

The Assembly met at 1:30 p.m.

Prayers

## ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

### PRESENTING PETITIONS

**Mr. Elhard:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have in my hand today a petition decrying the possibility of forced legislation, forced amalgamation, and it's from citizens of this province, most specifically from Guernsey, the community of Middle Lake, St. Brieux, and others around the province.

It reads as follows:

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

**Ms. Julé:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I too have petitions from citizens throughout our province who are very upset with the possibility of forced amalgamation of municipalities. And the prayer 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 on municipalities.

And the signatures on this petition, Mr. Speaker, are from Humboldt, from Burr, from Middle Lake, and Pilger, Saskatchewan.

I so present.

**Ms. Draude:** — Mr. Speaker, I also have a petition today calling for cellular coverage for Watson and area. The prayer reads:

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

The people that have signed this petition are from Watson, Watrous, and Eaton.

**Mr. Gantfoer:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise as well on behalf of people of my area, in particularly concerned about the high cost of fuel. The prayer reads as follows:

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 are mostly from my community of Melfort, but also, Mr. Speaker, from Moose Jaw.

I so present.

**Mr. Toth:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As well to present petitions, and presenting a petition in regards to the tax on fuel. Reading the prayer, it reads:

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.

As in duty bound your petitioners will every pray.

Mr. Speaker, the petition I present is signed by individuals from the communities of Melfort, Saskatoon, and Weldon.

**Mr. Peters:** — I also present a petition in regard to fuel costs. And the prayer reads as follows:

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

And it's signed by people from Melfort and Saskatoon.

I so present.

**Ms. Eagles:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too rise today to present a petition on behalf of the Saskatchewan residents regarding the 10 cent per litre reduction in fuel tax. And the prayer reads as follows:

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, Mr. Speaker, this is signed by the people of Melfort, Star City, and Weldon.

I so present. Thank you.

**Mr. Wall:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise again today on behalf of the people in Swift Current and area who are concerned about the Swift Current hospital. And this petition is regarding funding for the hospital. And I'll read the prayer:

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 for approximately \$7.54 million, thereby allowing the Swift Current Health District Board the opportunity to provide improved health care services in the region.

The petition is signed by people from Swift Current and McMahon in the Swift Current area.

Mr. Speaker, I so present.

**Mr. McMorris:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too present petitions on behalf of the citizens of Saskatchewan regarding their disdain for municipal amalgamations, especially forced municipal amalgamations. 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.

These petitioners are from the cities of Regina, and the towns and hamlets of Gray, Estlin, Wilcox, Lang, and many, many more.

I so do present.

**Mr. Weekes:** — Mr. Speaker, I also rise to read a petition against proposed restructuring of Saskatchewan municipalities.

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.

From the citizens of Guernsey and Grayson.

I so present.

**Mr. Brkich:** — Mr. Speaker, I also rise. I have a petition here against forced amalgamation of rural municipalities.

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.

The petitioners are from Plunkett, Humboldt, Lanigan, various other places from Saskatchewan.

I so present.

**Ms. Harpauer:** — Mr. Speaker, I rise to present a petition about citizens concerned about the lack of cellular services in the Watson area. The prayer reads:

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

The petitioners are all from the Watson area.

I so present.

**Mr. Wakefield:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to present a petition against the proposed restructuring of Saskatchewan municipalities. 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.

Signatures come from the Plunkett area.

And I so present.

**Mr. Hart:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too rise to present a petition on behalf of concerned citizens of the province. It deals with the restructuring 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 proposals of any forced amalgamation of municipalities.

And the signatures to this petition come from the community of Humboldt.

I do so present.

**Mr. Allchurch:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I have a petition here regarding concerns about forced amalgamation:

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

And I have petitions from Guernsey, Drake, and Lanigan.

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 cause the federal and provincial governments to reduce fuel taxes;

Of citizens of the province petitioning the Assembly to overrule the Parkland Health Board's decision with regard to the Blaine Lake Medical Clinic; and

Of citizens petitioning the Assembly to halt any plans to proceed with the amalgamation of municipalities; and

Of citizens petitioning the Assembly to provide funding for the Swift Current regional hospital.

#### NOTICES OF MOTIONS AND QUESTIONS

**Mr. Wall:** — Mr. Speaker, I give notice that I shall on Thursday next move first reading of The Fire-fighter Protection from Liability Act, Mr. Speaker.

#### INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

**Mr. Toth:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I would

like to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly an individual who really isn't a stranger in this Assembly as he served the constituency I believe of Regina South from the years of 1978 through 1985.

And, Mr. Speaker, I'm referring to a gentleman currently sitting behind the bar, Mr. Paul Rousseau. And I'd like to ask all members to join me in welcoming Mr. Rousseau back to the Assembly.

**Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Hermanson:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to point out to the members the presence in your gallery of the mayor emeritus of Saskatoon, Mr. Cliff Wright. Mr. Wright, of course, has served Saskatchewan and Saskatoon in many ways. We're happy to have him here with us today.

I believe that he is serving in his capacity on the Joe Garcea committee studying municipal renewal. So I'm particularly glad that's he's in the House today to hear some of the petitions and to hear comments from members in the legislature, in meetings outside of the legislature on that very important issue.

Would all members extend a welcome to the mayor emeritus of Saskatoon, Mr. Cliff Wright.

**Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Hon. Mr. Serby:** — Mr. Speaker, I too want to join with the Leader of the Opposition to welcome Mr. Wright to the Assembly today. I know that Mr. Wright has been described . . . as having a illustrious career as the mayor of one of our finest cities here in our province, and is serving Saskatchewan people very well these days as he travels the province with the Garcea committee and discussing a very important issue about the strengths and the importance of municipalities into the future. So, I too welcome you to the Assembly and ask all of my colleagues to join me in recognizing Mr. Wright.

**Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

## STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

### Cancer Month

**Mr. Addley:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In 1999, Mr. Speaker, an estimated 129,300 new cases of cancer were diagnosed and 64,000 Canadians died from cancer, making it our second leading cause of death. Two more startling facts — one in three Canadians will develop cancer during their lifetime and approximately one in four will die of cancer.

This not very happy news, Mr. Speaker. It is the reason April is traditionally designated as Cancer Month, the month in which we rededicate our efforts to raise money for the elimination of cancer, spearheaded by the work of the Canadian Cancer Society.

This month hundreds of thousands of volunteers will be knocking on doors and organizing special events to reach the Cancer Society's targeted goal of \$20 million. I know all Saskatchewan people will be generous in their donations.

And, Mr. Speaker, despite the alarming statistics I began with, there is good news. Research and education have changed the face of cancer control. Today 55 per cent of all people found with cancer live at least five years past their initial diagnosis. New treatments and new drugs are constantly being discovered.

The daffodil — the sign of spring and a sign of hope — is the emblem of Cancer Month; a fitting symbol for the hope that one day this scourge may be a thing of the past.

On a personal note, I know all members will join me in sending best wishes and a get well soon to my seven-year-old niece, Sarah, who is battling leukemia and got out of the hospital yesterday.

Thank you very much.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

### New Facilities at Shaunavon Industries

**Mr. Elhard:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Thursday, March 30, I had the great pleasure of attending the grand opening of the new facilities of Shaunavon Industries in the town of Shaunavon, that's one of the trading centres of the great southwest. In spite of the fact that the community of Shaunavon lays just outside of the boundaries of Cypress Hills, it does serve as an important economic and business centre for many of my constituents.

And having worked in the community for nearly 14 years and having developed many fine friendships and acquaintances there, I often feel like I am actually the member representing Shaunavon. Consequently I was doubly pleased to be invited to address the audience assembled for the grand opening of the new facilities of that John Deere dealership.

The new structure is state of the art design and construction and has set a new higher standard for farm machinery dealership facilities throughout the nation. A service shop of 20,000 square feet, a parts showroom of 6,000 square feet, a mezzanine for administration of 2,500 feet, and too many other features to enumerate.

But not only is this a great new facility, it's also the sales point for many fine products from short-line companies that this Assembly moved to protect in legislation last December, and during the grand opening event I received a grateful thanks of company representatives in attendance: Bourgault Industries, Highline Manufacturing, Honey Bee Manufacturing, and Farm King which have a distribution centre just outside the city of Regina.

It's my pleasure to be able to recognize the substantial contribution the building of the new facility has had on the economy of the area and the enthusiasm generated among the members of that farming community. They have shown tremendous faith in the community and their customers in spite of the adversity faced by the agriculture sector. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

### Local Economy Booming in Prince Albert

**Mr. Kowalsky:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's nice to hear the good news from Shaunavon and as the member for Prince Albert Carleton, I'd like to share some good news about one of Saskatchewan's most dynamic and progressive communities, and of course I'm referring to the city of Prince Albert whose citizens are enjoying a vibrant local economy.

In Prince Albert, new home construction is a way up in the last few years. New condominiums are also ahead of the previous year's pace. Commercial activity in Prince Albert over the last year exceeded \$5.2 million. Many new businesses have established themselves in Prince Albert in the last year, and existing local businesses are expanding.

For example, I'm pleased to mention the opening of a new Boston Pizza, an exciting new Humpty's restaurant, a new Co-op touchless car wash, a new Staples, an expansion of Minute Muffler, an expansion of Smitty's, a new Anderson Motors dealership, and a recent 1.2 million to the Prince Albert Credit Union, a new A&W. And I could go on, Mr. Speaker.

