'll gladly pay you Tuesday for a hamburger today.

Well, Mr. Speaker, that's what the Finance minister is saying — I'll gladly pay you some income tax back in four years, if you pay PST on everything today.

He stopped short of saying, he stopped short of saying, trust me to keep my word. He's from the government; he'll keep his word.

Mr. Speaker, the people from Kelvington-Wadena are not just upset because their taxes were increased again after years of promising that the light at the end of the tunnel wouldn't be another train. The people from my area are upset because the NDP were given a lesson in governance on September 16, 1999, and the budget proved that they didn't understand that lesson. In fact, they just failed the test.

Try as they may, this government doesn't understand what people need and want, even when the answer is so simple and seems to be so obvious. Just like saying, you just can't miss it. Some people can just miss the obvious, and the budget is a prime example. People wanted and people needed tax relief. They didn't want a promise of a tax relief; they wanted tax relief. They wanted the real thing, and they wanted it now.

In spite of what the member from Regina Dewdney suggested during his speech, the people from Kelvington-Wadena know what's happening in Alberta. In fact they know what's happening in other parts of the world where individuals, not governments, are getting ahead.

I don't have to tell my children, and I don't have to tell people in my constituency about the good things that are happening in the other parts of the world. They find that out for themselves. In fact, in homes and constituencies where socialism isn't the only reading and learning material in the house, people tend to figure things out pretty quickly. And they choose to go where life offers opportunity along with challenges.

Mr. Speaker, the government and the Finance minister just don't understand that you have to have faith in people and their ability to make decisions, to make investments, and even make money. Individuals will then make good things happen in life. Things that this government and their bureaucracy know is missing in this province, but they haven't figured out that government cannot give. It's not even their job to give it. We need government to get out of our life and we can make the economy grow, and good things will begin to happen.

So often in the past four years, I've wondered why these socialists don't understand what's going on, what's wrong in this province. And I think I've finally figured it out. The whole concept of business is so absolutely foreign that you just can't understand it.

Try to explain entrepreneurial spirit to a socialist is like trying to teach a robot how to fall in love. You just can't do it.

Mr. Speaker, the people of Saskatchewan have waited long enough for tax relief. They waited when this government came to power in 1991 and were told if they tightened their belts and worked hard, life would get better. So being the kind, gentle, and hard-working people they are, Saskatchewanians did just that. They worked harder; they paid more taxes; they complained very little, and they had faith that the government would solve the big problems and then look after them as individuals, but it never happened.

What did happen is this government allowed themselves another 8 per cent increase in spending this year. I believe the teachers, and the nurses, and the government employees, and farmers, and everybody in this province would enjoy an 8 per cent increase. But we don't have the luxury of taking the increase away; this government does.

(1530)

When I was home this weekend the talk of the budget centred around two issues: expansion of the PST and the admission by this government that they were sitting on nearly three-quarters of a billion dollars from a liquor and gaming slush fund. For nine years they've told the people of this province, you've just got to tighten your belts and hang on till things get better. And now we're finding out that you were hiding \$695 million, just like it was your own personal money.

Mr. Speaker, the people of this province have a right to know why they were hiding this money when we have an education system, a health system, and an infrastructure system falling down around people's ears? We wonder if you're hiding this because you're ashamed of tainted money that was gotten from ruining thousands of people's lives. You screamed sanctimoniously about having to pay millions of dollars in interest payments yearly, and now we find out you've taken in over half of that amount from a special little fund you set up where you just take advantage of citizens.

Your government uses this money that's resulted in broken homes and broken lives to balance your budget. Your record of seven balanced budgets didn't come on the backs of every Saskatchewan citizen; it came mostly of the backs of people whose lives were destroyed in order for you to cling to your own shallow victory of financial security. Every one of your so-called balanced budgets comes either from selling assets or from drawing down your own sin tax money.

Mr. Speaker, this government should be ashamed of themselves for bragging about being fiscally responsible because the end does not justify the means.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Draude: — Mr. Speaker, the Stabler and the Garcea report that are spoken about very loudly around the province right now is that the forced amalgamation is an issue that's very important to the people in my constituency. Government and their bureaucracy realize that there are missed opportunities in rural Saskatchewan. They know that economic growth and population increases are a rarity in our rural areas, and they also know that Saskatchewan is the only province that's seen a decrease in rural areas . . . in rural population in the last five years — the only province.

So they hired an economist that thinks in the same box as the government to analyze figures and trends. The analysis doesn't quite question why the trends are happening, they just arrive at a conclusion and pass on a continuation of the same philosophy. If there was a political will or a desire to see a different face on the landscape of rural Saskatchewan, government may have spent some of the \$750,000 earmarked to work with what is considered the inevitable . . . (inaudible) . . . turnaround.

But that doesn't appear to be an option. We have a government dog and pony show running around the province saying things will only get better for towns and municipalities if they get bigger. The government's answer to every problem is, it must be too small. We've got to make this bigger. The government says I know amalgamation won't save you any money and I know you'll have less local control, but perhaps you'll have more economic potential. That's what the analysis says. So if that's what the professionals say, you guys believe it's got to be true.

But, Mr. Speaker, forced amalgamation is not the answer. The answer is getting the government to do their job — provide health care, schools, and an infrastructure, then get rid of the mountains of red tape and regulations that they promised to do five years ago, cut taxes, and then sit back and watch it happen. The people in the province can make it happen.

Mr. Speaker, I believe everyone in this province is tired of hearing politicians talk about the rural-urban split. I'm willing to bet there are fewer than 5 per cent of the people in the province who don't have family or close friends on the other side of what is considered to be the split. I also believe those same 95 per cent of the people can tell you how this government has set about to divide and conquer and ensure that there is a split — closing 52, now 54, rural hospitals. Guess what? That's one of the reasons why shopping patterns change. It's a fact. If you close hospitals and you close schools, people have to go to a larger centre; it's inevitable.

Cut funding to agriculture, cut funding to municipal government, cut funding to highways, cut funding to regional parks, cut funding to education, and pretty soon there's going to be an urban-rural split.

Mr. Speaker, there are two departments that were obviously treated unfairly in this budget — probably more, but two that I've looked at closely. The first was the Department of Education. Both of the NDP parties across from us talked about the importance of education in the budget. Both the Premier and the Co-Premier talked about the tax revolt issues and they sympathize with the plight of the farmers saying that the issue would be addressed in the budget.

Well, Mr. Speaker, the total amount of increase in this budget for the Department of Education was 5.8 per cent. Out of that there has to be teachers' salary increases paid for and the government's plan to conquer and divide making sure that they can pit the SSTA against the Teachers' Federation isn't working. Every one of those people that I've talked to know very well that the children are the important issue, that there isn't enough tax dollars available to pay the teachers and that the SSTA are doing their very best to ensure that the teachers can stay in this province, but the government is not fulfilling their part of the responsibility.

We also have the department . . . the SSTA having to fund out-of-scope workers. They have increased costs for bussing. And one school division alone, it's going to cost an additional \$6,000 a month for bussing because of increased fuel costs, and that issue was not addressed at all in this budget.

We also have an increase in utility rates. We have an increase in the number of special needs children, and the list goes on. These issues have not been addressed and they're going to be a real burden for the local school boards.

Mr. Speaker, the minister bragged about the extra \$5 million put into capital expenditures for education. My question to him is: why didn't you just put that money into the capital budget in the Department of Education? Why did you have to start another fund, the CCF (centenary capital fund) fund, so that you could pick and choose who's going to actually get that money?

Why is it hidden in yet another one of the fancy programs that just hires bureaucrats and increases paperwork? What are the guidelines for actually getting the money out of these departments? Will the decisions be made by a politically appointed board so they can again reward their few followers this government still has?

What's the point of making the board go through another pile of paperwork and filling out another whole new set of forms so that they can apply for a program or capital expenditures when we already have a Department of Education that has capital expenditures and they're filling out forms there? Put the money into the budget the way it should be — as a line item — and let the process work the way it's supposed to.

Mr. Speaker, all of the money in this fund is still taxpayers' dollars, not government dollars. The people are saying, stop playing games with our money and start doing the work you were elected to do. This government put . . . they hid \$695 million into the General Revenue Fund and then transfer 405 million back to start their own fancy slush fund.

And how was that number chosen, Mr. Speaker? The people in this province have a right to know how hard the Minister of Education fought to put another 15 or \$20 million into education so that we can actually keep that. Saskatchewan is ranked 59 out of 63 jurisdictions on education funding for students. Is that this government's commitment to education? Right at the bottom of the list.

The other department that was treated unfairly in this budget was the Department of Economic Development. That department showed an increase of 18 per cent.

Mr. Speaker, that's truly amazing. The government increasing its own efforts at business and forgetting their real responsibility. The government's job is not to decide which areas of the province are viable, whatever viable may mean in your mind. The government should not try to be the engine of this economy; they are only the fuel to keep the engine going. And they cannot get inside the minds of the 31 rather ordinary people sitting on the other side of the House that are going to decide which businesses should prosper and which ones will fail.

Members on the other side of the House cannot see the opportunities that are waiting around every corner in this province. Their misplaced priorities underline the fact that this government does not understand their job and they don't understand the message that was sent to them in September 1999. Even more serious is the fact that they have no vision for the future but instead rely on fearmongering about the past.

Mr. Speaker, I would love to explain how the budget affects the people of Kelvington-Wadena in the other areas — areas of agriculture and health care and highways. But I am sure that there are other of my colleagues who would like to make comments on the budget.

But I must say before I close that the biggest hypocrisy in this budget was the government's about-turn on the issue of taxing Aboriginals. I would love to read some of the quotes, Mr. Speaker, from the members across the floor when the Sask Party first brought up the subject. Mr. Speaker, the rants from every one of those hypocritical members ranged from Sask Party people being called insensitive to being called racist.

I would like to encourage the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs to read his own comments on our platform issue regarding Natives.

We have said, as have over 80 per cent of the people in this province, that in order to achieve equality, people must be treated equally; that in order to achieve fairness, people must be treated fair; and in order to achieve opportunity, doors must be opened to allow that opportunity.

Today I read in the paper that a columnist who was very outspoken about taxing Natives off reserve, now sees the hidden opportunity in the ruling.

Mr. Speaker, it may be just easier if the government would just realize that everything the Sask Party members say reflect what's happening in this province, and they could just disband most of their task force and adopt our policies.

Mr. Speaker, I cannot support a budget that imposes a tax increase on the citizens of Saskatchewan, and I will be supporting the amendment that will give a small amount of tax relief through lessening the fuel tax for the citizens of Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wartman: — Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'm very thankful for the opportunity to rise and speak today in support of this budget.

This is a foundational budget. A budget upon which we will build a future of promise and hope for this province of Saskatchewan. This is a budget with the necessary substance for today and with substantial promise and hope for the future.

Unfortunately it seems, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that the members opposite just don't seem to be able to get it. Is it that their vision doesn't extend beyond today? Listening to their comments, I'm convinced that they have very, very little vision for the future.

They would follow the "spend it all and then some" practices of their predecessors, the former PC (Progressive Conservative) government. They would sell off the future. They would plunge us deeper into debt. They would mortgage the future of our children and our children's children. They would do this in a vain attempt to buy power in good times, just for today. They would mortgage the future of our children and our children's children, not for Saskatchewan, but for the Sask Party.

To be fair, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I must admit though that they do show some vision. The problem is that that vision is primarily a vision of Alberta. Every time they gripe, every time they criticize, they look at Alberta with unbelievable envy. If only we were like Alberta, they say, then everything would be wonderful.

In contrast, Mr. Speaker, this government does not suffer from Alberta envy. We appreciate who and what we are, and we work with that. Saskatchewan has a unique character — we are not Alberta. We have so much to offer, so many resources and so many opportunities to be developed.

Our government has a bright vision for the future of Saskatchewan. A vision where development continues at a steady and a sustainable pace as it has over these last years, leading the country in economic development.

We see a future where our children and our children's children will have good jobs right here in Saskatchewan, jobs with a future — not just short-term, low-paying jobs, but jobs with potential, jobs with a future, jobs that pay well. Working together with the people of this province we are building the future of Saskatchewan on a solid foundation.

Mr. Speaker, we wish that the members opposite could share this vision — this vision of a uniquely, uniquely Saskatchewan future. We wish they could simply understand that we don't have to be like Alberta in order to be successful.

Mr. Speaker, I am convinced it is how you develop and use what you have that brings such tremendously positive and satisfying results.

The official opposition don't seem to have a clear vision of how to effectively develop this province. As their leader was quoted in the *Moosomin Herald* or the *Moosomin Spectator* when they were looking at health care, well we can see the problems, but we just don't have any solutions.

I think that may be typical, Mr. Speaker. They can see problems but they don't have any positive solutions to offer other than look at Alberta.

But we are not Alberta. We don't want to be Alberta and we never will be Alberta. We have a different context, we have a different economy. And in this different economy, we are able to reduce our taxes and we are able to develop at a steady, positive rate. We are able to build a future on a solid foundation, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(1545)

Mr. Wartman: — I love this province, and I don't want it to become just like Alberta. I have relatives that live in Alberta and they'd move back here in a minute. They have to pay their health costs, Mr. Speaker, 800-and-some dollars a year per person for this.

We're going to charge a PST that is nowhere near that amount for the average person. They don't tax? They tax for health. Alberta is so, so expensive to live in. Their cost for vehicle insurance is way out of line, Mr. Speaker.

Yes, Mr. Speaker, Alberta may have a bigger economy than Saskatchewan's. They may be flashier in some ways and it may be more attractive to many. But with this budget, Mr. Speaker, with the continuing sound financial management, we are on the way to making Saskatchewan one of the most effective, growing, solid, and desirable economies not only in Canada but in the world.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wartman: — Mr. Speaker, this budget presents a solid plan for growth, for the growth of our economy, and more importantly, for the growth of our society.

To quote a wise Saskatchewan Finance minister:

By taking bold, thoughtful, forward-looking action today, we will achieve our vision for the future. A vision of Saskatchewan: where people choose to live and work, based on strong bonds of family and community; where responsive, effective public services support and enhance each person's ability to live a meaningful, satisfying life; where our young people find real opportunities to develop their talents to contribute to and benefit from a dynamic, growing economy.

Mr. Speaker, we are committed to growing an economy and a society which not only produces and educates some of the best young people in the world, but is a place where they can build a future for themselves and for their children for generations to come.

Mr. Speaker, this province will not just be a source of leaders for tomorrow, which it is already today. We have in fact, yes, exported leaders all around this country and around the world, people who have been educated here and have done this province proud.

But, Mr. Speaker, with our building economy, those leaders of tomorrow will stay here and they will build, and this province will thrive. This foundational budget lays the plan for that, Mr.

Speaker.

This province is viewed by many throughout the world as one of the best places to live. Isn't it ironic, isn't it ironic that that view is not shared by the Saskatchewan Party. One of the most wonderful places in the world to live. That's what they say all around this world. Not Alberta, not Ontario — Saskatchewan. And that vision is not shared. Unbelievable. Unbelievable. With all their Alberta envy, perhaps they would be happier and more accurately named the Alberta party of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, economic development is not the enemy of social development. In fact, good economic development is the very foundation of good, solid social development. With this budget, as with the previous seven balanced budgets, we will continue to build an economy and the social fabric of this province so that it will not crash; so that it will not be blown apart by the powerful shifting winds of an unstable world economy.

Mr. Speaker, in the past if the kind of agricultural income crisis that hit us this past year, if it was to hit us in the past it would have devastated our economy. But by the way that this economy has been built on solid ground, when that income crisis hit this past year we were able to continue moving ahead, and even promise and even come forward with tax cuts.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to help those members opposite get a handle on what it is that we're doing. And I think maybe a story that my parents — it is a story that my parents told when I was younger, and it's a story that I think has a lot of truth. And I'd like to share it with you.