Needless to say, 1999 was a great year for Prince Albert and 2000 will be even better as new opportunities in forestry will attract skilled workers and entrepreneurs to our city. Downtown redevelopment is proceeding nicely with a construction of a new provincial court house and they are continuing planning for a new performing arts centre.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for this opportunity to speak on behalf of the city of Prince Albert.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

### Elk Breeders Association Annual Meeting

**Mr. Boyd:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the Saskatchewan Elk Breeders Association held their annual meeting and banquet in Saskatoon over the weekend and during their banquet, they made a special presentation to their former executive director Terri Harris. They presented Terri with a special award of merit for her service to the association for a number of years.

During Terri's tenure at the association, it grew dramatically and now plays a major role in the livestock industry here in the province of Saskatchewan. The elk breeders association's loss is the Saskatchewan Party's gain because Terri now works in our office as a very capable communications person.

On behalf of the official opposition, and I'm sure the government members as well, I would like to pass on our special congratulations to Terri for her recognition of an award of merit from the Saskatchewan Elk Breeders Association.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

### Swift Current Pee Wee Broncos

**Mr. McPherson:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today, Mr. Speaker, to ask my colleagues of the legislature in joining with me in giving a huge congratulations to a group of 17 boys.

The Swift Current Pee Wee Broncos hockey team has just wrapped up an impressive season. For only the third time in the last 26 years has the Swift Current Pee Wee Broncos won this triple crown. This means they won first place in the league regular season; they won the league playoffs; and after defeating the Saskatoon Knights last Thursday, they have won the Provincial AA Championship.

The team was blessed with two excellent goal tenders, Anthony Huer and Michael Houde. Out in front of these great goal tenders were 15 of the most focused, driven-by-the-desire-to-win bunch ever to hit the ice.

They are Cade Slusar, Blair Stengler, Nate Wilson, Evan Vossen, Cody Thoring, Devon Shanks, Mark Schweitzer, Justin Menke, Brady McMillan, R.J. Larochelle, Scott Janke, Tanner Gillies, Jarod Erikson, Shane Baum; and of course, Mr. Speaker, I'd be remiss not to mention my own son, Carson McPherson, who has enjoyed an excellent year with the Swift Current Broncos.

A team can only have this amount of success with the leadership, devotion to the boys, and love of the game their coaching staff has shown. And congratulations to head coach, Gary Janke; Dale Slusar, Kent Woods, and Al Larochelle; and team manager, Melinda Baum.

I would ask everyone here to join me today in congratulating the Swift Current Pee Wee Broncos.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

### 1999 Prince Albert Citizen of the Year

**Mr. Wiberg:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure today to rise before this Assembly on behalf of one of my constituents in Saskatchewan Rivers.

Mr. Speaker, Mr. Howard Gange of Anglin Lake, a small community near the Prince Albert National Park was recently named the 1999 Prince Albert Citizen of the Year.

Mr. Speaker, Mr. Gange has been a very dedicated volunteer for 35 years. He was a teacher in Prince Albert at which time he volunteered his time coaching football, volleyball, and curling.

Mr. Speaker, Mr. Gange has also been involved in many monumental projects. They include, the Skates North Summer Figure Skating School, from 1978 to 1982. At that time he was also president of the Prince Albert Figure Skating Club.

Mr. Gange was also involved in the 1992 Saskatchewan Summer Games in Prince Albert as sports chairman. Mr. Gange helped raise funds in 1994 for the Harry Jerome track, and Mr. Gange was facilities coordinator for the Western Canada Figure Skating Championships in 1995.

Mr. Speaker, Howard Gange was also chairman of the games committee for the 1999 Western Canada Summer Games. Mr. Speaker, this event attracted top-notch athletes from across the west to Prince Albert to compete for gold.

Mr. Speaker, Howard Gange was chosen Citizen of the Year for

his many tireless efforts that make Prince Albert a better place to live.

Mr. Speaker, members of the Assembly, please join me in congratulating Mr. Howard Gange on the remarkable achievement of becoming Prince Albert's 1999 Citizen of the Year.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

#### Canadian Postal Employees Curling Classic

**Mr. Harper:** — Thank you. Mr. Speaker, on Sunday I was very happy to represent the Premier and the Government of Saskatchewan at the opening ceremonies of the 34th annual Canadian Postal Employees Curling Classic. This friendly competition amongst rinks from all provinces and territories began on Sunday and will conclude on Saturday.

The competition takes place at the Highland Curling Club, which is in my constituency, so you can be assured the good folks at the Highland under the direction of President Doug Kirk will provide a good show.

This is the fourth time the curling classic has been held in Saskatchewan — twice in Saskatoon, and now for the second time in Regina. Rinks from Saskatchewan have won four times so far and have been runners-up eight times.

Mr. Speaker, anyone who enjoys highly competitive and high-scoring curling games should come out. Because we all know the postal carriers always find the right house.

We also want to welcome all the teams. And I wish them good luck and a safe trip home. Thank you.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

#### ORAL QUESTIONS

##### Student Loan Program

**Mr. Hermanson:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Finance minister. Mr. Minister, I want to quote from your budget speech. And I quote:

For post-secondary students, our student assistance programs are among the best in Canada.

We want our graduating students to stay in Saskatchewan and contribute to shaping our future.

Now I want to talk about what wasn't in the budget speech. While you were crowing about your commitment to students, you neglected to tell the students a not so it'sy-bitsy little detail. You forgot to tell students that you cancelled the six-month interest-free grace period for student loans following graduation.

Mr. Minister, why did you cancel the six-month grace period and why did you try to hide it in last week's budget?

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Hon. Mr. Hagel:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thank the hon. member for the question. And I want to assure the students and the people of Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, that this government is committed to the assurance of the security of the student loan program here in Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, we introduced two years ago the best student loan program in all of Saskatchewan. We provided a higher level of bursary, Mr. Speaker.

And, Mr. Speaker, what I want for the hon. member to know and the students of Saskatchewan to know, that when it comes to student loans in Saskatchewan, we, Mr. Speaker, we provide 50 to \$60 million in student loans.

And, Mr. Speaker, this year alone we provided over \$22 million in bursaries to forgive student loans for the students of Saskatchewan. We are committed to the student loan program here in Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Hermanson:** — Mr. Speaker, you and the minister must not think that Saskatchewan students are so good at math. But they're going to see right through this budget in a hurry.

In the budget speech, the Minister of Finance bragged about a \$350 tax credit for graduating students. But if a graduating student has a \$10,000 student loan at the current student loan interest rate of nine and a half per cent, your latest tax grab will cost them 475 — \$125 more than your so-called tax cut.

Mr. Speaker, we all know that a lot of students have loans greater than \$10,000. Mr. Minister, the truth is your budget didn't cut taxes for students — it increased taxes on students.

Will you reverse the hidden tax grab on Saskatchewan students?

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Hon. Mr. Hagel:** — Mr. Speaker, I repeat that the Government of Saskatchewan is committed to the security of the student loan program. Mr. Speaker, we look at our policies in the context of priorities, and having, Mr. Speaker, to be aware of the implications when the federal government, when the federal government is unable to get its renegotiated agreement with the banks.

Mr. Speaker, I point out that we make priority decisions and we ensure the long-term security of student loans, and we do it by dedicating as well, Mr. Speaker, to students in other ways: increases in money to institutions to keep the rates down, Mr. Speaker. Increases in funding to improve the access for people with disabilities, Mr. Speaker. Increase in funding protection of technology and enhanced learning to bring programs to rural and northern Saskatchewan. Mr. Speaker, the graduate tax credit.

Mr. Speaker, we are dedicating money to the priorities of people of Saskatchewan to ensure the long-term access to post-secondary education and security of the student loan

program.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Hermanson:** — Mr. Speaker, this NDP (New Democratic Party) budget tells students that they're a low priority. Mr. Speaker, physics student learns about Newton's law of physics: for every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction. Now they have to learn the NDP law of taxes: for every tax cut there is an equal or greater tax grab.

Mr. Speaker, these people should be ashamed of themselves. They keep trying to treat last week's budget as a tax cut, and the reality is it contains one tax grab after another. The PST (provincial sales tax) tax grab; the utility rate tax grab; the education mill rate grab; and now the student loan tax grab. Mr. Minister, taxpayers are demanding tax cuts and you keep bringing in one tax grab after another. Mr. Minister, will you reverse this attack on Saskatchewan students?

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Hon. Mr. Hagel:** — Mr. Speaker, I remind the hon. members that when we went back to the provincial election last year, there were two parties that were committed to the priorities of students in post-secondary education in Saskatchewan; they sit on this side. There was one party which sat on its tongue, Mr. Speaker, when it came to post-secondary education; it's over there.

Mr. Speaker, as I said before, Saskatchewan has the best student loan program in all of Canada. There is not a better place in Saskatchewan to be a student than here. Mr. Speaker, the first payment for graduates is not required for six months, that is true today, it's true tomorrow, it's true this fall, it's true next year. Mr. Speaker, there is no better place in Saskatchewan to be a student than right here in the province of Saskatchewan.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Hermanson:** — Well, Mr. Speaker, wasn't that brilliant — wasn't that brilliant, and this guy is in charge of education. Mr. Speaker, my mother taught me that people should not be greedy. She said, don't be greedy — don't be greedy as a pig. Well, Mr. Speaker, this NDP government is greedy and this budget is a pig.

The minister has tried very hard to make the pig look good, but you can put lipstick on a pig but it's still a pig. Why is your greedy government pigging out at students' expense?