Mr. Speaker, once upon a time there were three little pigs. Those little pigs were pursued by a big bad wolf. Mr. Speaker, those pigs ran to a new place, and they began to build their houses. The first little pig saw that there was plenty of straw around and began to build a house with that straw. It was cheap; it was easy; it was fast. And that little pig, that little pig, Mr. Speaker, wanted to have time to get out and play around. So he built that up. And he used the available grants to put in carpeting in the basement and a hot tub and a deck. And he built a beautiful straw house, Mr. Speaker.

And then, Mr. Speaker, the second little pig saw that there were lots of twigs and sticks around, and he built this little house out of twigs and sticks. It was a big house, not a little house, Mr. Speaker. A big house built out of twigs and sticks — all the frills. It was an amazingly big, fancy, wooden house.

The third little pig, the third little pig, Mr. Speaker, decided that he would take the rocks that were there. He would take some cement, and he would get some bricks, and he would begin to build a solid foundation. And he worked away at that solid foundation, and then brick upon brick, he began to build a nice, comfortable little house.

Now, Mr. Speaker, one day the other two little pigs were all finished their houses, and they came along to see how their brother was doing. He still was building away, brick upon brick. And they said, why don't you build it with straw, Mr. Speaker, build it with straw. That's what they said. He said no, I'll build that, I'll build that house with brick — one brick at a time. But you could come and play with us if you built it with straw, said

the little pig. No, no, he was going to build it with brick.

And then, Mr. Speaker, the day came when the big wolf found that territory. The big bad wolf came along, Mr. Speaker, and that first little pig ran for his straw house, and he slammed the door. And the big bad wolf came along. And he huffed, and he puffed, and he said little pig, little pig, let me in, let me in. And that little pig stood behind the door in his straw house, and he said, not by the hair of my chinny chin chin. And the big bad wolf huffed, and the big bad wolf puffed, and he blew that straw house down.

The second little pig was there in his wooden house, and along came his brother and they ran into the house as the wolf came up.

Mr. Speaker, the wolf said, little pig, little pig, let me in. The little pig said, not by the hair of my chinny chin chin. You know the story, don't you? And that big bad wolf came along and he huffed and he puffed, and he blew that wooden house down.

Mr. Speaker, the Sask Party would build straw houses that they could get up and make look fancy real quick. They'd build wooden houses that they could put up out of twigs and sticks. But I'll tell you, Mr. Speaker, if that's the way they built the economy, it would not stand the test of time.

When the big bad wolf came along to that brick house that was built stone after stone, brick after brick, on a solid foundation, Mr. Speaker, when that big bad wolf came along and blew at that house, it was just like the economy that this New Democrat coalition government, Liberal coalition government is building here.

When that economy . . . When that big bad wolf comes along and blows at that brick house, it will not go down. He'll huff and he'll puff and it will not go down. That's the kind of economy that we're building — a solid foundational economy.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wartman: — Mr. Speaker, it's my hope that the truth of that story — it's not a true story; I need to maybe make that clear — but the truth of that story will come through and they'll understand how vitally important it is to build an economy on a solid foundation.

And just in case it's not clear, I'd also like to refer to the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 7, where Jesus was talking to the people and he was saying to them how important it was that they be aware of what's being said around them. That they take care and they pay attention and they think discerningly.

Because the problem is, Mr. Speaker, there are many wolves that come in sheep's clothing. They make a good story; they present themselves as meek and mild. But, Mr. Speaker, they are wolves in sheep's clothing.

Mr. Speaker, Jesus went on to say that you will know a good tree by its fruit. The fruit that this budget produces for the people of Saskatchewan will be good, will be nourishing, will keep them going.

Mr. Speaker, when Jesus was talking to those people, he said to them, you must listen to all the words that come from my mouth.

And then he went to say:

Everyone who hears these words (everyone who hears these words) of mine and acts on them will be like the wise man who built his house on rock. And when the winds and floods came they bashed against that house and it stood firm. And those who do not listen to these words will be like the foolish ones who built their house on sand. And when the floods came, and when the winds came, that house crashed. And what a mighty crash it was.

Mr. Speaker, we have seen a house like that crash. We have seen the economy devastated with an incredible debt that their predecessors gave to us, \$16 billion. And we have from the time that we took office built stone by stone, brick by brick, a house on a solid foundation, an economy that will not be washed away by the winds of economic beggary.

Mr. Speaker, we are building a house for the future, a house that will stand the test of time. The Saskatchewan economy can and will be strong.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wartman: — Mr. Speaker, using the best of our ability, working with what we have, taking advice on taxation from the Vicq commission, consulting with the people of this province, this government has developed a foundational budget which will enable us to build a strong and healthy province, a province with a future.

Our Finance minister has pointed out that the key areas of this plan for growth and opportunity are fiscal responsibility and good government. We are building a sustainable health care system, 63 million new dollars for base funding, and 150 million new dollars for one-time spending to help facilitate changes that are needed to make this health care system the most effective in the country.

Economic growth and jobs, developments in technology that will have profound effects on the years to come; petroleum technology research; the Synchrotron; developments in agricultural biotechnology; and many, many other developments. They are too numerous to mention. But I do want to mention one more, Mr. Speaker, because it's one that gives me lots of hope for the future.

I think about the money that is put into this budget to help with the development of ethanol, a alternative fuel that will help reduce greenhouse emissions, that will help stabilize our farm economy that will use grain to produce a fuel that will be good for the province and will help build our economy.

I am proud of the foresight that has gone into the development of this budget, Mr. Speaker. And I think of the tax reform. With prudent management, this budget enables us to put money into those sectors where it is most needed and where that money will have the most positive effect.

There will be significant and meaningful cuts to income tax which will leave more money in the hands of taxpayers. Fifty-five thousand — 55,000 — low-income Saskatchewan residents will be taken from the tax roll. Seniors, poor people no longer have to pay taxes.

Higher basic deductions will provide increased income for people — \$8,000 for basic, \$8,000 for spousal or spousal equivalent, \$2,500 for each dependent child. And, Mr. Speaker, for seniors, in addition to their basic credit, there will be an additional supplemental \$1,000 — \$9,000 for seniors, Mr. Speaker.

On top of the tax cuts and benefits, there are increasing amounts going into health, into education, into transportation and highways. New financial support for our farmers and for agriculture. This budget will bear good fruit for the people of Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wartman: — Mr. Speaker, this is a foundational budget. A budget that is built brick upon brick. A budget that will provide a future for the people of Saskatchewan, for our children, and for our children's children.

Mr. Speaker, this budget is a clear example of good economics, good public policy, and good government.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak in favour of this budget and against the amendment.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(1600)

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The previous speaker, Mr. Speaker, was referring to some fairy tales in his speech, and I suppose we could all sort of condescend to do the same thing.

And so, Mr. Speaker, once upon a time there was a regime, Mr. Speaker, that favoured very, very high taxes. Mr. Speaker, it was headed up by a black-hearted king, Mr. Speaker. And he was aided by the sheriff of Nottingham. And you can draw your own analogies, Mr. Speaker, but suffice it to say that during that regime of high taxes there was a group of people clad in green and yellow who made it their point to try to relieve people during this time of hardship until the day came that another King would be restored to the throne — King Richard — and that regime would disappear from government in the province of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to participate in this my first budget debate. These first six months as an elected representative, Mr. Speaker, for the great constituency of Swift Current have been both challenging and rewarding and I'm grateful for the opportunity to enter this debate.

I couldn't help but notice, Mr. Speaker, the look in the eyes of the Minister of Finance last week as he was defending his budget. I was trying to place where I had seen that look before and it finally came to me on the weekend when I went back home, Mr. Speaker.