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Hon. Mr. Hagel:** — Mr. Speaker, by any measure, the best student loan program in Canada is right here in Saskatchewan.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Hon. Mr. Hagel:** — Mr. Speaker, this is a government that is committed. It is committed to the long-term security of the student loan program. That is our commitment to the students of this province, Mr. Speaker.

Unlike those who said nothing about post-secondary education in the election, Mr. Speaker, there is a priority here. We will remain true to the priorities of the people and the students of Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

### Gas Tax Reduction

**Mr. Wall:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Minister of Finance. It's pretty clear that far too many businesses and organizations are now either planning or executing their exit strategy from the province of Saskatchewan. The news is full of them, Mr. Minister; you will know that.

The official opposition has proposed an amendment to your budget that would offer some immediate, temporary relief for consumers across the province to reduce the gas tax by 5 cents a litre until the price comes down, which analysts say should happen by the end of summer, perhaps early fall.

We would propose that that reduction would be conditional on the federal government making good on their own idea to match that amount. Over a six-month term, Mr. Minister, this would provide tax relief to Saskatchewan families of \$120 million at half the cost. It would benefit all consumers of fuel in the province over the busy spring, summer, and early fall season. Business owners, both large and small, municipalities, school districts, and families would all appreciate a little bit of . . .

**The Speaker:** — Order. Order. I would ask the hon. member to go directly to his question.

**Mr. Wall:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Minister, last week you said you would at least talk to the federal minister about this, or you were open to discussions. Have you done that? Have you talked to your federal counterpart about a tax cut, a gas tax cut, for Saskatchewan people?

**Hon. Mr. Cline:** — Mr. Speaker, this is just the same old, same old Grant Devine funny money, but it fits in well with what we've heard in just five days of sitting in the legislature.

The member from Kelvington says \$380 million more for school boards. The member from Rosetown says \$40 million rollback on utility rate increases. The member from Saltcoats says increase funding for municipal infrastructure and roads — I think about 50 million, Mr. Speaker. The member from Rosetown says no PST expansion — he says that in the House, not outside — \$160 million. That adds up to 630 million.

And I could go on, Mr. Speaker. And when I add up the promises and statements made by these members in this House, including the member from Swift Current, Mr. Speaker, total bill after five days — \$1.272 billion. Billion, Mr. Speaker. The Tories are back.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Wall:** — Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure if you heard through the minister's little trip through fiction there, but the Premier was calling from his seat again the old rant, the tired,

old, sad refrain about Grant Devine.

It's very ironic, Mr. Speaker, it's very ironic because it's this provincial budget, Mr. Speaker, that most closely resembles the last budget of the Devine government. The Devine government expanded the PST to used cars; this minister and this Premier have expanded the PST to used cars. Devine expanded it, Mr. Speaker, to professional services; this Premier's expanded it to professional services.

And the other analogy, Mr. Speaker, is that that budget precluded the death of that government and this budget is the harbinger of the demise of this government, Mr. Speaker.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Wall:** — You don't have to be Nostradamus to see that.

Mr. Speaker, the province of Alberta has said this morning that they will consider reducing the gas tax if the federal government is serious about matching the amount. Now what do you suppose that will do to Saskatchewan border towns, Mr. Speaker . . .

**The Speaker:** — Order, order. Would the member kindly go directly to his question please.

**Mr. Wall:** — I'd be happy to go to the question. It's a very good one.

In light of the fact that the Alberta government has said they will look at this proposal — they're going to look at it — why won't you do the same? Why won't you contact through your federal minister and look at gas tax relief for Saskatchewan motorists?

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Hon. Mr. Cline:** — Mr. Speaker, I note that the member is a little bit sensitive when we start talking about Grant Devine. But it is hard to forget about Grant Devine because we're still paying interest on the debt that Grant Devine ran up with that member from Swift Current, Mr. Speaker, working in that administration here in the Legislative Building and, I think, in Swift Current, paid by the Liquor Board as well, Mr. Speaker.

But I want to say to the member from Swift Current and the members opposite that there is a similarity to what they're saying today and what happened when Mr. Devine was in office. And the similarity is this. When Mr. Devine was in office, \$1 billion deficit every year; one year, 1.2 billion.

These people in the last five days, Mr. Speaker, the cost of their promises and commitments for spending and additional tax cuts, \$1.272 billion, Mr. Speaker. Same old Tories, same old deficit, same old debt.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Wall:** — Mr. Speaker, last week in Lloydminster the price of gas was 10 cents a litre . . . on the Alberta side than it was in Saskatchewan. If Alberta takes the federal government up on its offer there will be a difference between our two provinces of 20

cents a litre — 20 cents a litre. People in border communities will go to Alberta to fill up their tanks and do their shopping.

How do you expect Saskatchewan people and businesses to compete? Mr. Minister, the people of this province were looking for some immediate tax relief from your budget. Our idea, our proposal affords you the opportunity to give them that. Why won't you do that, Mr. Minister? At least call the federal minister.

**Hon. Mr. Cline:** — Mr. Speaker, this is the same politics you saw in the 1980s — trying to buy people's votes with their own money, Mr. Speaker. On a short-term basis, the member said himself yesterday or the day before in this House, that if we took the tax off gasoline or reduced it, it would be a temporary measure, Mr. Speaker — a temporary measure that we would be paying for for a long time like it was during Devine.

And I say this to the member opposite, Mr. Speaker. What we're doing with the gas tax is spending 78 per cent of that revenue on fixing the roads. That's what we need to do, Mr. Speaker.

And when it comes to the federal government, which contributes nothing to fixing the roads in this province, Mr. Speaker, we should be approaching the federal government all right, we should be approaching them to join with us in an infrastructure program to use the gas tax to fix the roads and highways in this province.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

#### Increase in Licence Fees

**Mr. Kwiatkowski:** — Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Environment minister. Mr. Speaker, I have some good news, but as is typically the case with this government, there's also some bad news.

The good news is the weather's getting a lot nicer outside. A lot of people will soon be looking forward to taking summer holidays, pulling out their fishing gear, getting out on the lakes, enjoy some fishing, and try to forget about how this NDP government has destroyed this province.

The bad news is now the NDP have figured out a way to tax fishing. Effective immediately, the NDP has increased resident fishing licences by 50 to 57 per cent — 50 to 57 per cent, Mr. Minister. Mr. Minister, didn't you raise enough taxes on budget day? Do you really need another tax grab on fishing licences?

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Hon. Mr. Belanger:** — I think that member for his question, and it's always good to be able to see that he is planning upon asking questions on a very important portfolio.

Mr. Speaker, it is SERM's (Saskatchewan Environment and Resource Management) mandate to manage all the resources throughout the province and we'll do our very best notwithstanding any advice from that old Tory group. And I want to point out, Mr. Speaker, that we are doing this in co-operation with many people and some of them stakeholders

are involved, and we are advising people as we go along why these increases are necessary. These increases are necessary, and we'll continue doing the right thing for the people of Saskatchewan.

And I challenge that hon. member to not add to the continual debt that that party wants to add to. These increases are fair, and they're consistent with our policy of trying to balance off the incredible costs of managing all the resources of this great province of Saskatchewan.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Kwiatkowski:** — Mr. Minister, if this was such a good idea and it was so well thought out, why didn't you announce it on budget day? Effective immediately annual resident fishing licences have jumped from 16 to \$25 and three-day licences have jumped from 8 to \$12. Altogether this amounts to a \$450,000 tax grab hidden in the NDP's so-called tax cut budget.

Mr. Minister, on budget day the Leader of the Opposition predicted that the NDP would find a way to claw back every dime of its so-called tax cut, the PST tax grab, the utility rate tax grab, the property rate tax grab, the pet food and drill bit tax grab, and now the \$450,000 fishing tax grab.

Mr. Minister, will you cancel your new \$450,000 fishing tax?

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Hon. Mr. Belanger:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The obvious answer is no. And I want to thank that member for his question, and to also point out, Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan is blessed with well over 60,000 beautiful, pristine lakes, Mr. Speaker, and we are the envy of Western Canada.

And when you make . . . Mr. Speaker, when he makes references, when he makes references to other provinces, my point is this, is that we have twice as many lakes and twice as many users as in Alberta. And if he likes to make comparisons to Alberta fishing law, then I would suggest, Mr. Speaker, he pack his bag and takes the rest of his Tory cronies and head to Alberta. We live in Saskatchewan.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Kwiatkowski:** — Mr. Speaker, the NDP likes to do things in pairs. They have an education and a health tax. They have a SaskEnergy rate hike and a SaskTel rate hike. They have their two Liberal cabinet ministers, hack and flack. And so of course this isn't just a fishing tax — it's a fishing and a coyote tax.

Mr. Speaker, the NDP has introduced a brand new \$45 coyote licence — good for two coyotes. I guess that means if you go out and find four coyotes gnawing on one of your cows, you can shoot two of them, and then you have to run into town and buy another licence.

Mr. Minister, you know full well that both your fish advisory committee and your wildlife advisory committee weren't even advised of these new tax grabs. On top of everything else, why

do you need a new fishing and coyote tax?

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Hon. Mr. Belanger:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again I thank the member for his question and again I want to point out that there are many demands within SERM. One of those is to balance all the economic interests as well as social interests associated with the wildlife and certainly with the land base that we enjoy in the province of Saskatchewan.

And my point is this, is that we are going to continue balancing all the interests and all the demands on this great province of Saskatchewan and the rich abundance of resources that we enjoy. We'll continue doing that, and we'll continue working with all the groups that are involved.

But sooner or later, Mr. Speaker, the point of the matter is that we have to make a tough position known. The fact of the matter is this province does and will always continue going along the way of balancing not only the interests on the monetary side, but certainly the wildlife and the protection of the environment.

So my point is this, the only thing fishy going on at this question, Mr. Speaker, is their obvious effort, their obvious effort to try and discredit this government that has had seven consecutive balanced budgets.

#### Executive Council Staff

**Mr. Gantefoer:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, a year ago today we were all getting ready for a provincial election. The Liberals were promising to get rid of hacks and flacks. In fact the Liberal leader said he would cut the number of staff in the Premier's office by 75 per cent — 75 per cent, Mr. Speaker.

Meanwhile the NDP were attacking the Liberal stand on health care. And the Premier was calling Liberal Health critic Harvey McLane, two-tier Harvey. Now just a year later, the Premier and the Liberal leader have joined forces. They're expanding the size of the Premier's office by appointing two-tier Harvey to advise the Premier on health care policy.

Mr. Speaker, my question is to either one of these co-premiers. Would either one of you stand up and explain this complete reversal of policy in your position? Why do you need Harvey McLane in the Premier's office?

**Hon. Mr. Romanow:** — Mr. Speaker, the hon. member opposite, I think after a few years in the legislature should learn — if he doesn't, I hope he takes some friendly advice from me — that the most important thing for any politician especially a remade Saskatchewan Party so-called member is some form of credibility. And that's what the member does not have on health care, and that's what that party opposite does not have — any credibility on health care.

Here is what the Leader of the Saskatchewan Party says, quote: a plan to invite private health providers is one of the policies that they pass at their conventions.

Here's what they say on February 23, '99, quote:



Hermanson also likes one of the new party's first proposals to have the federal government surrender its responsibility for the Canada Health Act to the provinces.

Here's another one, quote from *The Village Press*:

Saskatchewan is experiencing a serious health crisis and could do well looking at the Alberta government's experience with private clinics, according to Ben Heppner, MLA from Rosthern.

It's them who believe in two-tier — not us.

**The Speaker:** — Order.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Gantefoer:** — Mr. Speaker, on September 16, the people of Arm River decided what role they want Harvey McLane to play in the provincial government — none. But of course, neither the NDP nor the Liberals were willing to accept the voters' verdict. So they had to invent a new job for Harvey — special adviser to the coalition government.

You know the NDP cancelled its summer job program for students, but it keeps coming up with make-work projects for defeated Liberals: Neil Collins on the SaskPower Board, David Hulyappa on the SCN (Saskatchewan Communications Network) Board, and now two-tier Harvey in the Premier's office.

Mr. Premier, how can you justify this make-work project for these Liberal losers when you won't help students?

**Hon. Mr. Romanow:** — Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker, did I not hear just a few moments ago before question period, the hon. member from Kindersley praising the services of Terri Harris? What in the world is the Saskatchewan Party doing making jobs for these losers of the Saskatchewan Party in your caucus?

Why do you waste taxpayers' money on the losers that are over there? Why don't you start spending money into proper policy development. Don't lecture us about losers.

We have the person who's the president of SAHO (Saskatchewan Association of Health Organizations), a member who's had experience in health care policy, a member of this Legislative Assembly who has, while there has been disagreement in some areas, served well and honourably as a member and he serves a coalition government.

That is the role of Mr. Harvey McLane, and he's going to carry it out with distinction, unlike the losers that you have in your caucus.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Gantefoer:** — Mr. Speaker, the Premier took great pleasure for four years in calling Mr. McLane, two-tier Harvey. And you now are sitting there extolling his virtues.

But I can understand why you have twice as many people that you need in your office — you have twice as many campaign

promises to break now that you have this coalition. You have twice as many patronage appointments to hand out. You have twice as many things to tax. And you have not quite finished the job of destroying the health care system in this province.

So the job description is pretty simple — breaking promises, handing out patronage, raising taxes, and wrecking health care. Maybe a defeated Liberal is the right person for the job. God knows they do enough of that in their own party.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Gantefoer:** — So when I think of it you're also doing an excellent job, Mr. Premier; why do you need the help of Harvey McLane?

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Hon. Mr. Romanow:** — So, Mr. Speaker, perhaps Ms. Terri Harris is exactly the correct person for the Saskatchewan Party, making up all the wrong questions based on all the wrong facts; making up all kinds of requests for every kind of tax reduction under the sun now amounting to 1.2 billion debt, thanks to you.

Perhaps Ms. Terri Harris, a defeated candidate that the voters rejected but finding her way back in government again, is the right person in propagating all the wrong, false information.

And perhaps — not perhaps — she's bang on in one thing. She's onside with you and your Leader of the Opposition, the Reform Party member, formally as he was, and the supporter of the current Canadian Alliance Party — they're onside for doing away with the Canada Health Act and the two-tiered system.

We're for health care, universal health care. You're against it, you're against it.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

## INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

### Bill No. 15 — The Department of Justice Amendment Act, 2000

**Hon. Mr. Axworthy:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that Bill 15, The Department of Justice 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. 16 — The Justice Statutes (Consumer Protection) Amendment Act, 2000

**Hon. Mr. Axworthy:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that Bill 16, The Justice Statutes (Consumer Protection) Amendment Act, 2000 be now introduced and read a first time.

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

## ORDERS OF THE DAY

## WRITTEN QUESTIONS

**Mr. Kowalsky:** — Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the government I'm prepared to supply the answer to question 43. And by leave of the Assembly I want to supply the answers to all of these questions starting from 44 through to 68, Mr. Speaker, from a government that's showing itself to be open, accountable, and responsible, and very happy.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**The Speaker:** — Answers to question nos. 43 through 68 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. Kwiatkowski:** — Well thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last night after the House adjourned I received a number of calls from constituents saying that they'd heard what a wonderful speech I had made. How it was perhaps the most accurate and detailed historical account of a half century of failed socialism. There were in fact suggestions today that I should repeat it in its entirety, both for its educational value and for the further edification of the members opposite.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Kwiatkowski:** — Well, I'm tempted, Mr. Speaker, but I think instead I would like to speak to a couple of points that I think are the epitome of what this budget's all about and what this government has done.

The first is the hospital in Carrot River. With the closing of their hospital, for all intents and purposes, the community of Carrot River has good grounds to make an application to the Guinness Book of World Records because they're really left with nothing more than the largest and most expensive telephone booth in all of Saskatchewan.

The other incident that came to mind was a couple of weeks ago in Saskatoon, I called for a taxi. The taxi was driven by a young Bosnian Muslim refugee — that's a part of the world that I've always been interested in. And I was absolutely fascinated to get his first-hand perspective of the events over in Bosnia-Herzegovina over the course of the last 10 years and how it is that he managed to escape. And I really enjoyed my visit with him.

I asked him, as we were nearing the end of our conversation, what he thought of Saskatchewan and I was shocked at this

answer. Because typically when someone comes from the part of the world where they have experienced hardship to the degree that this young man had, you don't expect an answer like: it's okay, but you're taxes are too high.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Kwiatkowski:** — So I think in a lot of ways these two things epitomize the very situation that we're facing here. A young man who knows that there's a cost of freedom, who knows that there is, but just didn't expect that he was going to have to pay through his nose for the rest of his life. And a community with nothing left but a glorified . . .

**The Speaker:** — Order, order. I ask all hon. members to please come to order, in order to allow the member to make his presentation.

**Mr. Kwiatkowski:** — As I was saying, Mr. Speaker, and a building in Carrot River that is now nothing more than a glorified telephone booth.

So for those reasons I will not be supporting the budget but I will be supporting the amendment as proposed by the member from Rosetown-Biggan. Thank you.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Ms. Harpauer:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I very much appreciate the opportunity to stand up today and address the budget for the constituents of Watrous. Congratulations to our government — finally the income tax cut that the Saskatchewan Party has been suggesting since the time they were founded.

The members opposite implemented yet another innovative idea of the Saskatchewan Party. The only problem is they still don't get it. They still don't know how tax cuts will generate population and economic growth. So more true to their nature, they decided to tax somewhere else.

And now they sit back pleased as punch with themselves and call it an historical budget. If they had indeed given the Saskatchewan people a straightforward tax cut, it would have been historical for this government. But that's not quite what they did.

Our net taxpayers in this province are far below the national average, and our non-taxpayers are far above the national average. And as our Health minister pointed out yesterday, our population is aging. In other words, our youth are leaving the province.

Two tax cuts would have started to turn this around and the Saskatchewan's economy would have grown because of it. But our NDP government chose to wipe out the hopes of this by expanding the PST.

This government is truly amazing, Mr. Speaker. When the people of Saskatchewan have told the government loud and clear that they need tax relief today, they are being told in the budget: pay more taxes today; we promise relief tomorrow. Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, tomorrow may be too late for many of our Saskatchewan families and they'll be gone to

Alberta.

The nurses were on the steps of this very building just last spring telling our government that relief must come today. And the farmers were here this winter telling our government that relief must come today. And the teachers are right on the heels of the farmers, telling this government that relief must come today. And soon the different sectors of this province will have to take a number and line up to come to the legislature to protest; and yet this government says, trust us, relief will come next year.

And why won't the Saskatchewan people buy this? Well only last year the government told us that cutting taxes was reckless and unrealistic, good politics but not good government. And now today they say it is the best budget idea in the history of this province, just trust us.