If you're familiar with the city of Swift Current, it's a city of one-ways, and the look on the Minister of Finance's face is exactly the look that we see in the face of drivers just before they realize that they have turned the wrong way down a one-way street, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — Helpful and well-meaning motorists and people on the sidewalk are generally waving, trying to get the attention of these drivers who have turned the wrong way down a one-way street. They're hollering at him, some are flashing their lights to try to get them to turn around, but in this case, Mr. Speaker, the driver hasn't heard a thing. The windows are rolled up and he's busy listening to his favourite eight-tracks from the early 1980s and he can't hear the message from the people that are trying to help him.

Mr. Speaker, when I first had the chance to take a close look at the budget, I tried to do so from the perspective of my constituents. Throughout the recent campaign and since I have made an effort to pay close attention to what is on their minds as I judge this government and its actions. And so I tried to apply those same values as I read the budget, Mr. Speaker.

My constituents after all have an expectation, and rightfully so, that I will work towards and vote for those things that are good for them and their families. But equally they want me to fight against and vote against those measures that will be a hardship on the families and the businesses in the constituency of Swift Current.

And there are some things in the budget, Mr. Speaker, that are positive for my constituents. A few specific measures that rang very familiar when I read the budget. They sounded familiar of course because these few specific measures seem to almost come verbatim from the platform of the Saskatchewan Party, Mr. Speaker. They rang familiar because I discussed them at length during the recent election campaign. In fact I had to defend the very things that now appear in the NDP-Liberal budget from the NDP and the Liberals during the election campaign. Back then, Mr. Speaker, our ideas were wild. They were irresponsible. They were unachievable. They made for good politics, but not for good public policy is what the NDP and the Liberals said.

And interestingly enough, Mr. Speaker, these are the same comments we now hear from the Minister of Finance of our recent fuel tax proposal that would garner a \$120 million worth of tax relief for Saskatchewan motorists and families for half the cost. That's a two-for-one deal, Mr. Speaker. For less than 10 per cent, less than 10 per cent of what's in the NDP's slush fund, we could deliver that kind of tax relief for Saskatchewan people. But more about that later.

In a matter of months, Mr. Speaker, some of the ideas we proposed prior to and during the election went from being hare-brained schemes in the eyes of members opposite to, as they call it, a plan for growth and opportunity.

Mr. Speaker, last Friday the member from Regina Dewdney in his praise for himself and his colleagues, referred to that group over there as straight A students, Mr. Speaker. Well, you and I

both know that there are two ways to become a straight A student. You can work hard and get A's on your own merit or you can copy off your neighbour, Mr. Speaker.

And I am certain that when the Minister of Finance was crafting his budget he was looking for a few good ideas — he knew he had to include at least a few good ideas in the budget — and so he looked pretty long and hard to find some of those good ideas.

He looked around at this colleagues; he may have even looked at the member from Regina Dewdney. He looked at his own party's platform, Mr. Speaker, and stifling his laughter, he even picked up a copy of the Liberal platform and tried to find a few good ideas there, Mr. Speaker — stifling his laughter. The Liberal platform which is the political equivalent of a Curious George reader, so there were no good ideas in there, Mr. Speaker.

And so perhaps a little bit depressed, the Minister of Finance finally reached for *The Way Up*, Mr. Speaker. The platform document of the Saskatchewan Party that made political history in the province of Saskatchewan on September 16.

In that document he found a few good ideas that will indeed benefit my constituents and people across the province. And I do want to commend the minister, I do want to commend the minister for those things. They include some positive tax reform, possibly some future income tax cuts if we're able to hold this government to its word. They'll be tragically late, but they'll be good if they happen nonetheless: changes to the flat tax, high income surtax, and debt reduction tax, the farm fuel tax rebate changes and some property tax changes. He even saw the merit of our stance against expanding the PST to utility bills, and to restaurant meals and children's clothing.

But sadly, Mr. Speaker, he stopped taking our advice against expansion at those items and is just now realizing the price for making that mistake. And had he heeded more of our advice, I would seriously have to consider using the free vote that only our party has the courage to afford its members, to support the budget.

But the budget doesn't stop there, Mr. Speaker. The 6 per cent tax hike that this minister had levied on items previously untaxed will hurt the entire province — a \$160 million tax grab that took effect last week, brought to us by the tax and spend New Democrats. They just couldn't resist, Mr. Speaker. And it will be a major burden to an already tax-fatigued economy.

Mr. Speaker, a \$160 million sales tax grab is particularly harmful to Swift Current and area. We are far too close to sales-tax-free and soon to be income-tax-free Alberta for me to in good conscience support this budget.

And at this point . . . when I was drafting this speech on Saturday, Mr. Speaker, I received a call from a constituent — it was about 10 o'clock at night on Saturday night. He apologized for calling at home, and I assured him that was no problem. We all signed on for that.

And he asked me to settle a bet he had had with a fellow in a coffee shop, earlier that day in Swift Current. He said his friend knew that he was trying to sell his pick-up truck privately. And

his friend assured him that now as a result of this budget, he will have to collect, on behalf of the Minister of Finance, and remit PST on the sale of his 1996 Chevy truck. I had to inform the gentlemen who called that that would exactly be the case with this budget, Mr. Speaker.

Of great concern to my constituency and any area of the province that has a significant oil and gas industry, is the tax grab that will impede the ability of our oil and gas industry entrepreneurs to compete with their Alberta counterparts who make a living out of working in our province, Mr. Speaker.

The oil and gas industry is already finding it very difficult on an uneven playing field. I cannot tell you how many oil and gas related businesses, men and women, who have contacted our office to register concerns about this government's unwillingness or inability to enforce the same regulations that our contractors have to deal with on their out-of-province competition.

And now this budget seeks to increase the taxes that our oil and gas businesses will have to pay and that Alberta firms will not be paying — especially if the government doesn't enforce its own regulations.

Mr. Speaker, I have the information bulletin that was provided by the minister's department on the oil and gas industry. And I just want to briefly highlight some of the things in this bulletin that underscore, that underscore the difficulty this budget will place on, on southwest Saskatchewan oil and gas firms trying to compete with their Alberta counterparts.

Mr. Speaker, on equipment rentals, this is a new addition. A rental company may provide a supervisor or a service technician to install and maintain equipment. These rental charges and the charge for the technicians are now subject to the tax.

New, rebuilt, or remanufactured equipment including pumps, motors, re-tipped drill bits, clutches, and the list goes on — if the customer's equipment is rebuilt and no exchange takes place, the repair, labour, parts, materials, and shop supplies are subject to the tax. Labour charges for the installation, assembly, or repair of equipment are now subject to the tax, Mr. Speaker.

The tax under Saskatchewan purchases — the tax on all equipment, tools, materials, supplies, repair parts, repair labour purchased in Saskatchewan, must be paid to the vendor. All used goods are subject to the tax.

These are very, very important issues in the oil patch which, as the minister will know, is a major engine of economic and job creation here in Saskatchewan. This particular budget takes another swipe at that industry, Mr. Speaker.

Under the sale of used business assets, businesses are required to collect tax now on the sale of used assets such as vehicles and equipment. They've turned them from being entrepreneurs, Mr. Speaker, into being tax collectors. That's what this minister has done to the small businesses that are involved in the oil and gas business. There is now a tax on equipment, tools, materials, supplies, repair parts, and labour purchased in Saskatchewan as well, Mr. Speaker.

Those are just some of the list of the things that this minister has done to the oil and gas industry in our province.

Then as it relates to a local perspective on the budget, from Swift Current, Mr. Speaker, there's the issue of our hospital in Swift Current. Last week and in the coming days, I will be standing to present petitions signed by the people of Swift Current and area; the petition seeks an additional \$2 million in capital funding to our hospital, over and above what has already been committed.

What has been committed will simply bring our hospital up to current building and safety codes, Mr. Speaker, and will virtually do nothing to make the Swift Current hospital a truly regional hospital. Something, I might add, that the Minister of Health has called on the Swift Current hospital to become.

Mr. Speaker, earlier last week the Swift Current Health District sent a letter to the minister . . . or rather to officials in the Department of Health that clearly outlines an affordable plan for the regeneration of the Swift Current hospital and underscores the request that they have made and that I have made to this Health minister for an additional \$2 million to make the regeneration of the Swift Current hospital a reality.

They talk about the existing 1946 portion of the hospital as being expired in terms of usefulness. The letter goes on to say the district will have to spend \$8 million on the existing facility in the next three years to address problems with the failed facility. The result would be no operational efficiencies and no extension of the useful life of the existing building.

The operational savings annually, from investing in the option they proposed, would include: \$250,000 in savings to repairs and maintenance costs; \$196,000 in savings to required maintenance and staff time; and 496,000 in reduction in nursing staff time in pediatrics, women's surgery, and maternity because of the efficiencies of this proposal.

Swift Current has developed a plan and is willing to fundraise, Mr. Speaker, for their basic, for their share of the hospital regeneration. They want to build a new patient wing. And all it would take to achieve this goal is that additional \$2 million that they have asked for, and that I have asked for, of the minister. The community is prepared to raise their share.

(1615)

Mr. Speaker, the Swift Current hospital has not seen a meaningful capital improvement since the early 1970s. And despite the local work on this funding request and my letters and petitions, it is still very unclear in the budget as to whether the Swift Current hospital is a part of this budget, Mr. Speaker.

In fact we contacted the Department of Health last week and their answer was that they didn't know, that they had to wait for some details. So we're very hopeful for that, Mr. Speaker, and I will be continuing to push this government and this minister to approve the funding request that has come from the local district.

From the perspective of my Justice critic duties, Mr. Speaker, there are also some concerns in the budget, not the least of

which of course is the surprise announcement, without any consultation, of the closure of three court houses in the province of Saskatchewan — in Assiniboia, in Humboldt, and in Weyburn.

Mr. Speaker, it's interesting to note that a lawyer in Weyburn questioned, and I quote, questioned whether this government was perverse or not, at the announcement that the Weyburn court house would close down. And one can hardly blame him for asking the question.

There appears to be \$500,000 in the Justice department budget for increased administration, increased salaries of the minister's advisers and staff, and yet not enough to keep court houses open in rural Saskatchewan.

During the election campaign, Mr. Speaker, the Premier of the province, with much fanfare, announced that there would be 200 new police officer positions in the province of Saskatchewan. In this budget — and we had to pry it out of the government because they buried it as well in the budget — you couldn't find any reference to this major campaign promise that the Premier announced under a lot of fanfare during the election. You couldn't find one word in the budget about the police officers.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, though, finally — because of questions from the opposition in the media — the minister confirmed that, well there might be 20, 25 new police officers this year; and just trust us, that the other 175 will occur over the next three years.

Now, Mr. Speaker, this government has done nothing but give people ample reason to not trust them about their word for future relief.

Mr. Speaker, one of the main concerns, one of the main concerns that I have fielded as the Justice critic for the official opposition is concerns about the maintenance enforcement area of the Department of Justice, Mr. Speaker. I can't tell you how many single parents have contacted my office and frankly the offices of my colleagues, very, very concerned about the lack of enforcement that's out there.

These single parents, single moms, are trying to raise their children, and the staff in the department, frankly, do not have the resources they need to enforce the maintenance orders of our courts. And so I wanted to see what this budget held for that area — for maintenance enforcement, Mr. Speaker.

Well there's a 4 per cent increase in the maintenance budget. But, Mr. Speaker, there's a 15 per cent increase for the wages and the administration costs that I talked about earlier. Mr. Speaker, it is a matter of priorities. It's a matter of putting single parents ahead of the top bureaucracy in the Department of Justice and the minister's own staff.

Mr. Speaker, I also tried to look at this budget from the perspective of its impact on the overall economy. Mr. Speaker, during the election campaign you heard from both of the parties involved in the coalition government. We heard from them during the election that they believed that small business was the most important engine of the economy.

And so I remembered that from the election, Mr. Speaker, and went through the budget hoping against hope to see if they were going to put their money where their mouth was with respect to small business, Mr. Speaker. But there is nothing there. There is nothing there for small business in this budget. They could have taken one more suggestion from the Saskatchewan Party — in addition to the ones they did with respect to the small business tax — and they failed to do that, Mr. Speaker.

It is my belief that the voters are very seldom wrong in this province. And in the last election they sent a message that this province needs some immediate tax relief, some tax relief now. We cannot wait three or four years, especially when the waiting period will be characterized by a \$160 million tax increase. A tax hike, Mr. Speaker, can you believe it.

If there was any question, if there was any question as to whether this NDP government would get the message in the last election, that they maybe had learned their lessons, learned from the mistakes of the past, the answer came at midnight last Wednesday. The answer came when single moms went to their pharmacy on Thursday morning to purchase some Children's Tylenol for their kids. The answer came with all of the sales tax bulletins that were mailed and faxed across the province to small businessmen and women telling them that they must now become tax collectors for the government instead of job creators for their community.

Small businessmen got the answer loud and clear as they read those bulletins, Mr. Speaker, realizing that the government's so-called tax increase ... tax decrease would hurt their businesses and their efforts to make a living for their families. And most importantly, Mr. Speaker, to create jobs, the jobs that we so desperately need.

Mr. Speaker, as an economic developer for the past five years, it was my job to try to be in tune with the existing Swift Current businesses and prospective new ones who were looking to either expand or perhaps look for a new location for their operation. The list of those things is long, Mr. Speaker. But I can assure you what they aren't looking for. They are not looking to expand or locate in a jurisdiction whose idea of job creation is to set up another tax rebate office in the Department of Finance. They are not interested in a location whose government characterizes a \$160 million sales tax increase and a future promise of tax relief as a historic tax cut.

Mr. Speaker, we on this side of the House have tried to avoid criticism for the sake of criticism. We have provided alternatives. The most recent example of a viable and an affordable alternative to deliver some tax relief for Saskatchewan people came last week.

We recognize that we couldn't offer ... we couldn't afford irresponsible tax relief, Mr. Speaker, and our proposal in fact drew on a federal offer to basically match tax relief offered by the province. Our alternative would have provided some much-needed, if only temporary, tax relief at the pumps for Saskatchewan families and small businesses.

Mr. Speaker, since the election and through into Christmas, members of this Legislative Assembly, the Premier, the Deputy Premier, members of this side of the House, and farm groups,

struggled and scratched and absolutely left nothing in the bag in an effort to try to get some federal money in Saskatchewan. And seemingly overnight last week, Mr. Speaker, after the budget the federal Minister of Finance offers this government and taxpayers in our province up to \$60 million in tax relief right now -- right now.

And so we made a proposal, Mr. Speaker, that would see this government immediately cut 5 cents a litre off the fuel tax. It would be matched by a federal tax cut as well of 5 cents a litre and would offer \$120 million in tax relief for \$60 million, Mr. Speaker. Even by NDP math, that's a good offer to the people of Saskatchewan.

It would admittedly be a temporary cut, and we said as much, Mr. Speaker, last week. We said that when the prices at the pumps come down — as the analysts say they will in six months — then the tax would be back on.

Mr. Speaker, it would be a great improvement to a budget that is in desperate need for some help, Mr. Speaker. And what was the minister's response to our proposal? Well, to be truthful, I'm not convinced he heard it, Mr. Speaker. I'm not convinced he heard it because all he can talk about is the 1980s. I was in grade 11 at the time, Mr. Speaker, and I frankly don't care; I am interested in today. We're interested in today and the future, and that's the kind of proposals that we've been presenting to this Legislative Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, as a result of all of that, I will be . . . on behalf of the people of the constituency of Swift Current, I'll be supporting the amendment of the Leader of the Opposition. And barring any major improvements, as I have outlined, I simply will not be able to vote for the budget. To do anything else, to do anything else would be to betray the trust of the people of the Swift Current constituency. That's something I'm not prepared to do. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Kasperski: — Mr. Speaker, it's definitely my pleasure to rise today and participate in this budget debate. But just before I do, I'd like to take a few minutes, Mr. Speaker, and get a few thank yous and introductions in that I didn't have a chance to do during the Throne Speech debate.