Only six months ago, this government promised tax cuts of a thousand dollars per family without expanding the PST and yet they still say, just trust us. Only three months ago, this government told us there was no money in the slush fund. They said in order to help the farm families, they'd have to borrow money and increase everybody's taxes.

Now they reveal that they actually have 700 million in their slush fund and they were hiding that from the taxpayers, they were hiding that from the Provincial Auditor. And yet they still say, just trust us.

So the Saskatchewan people are expected to pay an additional \$160 million in taxes in the upcoming year and they're supposed to trust this NDP government that they will see tax relief in the years that follow. I don't think they're going to believe it, Mr. Speaker.

The NDP government has difficulty remembering their promises for only sixty short months . . . six short months ago. Why on earth would the Saskatchewan people trust them to keep their promises four years from now?

So what actually happened in Saskatchewan at midnight on March 29? Well according to *The StarPhoenix* headline, "PST confusion reigns in post-budget reflection." The article goes on to say:

(1430)

Confusion and frustration reigned Thursday as Saskatchewan residents tried to come to grips with charging and paying the new expanded provincial sales tax. Business people . . . expressed outrage.

An interview with an auto body businessman said:

"It's going to hurt the auto body business quite a bit," said Mike Oleksyn, owner of Antique Auto Body in Saskatoon. "People are already not fixing most of their cars because they have a \$700 deductible."

Oleksyn said many shops, particularly small ones . . . (like) his, do not even make a 13 per cent profit. Essentially, he believes the government is robbing Peter to pay Paul by

charging more PST while reducing personal income tax. "I think I'm shutting down."

A furniture warehouse owner says:

Rob Hill, owner of Great West Warehouse, says it's going to be difficult tallying up receipts when people buy more than one item at . . . (a) store.

Because the first \$300 of every used piece of furniture and appliance is tax exempt, the cashier will have to assess the 6 per cent PST on the amount above \$300 . . .

So that's taxing \$90 of a \$390 purchase.

"(We'll) . . . have to go through that on every item," Hill said. "Once again, we're doing the government's paperwork (for them).

A greenhouse owner:

Keith Clement, of Clement Farms Greenhouses, does not carry any items, such as fertilizer, on which he has previously had to charge (PST) . . . Now, his business will have to get a PST number from the province and learn the province's system for charging PST.

"It's all that book work . . ." Clement said. "It's going to force prices higher and that's all it's going to do."

A car dealer in my own constituency says:

"They're double-dipping," said Don Campbell of Mainline Motors in Watrous. "I've got a yard full of cars, 3 to \$4 million worth of used inventory that the tax has been paid on and now they're going to make the consumer pay the tax on that again. To me, that isn't fair."

Because of the consumers' resistance to sales tax, a car with the tax paid is more valuable product from the dealer's point of view. As a result, the dealers are prepared to pay more to get them and are more likely to put money into them to prepare the cars for sale. But with the new tax applied, those cars have effectively devalued.

Mr. Speaker, for this dealership alone, he must overnight try to recuperate \$240,000 of PST.

The article goes on to say, by announcing a 6 per cent increase in vehicles, that doesn't mean someone is going to pay it.

Had the government simply declared that existing inventories would not be affected by this tax hike, the problem would not exist. For the accountants and lawyers, which is what a lot of these politicians are, they give them until July 1 before there is a change . . . or a charge on their services.

"Why don't they give it to us so that we can move our inventory out, or give us a 6 per cent tax credit?"

Campbell took his concerns to the government this week, but he was told — and can you believe this, Mr. Speaker? — he was

told by this government, the train has already left the station.

Yes indeed, Mr. Speaker. The train has already left the station. The socialist NDP train has already left the station, leaving confusion, chaos, and frustration in its path.

I know the phone has been ringing off the hook in my constituency office in Lanigan, and it wasn't calls from happy little taxpayers all excited about a truly historical budget.

Implementing the tax cuts in this budget, an average family earning \$25,000 will save \$121 in taxes in the first year. That calculates out to approximately \$10 a month. But wait, there was a \$3 a month increase in SaskTel rates, so that reduces the family savings to \$7 per month.

And let's not forget the \$5 a month SaskEnergy increase, so that reduces the savings to only \$2 a month.

The PST on non-prescription drugs alone will snap the \$2 back into the government coffers, and that's not paying the taxes on the pet food necessary to keep little Scotty the dog.

So in the fact the average family in Saskatchewan will realize a negative savings in the first year of this so-called historical budget.

This whole shell game which the NDP government plays of now you see it, now you don't, reminds me of an analogy that I've read on governments.

In communism you have two cows; the government will take both of them and give you part of the milk. In socialism you have two cows; the government takes both of them and gives you part of the milk.

In fascism you have two cows; the government takes both cows and sells you the milk. In Nazism you have two cows; the government takes both of your cows and shoots you.

In bureaucracy you have two cows; the government takes both of them, shoots one, milks the other, then pours the milk down the drain. In capitalism you have two cows; you sell one of them and buy a bull.

And in democracy everyone has the opportunity to have two cows and a vote is taken as to what to do with them and whatever the majority decides to do, you do.

This budget demonstrates a few of these concepts but certainly none of those are democracy. The majority of Saskatchewan people did not vote in the last election for this government, Mr. Speaker, and I could assure they would not vote for an expanded PST.

Mr. Speaker, we've been accused of many things by the members opposite throughout this budget debate. And I've repeatedly heard them chant the Saskatchewan Party only wants to spend, spend, spend. And quite truthfully, there are areas in the budget where we feel the NDP government should spend more money. However, there are many areas where the money should simply be managed more responsibly.

It's interesting, Mr. Speaker, that the members opposite often talk about being responsible but they never mention it in the same sentence as good management.

I've also heard the members opposite accusing us of being irresponsible to our children because of the debt we've created in this province. That's very, very interesting considering that I have never met Grant Devine, and the majority of us were not involved in politics when he was premier and when the debt that the NDPs use as their excuse for every screw-up that they do, when it was created. I have small children at home, Mr. Speaker, and I take it as a personal insult when I'm accused by the NDP government of being irresponsible for my children's future.

How responsible was this government when it hid a \$700 million slush fund from the Saskatchewan taxpayers and the Provincial Auditor, when the farm families pleaded with them to spend only 250 million of it.

They not only didn't care about those farm children's futures, they also set a fine example of honesty by denying the existence of the money in the slush fund. In fact they went so far as to tell the taxpayers of Saskatchewan they would have to raise all their taxes by an additional thousand dollars if they were to help farm families. And if you doubt this, a headline in *The Leader-Post* today is an article on "Farm crisis may hurt children."

I wouldn't exactly be sitting on the other side of this House accusing too many people of being irresponsible for our children's future, not after what they themselves did just a few months ago.

So now after all this time and all their promises, has the budget set out to help our vital agriculture industry? Very little, Mr. Speaker. There is actually less for agriculture in this year's budget than there was in last year's. There is no mention of a desperately needed safety net program for our farmers — another display of the NDP's irresponsibility for our farm children and another promise forgotten.

But there is the removal of the cap on the fuel tax rebate. That is a very positive step and it will be helpful to some farmers. However it will not cost the province a great deal of money because most farms operate on diesel and not gas.

There's also a 25 million per year reduction on property tax for the year 2000 and 2001 — an average of \$440 per farm. Like the rest of this budget however, it sounds great at first, but it's only more smoke and mirrors.

Education's getting desperate, Mr. Speaker. SSTA (Saskatchewan School Trustees Association) is telling us that their increased funding in the budget is going to be absorbed very quickly by the increase for teachers' wages, and the increased PST they will have to pay for services and transportation alone. The budget doesn't even begin to address the need that's grown in our education system. And our Education ministers simply brushed these concerns aside and suggested that the school districts will just have to up their mill rates. And again this NDP government claims the fame and passes the blame.

The government will take credit for their assistance for farm property taxes, and then they will deny responsibilities when it's snapped away by the school divisions. It won't be their fault — and it never is. I'm sure if they could find a way they would blame the unreasonably high education tax on agriculture property on the federal government — or better yet, let's blame that on Grant Devine too.

Mr. Speaker, I told this government . . . I know this government cannot understand how we can praise some areas of the budget while criticizing others. I find this odd considering that they themselves chose to cherry pick Vicq. But since we have to vote on the budget on its entirety, I find I cannot do so.

It does not offer any immediate tax relief for Saskatchewan families, and Saskatchewan families need tax relief today — not four years from now. The amendment put forward by our Leader of the Opposition does give immediate tax relief to our Saskatchewan families, and it is doable, and it's affordable, and we can do it today.

Therefore, I support the amendment. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Kowalsky:** — Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, this is a very important debate — the debate on the budget. Because what this does is the debate lays out the government long-term plan, plus the plan for the next year, and at the same time it shows us, through their speeches and through their comments, it shows us where the opposition is going.

Mr. Speaker, the people of Saskatchewan want to know where this government is going. They also want to know where this opposition is going and what direction they propose to go in.

Mr. Speaker, I have listened, I have listened to many of the opposition comments, and I have summarized some of the comments, summarized some of the comments that the members have made. And I want to repeat some of these here today.

Mr. Speaker, if there's any one thing that stands out in my mind after the first three days of debate is the figure \$700 million. Mr. Speaker, I heard the Leader of the Opposition use that figure, \$700 million, 12 times in three days — 12 times. I kind of got to thinking he must be, he must be obsessed. What is it, what is it that is obsessing him about \$700 million? He cannot stand a surplus, Mr. Speaker, nor can he stand a long-term plan. He wants to spend it.

Mr. Speaker, before I progress I want to mention that the government has budgeted for a surplus of nine and a half million dollars. And in addition to that, the government has budgeted to put \$405 million into a stabilization fund to be drawn down over the next four years to 290 million. It's to be drawn down, Mr. Speaker, in the case of forest fires, in case of drought, or some other disaster or unforeseen situation where the . . . in order to make sure that the services that the government provides will not be affected.

Mr. Speaker, I want to, I want to check their comments and go

through some of their comments because it shows their intentions. Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition has managed, has used the figure of \$700 million at least 12 times. And you know what, the other members — along with him — have found a way to spend it and I'm going to detail it to you.

What I've seen here, Mr. Speaker, is it, it's like they've been given this debit card and they're swiping this debit card through the swiper and each time, there's a certain amount of money that goes out of the budget.

Mr. Speaker, here's the way it works. Swipe number one, the leader himself, the member from Rosetown-Biggan would do away with the PST expansions. Swipe number one — \$160 million. Swipe number two, Mr. Speaker, the member from Kelvington-Wadena, \$380 to education — swipe number two. Take that card now.

Swipe number three, Mr. Speaker, the member from Swift Current. First it's just a little swipe; he wants seven and a half million dollars for his hospital over and above any other hospital in the province. The member from Swift Current, Mr. Speaker, swipe number two for him, the fuel tax reduction — 60 million more dollars. The member for Swift Current again, Mr. Speaker. A swipe for the police officers — \$14 million. The government has provided, Mr. Speaker, has provided \$2 million so far; part of the strategy to meet the province. That's going to give us 25 more officers. He would do it all in this one year. Another \$14 million.

(1445)

Of course they'd all like to get into the picture, Mr. Speaker. The member for Last Mountain-Touchwood, swipe, partnership program back in — another half a million dollars. Not to be outdone, my friend and colleague from Sask Rivers wants to see that highway from Saskatoon to P.A. (Prince Albert) paved. So do I but he would do it now. Swipe — another \$40 million gone.

When you add them up, Mr. Speaker, when you add them all up — just those in three days in debate, \$662 million — \$662 million. And that's not counting the amount that the member for Saltcoats wants for highways in addition to this. That's not counting the undoing or the freezing of utilities from the Leader of the Opposition. That's not counting the hard decision about the court houses. That's not counting what the member of Carrot River spoke about today, about fishing licences, Mr. Speaker, another half a million dollars.

What's the result, Mr. Speaker? These members — these members — would swipe out of the budget the entire stabilization fund of 405 million. They would swipe out the entire \$9 million surplus. And, Mr. Speaker, together with that, they would swipe away our children's future with a debt of \$245 million. In how much time, Mr. Speaker? In three days of debate.

Mr. Speaker, not to say that the ideas that the members have brought are bad ideas. But what I'm saying is there has to be some responsibility and there has to be some accountability on their side. Where will the money come from? What are they planning to cut back? Or what are they planning to tax to make

up for it?

Because with seven swipes of this debit card they would create a Devine-type deficit. Mr. Speaker, I think it's very fortunate that the Sask Party is in opposition. Because I can tell you that this government will not allow anybody to swipe away our children's future.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Kowalsky:** — Mr. Speaker, a couple of comments about the budget in general. First of all I want to say that it's a sensible budget because it provides a sustainable plan for Saskatchewan. It's fiscally responsible, it's balanced, and it provides more money where it's needed.

I'm pleased to see, Mr. Speaker, that the budget speaks directly to the problems faced by farmers in Saskatchewan. The crop insurance premiums are going down. That's a big help to farmers in Saskatchewan.

Secondly, all of the fuel taxes, all of the fuel taxes that farmers will have to pay, are gone in this budget. Farmers never did have to pay diesel tax for quite a few years, and part of the tax on gasoline was rebatable. But as of now, all taxes on fuel for farmers are gone.

Mr. Speaker, a third thing that farmers are very pleased about is the help in this budget to deal with their property taxes. There are three things there, Mr. Speaker, that are good for the farmers of Saskatchewan.

The third thing I want to mention, Mr. Speaker, about this budget is it addresses issues which are confronting health. Perhaps the biggest issue in health right now, Mr. Speaker, is the funding. This budget speaks to funding of this by adding \$63 million more to the Health budget. But in addition, it speaks to the federal government and says please, please up the ante from 13 per cent to something approaching 50 per cent. And our Minister of Health ought to be commended for the tremendous job she did at the ministers' conference this last week.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Kowalsky:** — I like the idea, Mr. Speaker, I like the idea of \$150 million Health transition fund because there are areas in the province that have fallen behind. Some of the places and some of the building and the infrastructure needs some help, and that will certainly take care of that.

Mr. Speaker, lastly, the new taxation system. What a great idea. That flat tax, eliminated. That debt reduction surtax, eliminated. That high income surtax, eliminated, Mr. Speaker. Now the income tax system, by being changed, is now much more progressive. The low-income people will be much better off particularly because of the PST rebate and because their exemptions are going up to \$8,000. If you're a senior, to \$9,000. Middle-income people will be better off, far better off, and will save up to a thousand dollars per year after total implementation.

Mr. Speaker, there is an incentive in this budget for

high-income people to stay in Saskatchewan. Without a doubt, Mr. Speaker, I will be supporting the budget and I will be urging all members in the Assembly to support this budget.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Ms. Julé:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I would like to say that it is indeed my pleasure to rise on behalf of the good people of the Humboldt constituency to comment on this so-called historic budget. Incidentally, Mr. Speaker, the only history being written here is the final chapter of this NDP's sorry regime.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Ms. Julé:** — Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest yesterday to the member from Regina Qu'Appelle Valley as he told all of us a fairy tale about a big bad wolf. Now although I thought that the fable about the big bad wolf was going to be a commentary on the recent provincial budget. The only thing that relates to the big, bad wolf is the hot air that blows from the NDP members opposite.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Ms. Julé:** — Although, Mr. Speaker, it is noteworthy to mention that there were some significant, historic comments made recently by the people of Saskatchewan. And what they commented on, in fact 60 per cent of those people commented on, was their constant and ongoing support for the Saskatchewan Party which resulted in 25 members voted in to sit on this side of the House representing the people of this province.

Mr. Speaker, the people of Saskatchewan were hoping that last fall's election would be a wake-up call to this government. But this government chooses to remain in a deep, deep fog. And it appears that the only thing that the people of our province can wake up to is to higher taxes.

Mr. Speaker, the members opposite talk about how grateful the people of Saskatchewan should be that this socialist regime is cutting their taxes. When in fact, the only thing that people will remember is the \$160 million tax grab that was crammed down their throat.

Mr. Speaker, the Finance minister has been gloating about his income tax cuts, but the fact of the matter is that the people of our province here just simply don't believe him. Because they know that when it actually comes down to it, and time to cut taxes by the minister, this government will find one way or another to once again backdoor tax the people of the province.

Since last fall, Mr. Speaker, we have seen in Saskatchewan a continual and gradual decrease in the lack of confidence for NDP governing philosophy. This budget does absolutely nothing — nothing — to reverse that trend.

Where is the hope for the people of our province? Where are the dreams? Where is the optimism? No where, no where to be seen, Mr. Speaker.

The people of Saskatchewan, they were looking for a change.

They were looking for tax relief, looking for hope. Instead, we got a tired, old administration trying to convince the people of Saskatchewan that an immediate tax increase, the PST expansion, was good for them. And the promise of tax cuts in the future.

But, Mr. Speaker, the fact of the matter — no one believes it. No one believes that this government will do anything good for them any longer.

All the talk about goodwill by this administration has evaporated. I believe it is the result of the NDP's continual cynical moves.

The closure of hospitals. The downgrade of hospitals to health centres and then forcing those health centres to cut services. The underfunding in education and health. The delusion that they impose upon people about health services they may or they may not get.

And, Mr. Speaker, at this point I know that the people of the Humboldt constituency are wondering whether or not they are in fact going to have the services in place at their hospital that they do have now. Because the antics of this government in the past are giving them some indication that their area there is not valued by this government either.

They have had the promise in my constituency, by this government, of a farm safety net. And what has the government delivered? They've delivered nothing.

We in the Saskatchewan Party opposition have proposed that a 10 cent tax reduction on fuel be put in place. Will this government do that for the people of this province, for the farmers of this province, for all people in this province? We are hoping that the Minister of Finance will look at that. Because it truly does mean whether people will have the opportunity to be able to continue with their operations and their work.

And, Mr. Speaker, we have seen recently the closure of some of the Queen's Bench court houses in our province. Humboldt has seen that. It really does shock me that that happened because in the past the government of the day have constantly said that the Humboldt area is thriving. The Humboldt area is an area of economic development. Even the Stabler report mapping out the areas that are viable economically have situated Humboldt right in the middle of economic viability, economic growth.

And what do we have now? We have this government cutting out Queen's Bench court. What do you think is going to happen to the people of that constituency, of that area, that need court services? What do you think the lawyers are going to think? What do you think they're going to do eventually? What do you think the businesses there, in that community, are going to do when they have to access a lawyer and they have to access court houses? Most likely they are going to bypass the lawyers in our good community of Humboldt and go to Saskatoon.