My colleagues had so much to say about the Throne Speech and in the debate on that, that there were a few of us that did not have a chance to get up and participate in that debate. So I hope, Mr. Speaker, that you might bear with me, and my colleagues opposite, to get a few thank yous and other necessities out of the way before I enter into the debate.

Mr. Speaker, I first of all want to thank very much the residents, my residents and constituents of Regina Sherwood for re-electing me in this past election last fall. Although the margin of victory was a little bit less than I got — I think I got 63 per cent in 1995 and 52 per cent this time — it was still a very good victory and I want to express my thanks to all the residents and voters of Regina Sherwood.

I especially want to add thanks to my family — my wife Barbara, my son Dan, and my son Jay — all of whom worked

very, very hard during the campaign on my behalf. I owe them a lot and I want to publicly thank them for their work.

I also want to thank the members of my election planning committee and all the volunteers that worked in our campaign. We had a very good campaign and I just want to thank all of those that worked on that campaign.

Also, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to add my congratulations as well formally to all members on this side and members opposite on their elections and welcome them all to this legislature.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, last but by no means least, I think I'd like to add my congratulations to yourself, Mr. Speaker, on your election as Speaker. And, Mr. Speaker, as you are aware — and you and I have talked before — we both come from Polish background. And your parents come from a community called Rzeszów, mine from . . . my grandparents come from Nowy Sacz and Buczacz. All these communities were in the former Austro-Hungarian Province of Galicia. This is a part of Poland . . . or a part of Europe that became Polish after World War I, and the eastern portion of this area — the area actually where my relatives are from — became part of the Ukraine after the Second World War.

Mr. Speaker, I've done some additional research though, and I'd like to share some of this research with you. I have found out for instance, to the best of my abilities in doing this research, that yourself and myself, sir, were the 9th and 10th . . . are the 9th and 10th deputies of Polish background who have been elected to this legislature when we were elected in 1995.

For your information, Mr. Speaker, our predecessors were Walter Smishek, who served in this legislature from 1964 to '82; Adolph Matsalla from 1967 to 1982; Ed Tchorzewski from 1971 to '82, and again from 1985 to 1999; Murray Koskie from 1975 to 1995; Bernard Poniatowski from 1978 till 1982; Russ Sutor from 1982 to '85; Jack Klein whose mother was Kotowicz, from 1982 to 1991; and Ken Kluz, 1991 to 1995.

Mr. Speaker, I guess I should add too that where there was an 11th deputy of Polish background that was added in the fall election, and we should welcome the hon. member from Carrot River Valley who joins this distinguished list of people.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to also point out, and I'm sure that you are aware, that you're not the only Speaker of Polish background in Canada. The Hon. Ken Kowalski, the Speaker of the Alberta legislature, also comes from Polish background, and his home village is very much in the same area as ours is from as well.

I should also point out, Mr. Speaker, that the father of the Premier, who also came over about the same time your parents and my grandparents came over, is also from the same general area as we come from as well.

Mr. Speaker, I'm certain I speak on behalf of all Saskatchewan residents of Polish backgrounds when I say how proud we are to have you elected as a member to this legislature, and a proud member of our Polish heritage.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Kasperski: — Mr. Speaker, I'd like, if you don't mind as well, and with the indulgence of members, maybe express a little bit of these sentiments in Polish.

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

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(1630)

Mr. Kasperski: — Thank you, colleagues. Thank you for bearing with me on that.

Anyway, Mr. Speaker, before I get into the next phase of the Throne Speech, Throne Speech debate, I'd like to talk a little bit and inform members of my constituency of Regina Sherwood.

Regina Sherwood is a constituency on the west and northern part of the city. It consists of 11 community . . . or sorry, 7 community association areas, which are the Dieppe area, Prairieview, Normanview West, Normanview, Walsh Acres, and a portion of the area of McCarthy Park, and also a portion of Rosemont, Mount Royal.

Mr. Speaker. I was very proud earlier . . . A couple of months ago the mayor of the city of Regina, during his state of the city address, singled out in my area the community association of Normanview West who was participating in a pilot in this city with the Regina Police Service, which is a neighbourhood speed zone alert program which I think typically represents the volunteer spirit and community spirit of associations in my area of Regina Sherwood.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to talk a little bit about . . . a little bit more about Regina Sherwood. And I'd like to point out, I think it was . . . Many of us are aware a couple of months ago when one of our national newspapers wrote a number of articles or three or four articles which were somewhat disparaging on Saskatchewan, its people, and its economy. And I know at that time I was giving a member's statement . . . or, sorry, an MLA address on CBC (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation) radio, and which came out about that same time.

And during this address I talked . . . we came very much to the defence of Saskatchewan people, its economy. And I received, Mr. Speaker, a number of phone calls from people not only from my constituency of Regina Sherwood, not only from Regina actually — from across Saskatchewan — complimenting me for taking such a proactive and strong stance in sticking up for Saskatchewan people.

And, Mr. Speaker, this prompted myself and my constituency assistant in my office to do a lot of research to ascertain what makes us such a good place to live in the world and why, as we've talked about before, why we continually get cited by the United Nations as being the best place in the world to live.

And, Mr. Speaker, we did a lot of research and we came up with a lot of interesting facts not only about Regina, but the province in general. Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan is the only province that reduced child poverty between 1989 and 1997.

As I said earlier, the United Nations has ranked Canada as the

best country to live in. When the same criteria has been applied to the provinces, Saskatchewan is ranked as the best province in Canada to live in.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Kasperski: — Between 1993 and 1998, Mr. Speaker, personal income growth in Saskatchewan was 16 per cent higher than the national average.

An Hon. Member: — What's that? Say it again.

Mr. Kasperski: — Personal income growth in Saskatchewan was 25 per cent than the national . . . 25 per cent higher than the national average.

Mr. Speaker, from 1993 to 1998, Saskatchewan's real economic growth averaged 19 per cent higher than the average Canadian growth during that time. In the 1990s, Saskatchewan's personal disposable income per capita grew at a rate 28 per cent higher than the national average. In the 1990s, housing starts in Saskatchewan grew by 9.5 per cent compared to a national decline of 2.1 per cent, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, diversification is working in this province. Manufacturing shipment growth in Saskatchewan increased by 9.5 per cent last year — 20 per cent higher than the national rate.

Saskatchewan in the 1990s has 31,600 net new jobs than in 1992. Net full-time jobs have increased by over 39,000. In 1999 there were 480,100 people working in Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker. Just about 47 per cent of the entire population in Saskatchewan has a job. The highest level of employment of any province in the country.

Mr. Speaker, in paying down the debt, we are able to stop the extraction of \$157.6 million in annual interest payments from the pockets of Saskatchewan people to international banking centres.

And as we continue to pay down the debt even more, more money will be available to Saskatchewan people in the form of tax cuts and program service enhancements.

Regina, Mr. Speaker, has the second lowest unemployment rate in the country at 5.2 per cent; 107,900 jobs are held for the population of our city of 193,000.

Also, Mr. Speaker, KPMG conducted a study of G-7 nations which stated that Regina has the lowest business costs in the North American west region and the sixth lowest in all of the G-7 countries. You don't hear very much about this information coming from the other side.

Mr. Speaker, almost 81,000 people in Regina have post-secondary education. And of the 25 largest cities in Canada, Regina has the fifth highest total number of computer information technology research professionals in Canada. Regina ranks higher than Edmonton, Winnipeg, Vancouver, Montreal, Hamilton, and any other cities of similar or larger size.

Mr. Speaker, in doing this research, we also consulted a lot of real estate publications and StatsCanada sources and we came up with some interesting statistics around the category of home ownership.

Mr. Speaker, the average income of a person in Regina — and I will apply that to Regina Sherwood — is \$25,918. The average sale price of a house in Regina Sherwood in the last year, 1999, was \$83,700 which is about 3,000 lower than the average throughout the city of Regina.

Mr. Speaker, based on a 5 per cent down payment, a mortgage . . . a young couple or a young family taking out a mortgage in Saskatchewan, or in Regina Sherwood, would have a monthly payment on an average house price sale of \$653 a month — very affordable. Slightly lower than the 703 for other people in the city of Regina.