That is not any indication of your government giving credence to the viability and the economic success of Humboldt. Just a couple of years ago the highway maintenance office was closed in Humboldt. What kind of commentary is that on a growing community?

How do you expect the people of the Humboldt constituency to believe that you are really looking out for and considering economic growth and considering the people in those areas that are trying so very hard in every way that they can to continue their growth. And so, Mr. Speaker, we have to wonder what is going to happen with our hospitals? What is going to happen with the services that we now enjoy?

The trend gives me some indication that we are not going to be valued there either. So I wish that the minister would have spoken clearly about what is going to happen to some of these communities that are 5,000 or 10,000 like Humboldt and Weyburn. What is your intention for those communities? You seem to think that your government is the one that dictates whether these communities can continue or they cannot continue.

That is not the Saskatchewan way. The Saskatchewan way is the people built those communities from the ground up. The people have the right to self-determination. They do not, and will not, tolerate a government with a heavy hand tearing them apart and pulling them down.

Mr. Speaker, cynical moves like we have seen from this government, like appointing Louise Simard as CEO (chief executive officer) of SAHO and expecting everyone to say it's fine. Fine to a point. Former NDP cabinet minister . . .

**The Deputy Speaker:** — Order, order. I recognize the hon. member from North Battleford on a point of order.

**Hon. Mr. Hillson:** — Mr. Deputy Speaker, unless I heard wrong, I distinctly recall the hon. member from Humboldt saying this government appointed the executive director of SAHO. This government of course has no input into the appointment of persons in SAHO.

**Mr. D'Autremont:** — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, the member's opposite point of order is not well taken and in fact though, Mr. Speaker . . .

**The Deputy Speaker:** — Order, I will be giving the hon. member for Cannington an opportunity to make his point respecting the point of order raised by the hon. member from the Battleford, but I remind all hon. members that whether the point is well taken or not is a decision to be taken by the Chair, not by any hon. members.

**Mr. D'Autremont:** — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I would argue that the point of order that the member raises is not well taken, not valid. And that SAHO, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is a creature of the provincial government, funded fully by the provincial government with provincial tax dollars and, Mr. Speaker, does have a direct bearing on the operation of SAHO . . .

(1500)

**The Deputy Speaker:** — I thank the hon. member for North Battleford for raising the point of order, and I thank the hon. member for Cannington for speaking to the point of order that was raised.

There is, frankly, one fact that I will be checking, and then I'll bring back a ruling as soon as is reasonably possible. In the meantime we'll allow the member for Humboldt to continue her speech.

**Ms. Julé:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Ms. Julé:** — Mr. Speaker, whether or not we agree that the government has appointed this member as the CEO of SAHO, or whether we believe that the government has influenced this appointment, makes no difference. The fact is this is the very person who put the so-called helmet . . . health reform into place, the wellness model into place. The whole area of health care has been decimated under this person's instruction. And now, the very person who closed 52 rural hospitals and told us it was good for us, is now being reappointed. That very person is the person we are now asked to trust to manage health care once again.

Mr. Speaker, the Premier promised that he would never appoint former MLAs to government boards, and then he went and appointed Louise. I have to ask, Mr. Speaker, does that build trust? No, it certainly does not. Does it build confidence? I don't think so. Does it build hope? No. But what does it do, Mr. Speaker? What it does is continue to erode the public's confidence in government and the NDP.

Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, there is more. Just last week, the Liberal candidate, Neil Collins, that was trounced in Estevan last fall, was appointed to the board of SaskPower. And again, we are all to believe that this is fine.

Yesterday, Harvey McLane — two-tiered Harvey — the former member from Arm River who was soundly defeated in the last election, lands on his feet also with a big patronage job from the coalition. His yearly wage, Mr. Speaker, might end up to be just about enough to operate a safe house. But what does that matter to this government?

We're talking about the needs of children in this province. We have people being appointed whose wage is going to be comparable to many, many programs such as a safe house that could be put in place in this province to assist the disadvantaged children of our province.

And again, Mr. Speaker, we are asked to say it's okay. We are all asked to say that all of those antics are okay.

Well, Mr. Speaker, this is all about power and the maintenance of power. That's what it's about. The politics of fear, the politics of diversion, the politics of divide and conquer, the politics, Mr. Speaker, of the NDP.

Mr. Speaker, the Finance minister says this government wants to look towards the future. But when asked to defend his budget, he pulls out newspaper clippings from the 1980s — 20 years old, 20-year-old newspaper clippings. When he is defending the PST expansion, he says that it was Grant Devine — that's what Grant wanted to do.

The NDP has been in office for 10 years, Mr. Speaker, and they

still want to fight the battles of 1982 and 1991 again. Mr. Speaker, given the backward budget, I suppose that's all that they have to cling to.

Mr. Speaker, our children's future is at stake, and this is all that we have to offer? This government has cut funding to K to 12 education by hundreds of millions of dollars since 1991. And how does the Minister of Education respond to all of this? Well, he says, let's raise the mill rate. All they have to offer our children is tax increases, Mr. Speaker. Tax increases in every area — expanded PST, exorbitant utility rates, and fees for everything from A to Z.

Incidentally, Mr. Speaker, we have seen how concerned this government is for our children's future that they cut a job program that many students rely on for the summer . . . their summer employment. But then they blame the federal government for this because the NDP here are incapable of taking any responsibility for their own socialist actions.

Mr. Speaker, this government has built walls around our province. NDP backbenchers there are giving advice to parents not to share the good news that other provinces like Alberta are experiencing. Don't wish for anything better is what they're telling them. Don't encourage our children to look around and look beyond. Don't encourage them to reach for success. Don't provide them with any hope. In fact don't tell them about anywhere, anywhere in the world or anything in the world but Saskatchewan.

Where is the vision in that view of the world, Mr. Speaker? Can you imagine, can you imagine what the pioneers that built our great nation and our province would think about that ludicrous view of the future?

Mr. Speaker, government is supposed to be about providing vision, but it is blatantly clear that there is none here on the part of the NDP. This is all about old-style politics. It's about patronage. It's about power and position: tax increases sold as tax cuts; splitting the urban and the rural; slush funds hidden from the public when farm families are suffering; \$700 million and our farm families are suffering, their children are suffering.

Mr. Speaker, education is underfunded. And the Minister of Education, the former leader of the Liberal Party, said to the school boards just raise your mill rate; it's simple, raise taxes. So what he's doing is he's leaving that awful responsibility to school divisions. Download on them again. Blame them for it. This it totally unacceptable, Mr. Speaker.

The Minister of Education campaigned last fall for exactly the opposite. That must have just been more political rhetoric, I guess; more broken promises. Mr. Speaker, this budget does not speak to the future; in fact it does the exact opposite thing.

Before I close, Mr. Speaker, I wanted to mention the very grave concern that many of my constituents have about the recommendations, be they interim, on the amalgamation of rural municipalities and municipalities . . . urban municipalities.

I have a letter I would like to read from here just to give the House an example of the kind of feelings that are put forth by some of the RM (rural municipality) councillors, RM reeves.



And here is the response. I wrote to them and I asked them for their views on forced amalgamation. And here's a response.

There would be absolutely no benefits if amalgamation took place as suggested in the Garcea and Stabler Report. Rural ratepayers have never been disappointed with the services provided by their local RM. Do we want our rural ratepayers to be faced with the same situation that people in a large urban centre are faced with where snow removal on residential streets is done once a year? If we accept the Garcea and Stabler Report, this is exactly what will happen. All we have to do is look at what the government made of health care. The government is only concerned about having more provincial control, less local voice and more large urban and no rural. I would hope that we would give our heads a shake and not kill the best resource Saskatchewan has, our identity, heritage and rural make up. Lets remember, our neighbours to the west are only waiting with open arms to welcome the influx of more talented individuals from this great province.

And so, Mr. Speaker, it is absolutely crucial in the view of my constituents that any decision made on amalgamation be made from the ground up — be made from local people, local councillors, and that being the voice of the people around them.

There is no doubt in my mind that municipalities that can share resources are willing to do that. It's already happened. There is going to be no cost benefit. We have learned that from Ontario. Can't we take a lesson from another province that has already gone through this and is willing to advise us and has advised us that this kind of forced amalgamation absolutely is detrimental to the general population.

Mr. Speaker, one other thing that I'd like to comment on is, as a critic for Aboriginal Affairs, I notice that the government of the day has put quite a bit of money into northern Saskatchewan, and so be it.

But I want to also make comment to the members opposite of an article in the *Prince Albert Herald*, that I was just recently reading. This article states:

Though the politicians called it a renewal of their commitment to meeting the housing needs of northerners, at least one mayor from northern Saskatchewan didn't think much of the provincial government's announcement of a 9 million package Thursday.

The last news release was for 60 housing units and I still haven't seen anything where I come from.

And this is being said by the mayor of Stony Rapids, Joan McDonald. McDonald said:

Stony Rapids is an isolated town of about 300 people located 680 kilometres north of Prince Albert. They were promised two new houses when the province made its last funding announcement in 1999. The houses never materialized and she has yet to get an explanation through the Minister of Housing or anyone else. She states there has been no work done. They're just running around and blaming, and blaming everybody for who does what.

McDonald said people in her community resent the 22 housing units standing boarded up and empty in Stony Rapids, houses that have never been lived in. These houses were built by the government as future homes for employees of a hospital slated for construction this year. And those houses stand empty while residents of Stony Rapids crowd together in substandard housing.