But let me go . . . Where it's \$650 a month for an average house in Regina Sherwood, in the Greater Vancouver area to buy their average house it would be \$2,194 a month. In Toronto, \$1,782 a month; in Calgary, \$1,296 a month — just under \$1,300.

Mr. Speaker, over the lifetime of a mortgage, a family paying a mortgage over 25 years in Regina Sherwood would pay a total of 200,000 . . . sorry, pay just go to the interest, they pay 116,000 in interest. That same family in Vancouver would pay \$400,000 over the life of that mortgage in interest. A difference of \$285,000. That, Mr. Speaker, would buy a lot of RRSPs (Registered Retirement Savings Plan) for anybody's retirement.

Mr. Speaker, when doing this research we also came across another important area of cost for families in Saskatchewan — car insurance. And this is one of the more, I think house insurance — or sorry, house mortgages are a big item. Car insurance. We came across some interesting facts in this area.

Mr. Speaker, for many of my constituents who would be driving a 1991 Chevrolet Caprice — that's a good full-size car — the insurance in Regina is \$795 per year. That same insurance in Vancouver is \$1,460; in Calgary, it's \$1,550.

An Hon. Member: — How much in Calgary.

Mr. Kasperski: — Fifteen sixty — \$750 more. Almost 100 per cent, Mr. Speaker, almost 100 per cent.

That's Chevrolet figure — I'm singling them out. I should also for a Toyota, 1995 Toyota Celica, in Regina, \$1,043 annual premiums; in Calgary, \$1,963. Almost another 100 per cent . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Every year.

And I'll maybe go — I'm on a bit of a roll here — we'll go with one more comparison. There's many more but we'll go with . . . there's one more. A 1995 Dodge Caravan minivan — in the city of Regina or province of Saskatchewan, \$657; in Calgary, \$1,556. In almost every case, Mr. Speaker, twice as much.

Anyway, Mr. Speaker, my point being that I think that our government in the last nine years . . .

An Hon. Member: — What about medicare premiums?

Mr. Kasperski: — And no medicare premiums. I'm glad somebody pointed that out. We have no medicare premiums here.

Mr. Speaker, this province has come a long way from the dark days of the 1991 economy that we faced. And this budget, Mr. Speaker, that was presented by our Minister of Finance last week is taking us a long ways more to getting out from under that.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to take maybe a couple of minutes to talk about some other general highlights and economic development activities that have taken place here in the city of Regina. Mr. Speaker, it was my pleasure to serve in the last two years before the previous election, actually up until last month, as chairman of Regina caucus, a group of us that are all NDP members that represent the city of Regina.

And, Mr. Speaker, as a Regina caucus, we get together on a periodic basis with our city council colleagues here in the city of Regina, with members of the Regina Regional Development Authority, and with members of Tourism Regina. And I'd like to just share with you, Mr. Speaker, and with my colleagues some of the 1999 highlights of the Regina Regional Economic Development Authority.

In the area of new developments, there was a new Staples store opening on Albert Street North, for \$3.5 million, a new 18,000 square foot facility. IGA opened a second 37,600 square foot location. Chapters and Starbucks each opened a 26,000 square foot location. Tony Roma's opened their first Saskatchewan location in Regina.

The University of Regina received almost \$800,000 from the strategic initiatives fund and the Canada Foundation for Innovation for an environmental quality analysis laboratory out at the U of R (University of Regina). UniTech International controls corporation out of Burnaby, BC (British Columbia) has established an oil and gas technology division here in the city of Regina.

A & B Sound opened Saskatchewan's first location in Regina and Days Inn opened their new \$5 million 97-room facility. The Gap opened their first Regina location. Quality . . . sorry, Queen Victoria Estates officially opened their 114-suite seniors' complex and the Quality Hotel in downtown Regina reopened after an extensive renovation. Agrevo, Mr. Speaker, became the Canadian head office of Aventis CropScience.

Under expansions, Mr. Speaker, the Normanview Shopping Centre in my area underwent an expansion which included increasing the floor space of the Zellers store, a new SLGA (Saskatchewan Liquor and Gaming Authority) store, and expansion of the Brewsters Pub. Partner Technologies of Regina, a Regina-based manufacturer of transformers and electronic components, expanded operations with a 100,000 square foot facility. Redhead Equipment expanded their facility. Sears underwent a \$1 million expansion. Brandt Tractor opened a new 31,000 square foot facility and The Bay announced plans to relocate to the Cornwall Centre.

(1645)

Mr. Speaker, those are a snapshot of what took place during 1999. In the area of future developments taking place in this year 2000, the following announcements and activities are taking place. Farm Gro Organic Foods will construct an \$11.3 million organic flour mill and grain processing facility just southeast of the city here in the Regina region. Construction is almost complete on the Petroleum Technology Research Centre and the Information Technology Building at research park on the campus of the U of R.

First Professional Management announced a proposal to develop a 400,000 square foot mall in east Regina, a project, Mr. Speaker, that's valued at \$40 million. Lewis Dreyfuss, an international grain company announced it will be constructing a 20,000 tonne facility between Regina and White City. And also Regina's research park, Mr. Speaker, will be home to the international test centre for carbon dioxide capture. This \$3.3 million plant, Mr. Speaker, in Regina . . . or a plant in Regina and Boundary dam will be used for the purposes of the carbon, carbon dioxide pipeline project coming into the province.

Mr. Speaker, just on the general economic trends of the past year, the city of Regina has reaffirmed the commitment to eliminate the business tax here in the city, with another 40 per cent reduction. The business tax will be eliminated completely in this year 2000 here in the city, Mr. Speaker.

Employment was down slightly in 1999 compared to the record employment growth of 5.6 per cent in 1998. However, GDP (gross domestic product) grew by 1.4 per cent, coming in with a robust growth of 5.4 from the year before. Housing starts were up 5 per cent in 1999; building permits valued at . . . building permits, sorry, will be increasing by 16 per cent. Retail sales, Mr. Speaker, were up 3.7 per cent. Mr. Speaker, these are stats that are active in other places across the province as well.

And, Mr. Speaker, I'd also like to maybe take a couple minutes and talk about some activities that are undertaken by . . . and the high points of Tourism Regina. During 1999, Mr. Speaker, Tourism Regina received a grant from the Millennium Bureau of Canada to begin the development of a flag park at the tourist information centre on the east part of the city.

Marketing blitzes took place in various locations such as Minot, Calgary, Ottawa, Saskatoon, and in southeast Saskatchewan. Tourism Regina, Mr. Speaker, increased information . . . had an increase of information requests of over 4,000 from the year before. Mr. Speaker, the Tourism Regina continues to publish its meeting and event planner's guide. It also had a successful Rave on Regina campaign which won the Tourism Award of Excellence in the promotion and marketing campaign at last year's Tourism Saskatchewan awards banquet.

A successful host-at-home program is also . . . has been developed in conjunction with Tourism Saskatoon. And also last year was the first year of the successful Bid Regina initiative. And Mr. Speaker, I'll take a couple of minutes to talk a little bit about Bid Regina in a few minutes.

Tourism Regina had an increase to 475 members in the past year and in the most recent Tourism Saskatchewan awards banquet which was held in Saskatoon in the middle of March, members of Tourism Regina received the following awards: the

Rave on Regina campaign, as I said for promotional and marketing; the SaskPower Festival of Lights, Mr. Speaker, for promotion and marketing for their Christmas light display; also, Mr. Ron Clark, who is the Memorial Cup Bid Committee chairperson, was recognized for an above-and-beyond-service award category.

Victor Sawa of the Regina Symphony Orchestra was a recipient of the Fred Hill Friend of Tourism Award and Kerry Anne Kuntz of the Hotel Saskatchewan Radisson Plaza was the recipient of the Saskatchewan Welcome Award.

Mr. Speaker, I talked a little bit about Bid Regina and Bid Regina is a committee, it's a subcommittee of Tourism Regina. It's a committee which myself and the Deputy Premier have had an honour to participate in over the last year and a half.

And Bid Regina — many might say, what is Bid Regina? Well it began as a concept, Mr. Speaker, that has now developed into an organization that takes a proactive approach in combining the strengths of all stakeholders and resources in our community for the purpose of attracting new events and conferences to our city. With the right blend of events, Regina businesses and residents will feel they have a positive impact.

Mr. Speaker, the Bid Regina committee has had a number of successes since its inception. It had the Syncro Swim Invitational Competition between February 4 and 6 of this year. It will host the Syncro Swim Tri-provincials in May of this year.

In January of next year, 2001, the National Squash Senior Men's Championships will be hosted in Regina. Also in April of 2001, the Western Canadian Gymnastics competition will take place.

Mr. Speaker, one of our most successful prizes was the 2001 Memorial Cup which will take place in May of 2001. The Canadian Ringette Championships will be hosted here in Regina in 2002 and the Canadian Olympic Association Annual General Meeting and Congress will take place here in 2005, Mr. Speaker.

Currently, Bid Regina is in the final running or preparing a very serious bid for the University of Regina hosting the 2003 Congress of Social Sciences and Humanities, an event which could attract from 3 to 5,000 people from around the globe here to our city.

We are going after the 2001 National Junior Racquetball Championships, the 2002 International Snowmobile Congress, and the 2005 Canada Summer Games.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to take a couple of minutes and maybe acknowledge the people on Tourism Regina and especially the Bid Committee that the Deputy Premier and I have been involved in for the work and tremendous effort they do. And it's what makes our community what it is here in this city. And I just want to publicly thank those people and those committees.

Mr. Speaker, I guess I would be remiss if I didn't talk a little bit more directly about the budget, although I think the viewers who are watching and my colleagues and certainly the members

opposite will get the gist that we have an economy that is, although with problems, is moving along very, very well. Certainly much better than members opposite would give us credit for.

Mr. Speaker, the budget brought down by the Finance minister could broadly be described as falling into four parts. It dealt with fiscal responsibility and good government. It dealt with a sustainable health system. It talked about economic growth and jobs. And above all else, Mr. Speaker, it talked about tax reform here in the province of Saskatchewan.

Just in the area of fiscal responsibility, Mr. Speaker, not to bore the members opposite, but I think it cannot be said enough that this is the seventh balanced budget of our province.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Kasperski: — More than any other provincial government, more than any other province in Canada since this current area of balanced budgets started.

Our responsible balanced approach has supported, Mr. Speaker, the longest period of sustained economic growth here in our province. It has allowed the government to invest in important public services and reduce taxes each and every year since the budget was first balanced in 1994-95 fiscal year.

It has allowed Saskatchewan's debt to fall from 70 per cent of gross domestic product to less than 38 per cent today. And, Mr. Speaker, at the end of this four-year projection of this budget, the ratio of debt-to-gross domestic product is projected to be 31 per cent.

Mr. Speaker, a new Fiscal Stabilization Fund will strengthen the capacity of the government to respond to unpredictable financial pressures on the province's finances. The goal will be to place 5 per cent of our annual revenues aside in this fund so that when drops in revenues do occur, as they inevitably will in economies . . . resource-based economies like ours, we will not have to raise taxes, cut services, or return to deficits, Mr. Speaker.

The target level for this fund, Mr. Speaker, will be clear and the use of funds here totally transparent. In addition, Mr. Speaker, our government is creating a new accountability framework which will provide information about goals, objectives, and measured performance of government departments.

Mr. Speaker, I think this budget and the . . . what the budget outlines in this area is above and beyond reproach and certainly areas that we have become noted for as a government. And with the help of the people of our province we take . . . with the help and support of our citizens we have taken great pride in this.

Mr. Speaker, in the area of sustainable health, this budget will do the following . . . And I should point out first, Mr. Speaker, that the federal government pays only 13 cents of every health dollar that's expended here in the province of Saskatchewan. Obviously, Mr. Speaker, the future of our health system is in our hands if this is to continue. Over the last two years, Mr. Speaker, we've increased health spending by 17 per cent. This year our government will provide \$63 million in increases in

base funding for the operation of our health system.

In addition, we are establishing a \$150 million transition fund to provide one-time support for change. Mr. Speaker, we are setting aside these resources needed to help ensure that these changes can be made while achieving our vision of ensuring people have access to quality health. And I know, Mr. Speaker, I want to join, as I'm sure many of my colleagues do, in applauding our Minister of Health and our Premier for the work they're doing in trying to bring these . . . the health agenda to the top of the line . . . or the top of the heap when it comes to negotiations with the federal government.

Mr. Speaker, in the area of economic growth and jobs, I think I can . . . Earlier in my remarks I talked a great deal about the effects of our programs and what they have been doing, the effects they've had on our economy, the positive effects. Mr. Speaker, under this budget we will continue to provide the type of leadership and direction and atmosphere that our economy needs to further diversify, to further develop, and to grow even further.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, in the area of tax reform. Mr. Speaker, as many of my colleagues have stated before and before I arose, tax reform is one of the single biggest features that we faced in going into this budget.

Mr. Speaker, when I . . . during the campaign when I appeared on the open line show with my opponents in the last provincial election, I was somewhat surprised when my two opponents that were there at the open line show indicated that other issues besides tax reductions were the number one issue to people in Regina Sherwood. I indicated very strongly that I had felt that taxes — reductions in tax cuts — were our number one issue.

And I think what happened, the election has proven that out — certainly in Regina Sherwood. Tax reductions were something that meant a lot to my constituents. It was, in my conversations with them — and I had a chance to knock on most of the doors in my constituency during the elections — this was a top-of-mind issue.

I'm very pleased, Mr. Speaker, that the Minister of Finance and our government have managed to deliver on this very, very important area of our economy, and this very, very important area of our province in terms of the reform we have.

I have a number of things I'd like to say about tax reform before I maybe sit down and take my place. But I see that it's being close to the hour of recess, I would ask . . . Mr. Speaker, I would move that we recess.

The Speaker: — It now being 5 p.m. this House stands recessed until 7 p.m. this evening.

The Assembly recessed until 7 p.m.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRESENTING PETITIONS

Julé	387
Draude	387
Gantefoer	387
Peters	387
Eagles	387
Wall	387
Bjornerud	387
McMorris	387
Weekes	388
Brkich	388
Harpauer	388
Allchurch	388

READING AND RECEIVING PETITIONS

Clerk	388
-------------	-----

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Wall	388, 398
Weekes	388
Hillson	395
Julé	395
Goulet	395
Lorje	402

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Sexual Assault Awareness Week	
Prebble	388
Courageous Youngster from Hafford	
Weekes	389
Meadow Lake Spartanettes Win Provincial High School Championship	
Sonntag	389
Sexual Assault Awareness Week	
Julé	389
Rendezvous 2000	
Kasperski	390
Canadian Bible College and Theological Seminary Moving to Alberta	
Hart	390

ORAL QUESTIONS

Provincial Sales Tax	
Hermanson	390
Cline	391
Funding for Health Care	
Gantefoer	392
Atkinson	392
The Partnerships Program	
Hart	393
Hagel	393
Funding for Education	
Draude	394
Melenchuk	394

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 13 — The Education Amendment Act, 2000/Loi de 2000 modifiant la Loi de 1995 sur l'éducation	
Melenchuk	395
Bill No. 14 — The Film Employment Tax Credit Amendment Act, 2000	
Serby	396

STATEMENT BY THE SPEAKER

Use of Props and Exhibits in the Assembly	
Speaker	396

ORDERS OF THE DAY

WRITTEN QUESTIONS

Kowalsky	396
----------------	-----

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

SPECIAL ORDER

ADJOURNED DEBATES

MOTION FOR COMMITTEE OF FINANCE (BUDGET DEBATE)

Yates	396
Bakken	397, 399
Thomson	399
Draude	406
Wartman	408
Wall	411
Kasperski	415