Now the community hears that southern contractors may be allowed to live in them while the hospital is being built. She also states, they won't trust our own local people to live in them. What kind of respect is that for these people in Stony Rapids? I ask the government of the day that question.

One other thing that has been brought to my attention, Mr. Speaker, by a member of . . . well I guess I can't say the minister's name in the House, but actually the member from around La Ronge was stating to me that Mr. Goulet is setting up a commercial fishery. This is supposed to be to help First Nations people process their fish, but the people there, the First Nations people say it's not going to work for them. They say it's not going to work because the transportation issue is important when you're factoring in the costs associated with that processing.

The transportation costs are just too many, Mr. Minister, and the roads aren't there. The cost of processing does not net the First Nations people who are the producers anything. They will not be the beneficiaries of this so I hope you please take note of that and do further consultation with your people.

Mr. Speaker, I would also like to just mention for a moment a little bit about the comments in the budget about agriculture. We have, of course everyone knows, farmers in this province who are going out of business, who cannot bear the costs, mostly the tax costs associated with government placing exorbitant taxes on them. We hear an announcement that crop insurance premiums are going down but everybody knows so is the coverage.

(1515)

Mr. Minister, the \$25 million per year in property tax rebates that are going to farmers sounds like a good announcement. But it didn't take long for my constituents to talk to me saying, what is this that we hear about mill rates going up. We are going to be just having to pay that tax in another form. We are not going to be better off in the long run.

I would suggest that if the government is going to do anything for agriculture, they look at the Estey Report and possibly some real restructuring of the industry, restructuring of the transportation system. Other measures like that that would truly help our farmers in the long run.

And I would suggest to the minister also, regarding Indian and Metis affairs, that if they really want to do some things to help the Metis people, it may not necessarily take any provincial money, but it would be very helpful if the minister would address the volatile situation in the Metis community today in this province.

He has . . . had mentioned me to him, of needing help to address the federal government on this issue and he tells me that no one has come to him. I know otherwise. So I think if the minister took his responsibilities a little more seriously, we would be able to get the kind of support and facilitation from this government that could help the Metis people.

One more comment. I am extremely concerned about the health services that we will be receiving in the future in Humboldt and area. So I find it really important to bring up just a couple of things that I found through research. And one of them is that I understand from the Murray report, that had recommendations for future directions in health care, that health districts are supposed to be getting funding according to their population.

The population of Central Plains Health District is 22,000. The population of Saskatoon Health District is 220,000. That means that the Central Plains Health District should be getting about 10 per cent of what Saskatoon is getting.

Well that is not what is happening. Last year Central Plains lost \$1 million in funding from the provincial government at budget time. How on earth are we to believe, Minister of Health, that you really have a serious intention to ensure the people of Humboldt will continue to enjoy the services they have today?

I would ask the Minister of Health to give us some written guarantees about the services that we are going to have there. I would ask her to give those guarantees to the CEO of the health district and the Chair of the health district so that they can relay that to all the people in that area who are depending on those services in this very viable community.

I do believe that this government is centralizing services in the province — centralizing them predominantly in Regina and Saskatoon. I believe that the court house closure, the Queen's Bench closure in Humboldt as well as other measures taken by this government, are just an indication that amalgamation is going to take place and it's going to be benefiting Saskatoon and Regina mainly.

I believe that rural people must be told the truth if government intends to go ahead with this amalgamation, with the centralization of services. Be at least so gracious as to let the people in this province know what's happening.

Mr. Speaker, I will close by saying that this budget does not speak at all to the future. This budget does not speak to the concerns of the people of this province. It speaks to the people of this province of more decimation, of total disregard, and of government putting down their agenda from the top.

And that is why I cannot support the budget, Mr. Speaker. And I will support the amendment put forth by the Hon. Leader of the Official Opposition, the member from Rosetown-Biggar. Thank you.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**The Deputy Speaker:** — Members, before I recognize the next speaker, minutes ago there was a point of order raised by the hon. member for North Battleford and addressed by the hon. member for Cannington. I wish to thank both hon. members for

participating in that point of order. And having confirmed what I needed to confirm, I wish to report the following:

Having listened to the hon. member from North Battleford and the hon. member for Cannington and having ascertained there was no procedural breach that took place, what we have is a point of debate between members. Members are very capable and have a long-standing tradition of sorting out such matters in an orderly and normal fashion.

To sum up there is no point of order; what we have is a point of debate. And I thank all hon. members for participating in that.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Prebble:** — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It's my pleasure to participate in this budget debate this afternoon representing my constituents of Saskatoon Greystone. Mr. Speaker, this is a positive budget. In total it represents a net reduction — a net tax reduction — of \$43 million for Saskatchewan taxpayers in the year 2000.

And I've heard members opposite refer to this budget as a tax grab. And I think, in all fairness, that's not a fair representation of this budget. There are tax increases — and it's fair for members opposite to point that out; but there's a net tax cut, Mr. Deputy Speaker — and members must be honest about pointing that out too.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Prebble:** — I think that's only fair, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, this budget also offers significant increases well above the rate of inflation for important public services like health and education and environmental protection.

It offers realistic help to the farm community, Mr. Speaker. It is a balanced budget, Mr. Speaker. The seventh balanced budget in a row brought down by this administration.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Prebble:** — After seven consecutive deficit budgets from the PC (Progressive Conservative) Party, Mr. Speaker, we've now got seven consecutive surplus budgets from an NDP government and now from an NDP-Liberal coalition.

And it lays out a clear plan for achieving the NDP election promise of a \$1,000 per year tax cut for the average family by the end of the term of this government, Mr. Speaker. And finally, this budget offers a positive long-term vision for the future of our province.

Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, let me say a few words about the tax measures in this budget. The significant tax reductions in this budget begin on July 1 with a 50 per cent reduction in the amount of the flat tax that Saskatchewan taxpayers will pay — 50 per cent reduction. And by January 1, Mr. Deputy Speaker, less than nine months from now, there will be further important tax reductions. The flat tax will be eliminated, Mr. Deputy Speaker — completely eliminated — \$320 million of tax, Mr. Deputy Speaker, gone in terms of the flat tax.

And the debt reduction tax will be cancelled. Gone completely as well, Mr. Deputy Speaker. But we haven't heard much acknowledgement of those two facts from members opposite.

2001, Mr. Deputy Speaker, will mark the beginning of a three-year phase-in of a new personal income tax system. Each year tax rates will be further reduced. Income brackets will be expanded and personal tax credits will be increased. The result, Mr. Speaker, will be that 55,000 low-income seniors, single parents, minimum wage earners, and working families will be taken off the tax rolls of this province. And that's an accomplishment I'm proud of, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Prebble:** — The second result is that the average family in this province will save well over a thousand dollars per year in personal income tax when this new system is fully in effect. Another very positive feature, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is that the tax system will be indexed to eliminate bracket creep completely.

Now in these past months our government has wrestled with some very difficult decisions around the PST, and members opposite have raised some of those. The Vicq commission recommended a decrease in the percentage of tax collected in income tax and an increase in the percentage of tax collected in sales tax. The Vicq commission also recommended that the PST be expanded to cover a very wide range of goods, including most family essentials.

Members will recall that I said clearly in this Assembly during the Throne Speech debate that I opposed the Vicq committee recommendation to tax family necessities. And, Mr. Speaker, I am pleased that our government has largely adopted that principle.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Prebble:** — Mr. Deputy Speaker, in this budget there is no PST on residential electricity, no PST on residential natural gas, no PST on insurance payments, no PST on personal services like haircuts, no PST on reading materials, no PST on children's clothing and footwear, no PST on used goods under \$300, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

That, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is a significant accomplishment. I am proud to be part of a government that still has one of the widest range of exemptions for the sales tax in Canada and, with the exception of Alberta, the lowest sales tax in the country, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Prebble:** — And I might add, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that Alberta chooses to raise that revenue by levying an \$816 health care premium on every Alberta family — something on this side of the House that we've chosen not to do, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Prebble:** — Mr. Deputy Speaker, any expansion of

consumption taxes can pose a disproportionate burden on lower-income people unless precautions are taken. And to protect the interests of low-income residents, our government is implementing a refundable sales tax credit, which families earning up to \$35,000 a year will be eligible for it.

Approximately 285,000 Saskatchewan people will receive the sales tax credit every year with rebate cheques of up to a maximum of \$77 for individuals and a maximum of \$264 for families. The tax credit cheques will not need to be applied for. They will be received automatically when income tax returns are filled out.

As a result of this, many low-income residents of our province will be further ahead financially even after paying the expanded PST. For example, a family with two children earning less than \$25,000 a year will usually have more money by year-end from the new provincial tax credit than they'll pay out in PST, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Prebble:** — Mr. Deputy Speaker, members of the opposition have been accusing our government of increasing the net tax burden on Saskatchewan people, and that is clearly not the net effect of what we've done, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And I believe members of the opposition know it.

The net tax savings for Saskatchewan people in this budget are a little under \$200 a family. On the average, net tax savings by 2003 will be a thousand dollars a family, Mr. Speaker, just as we promised during the provincial election.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Prebble:** — Mr. Deputy Speaker, this is being phased in gradually — not dramatically as members opposite would like, but gradually. And there's a reason for that. Because it's only by doing it gradually that tax cuts can be delivered in a sustainable way. It's only by doing it gradually, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that tax cuts can be delivered without jeopardizing social programs which I as a member on this side of the House am not prepared to do.

And it's only, Mr. Deputy Speaker, by doing it gradually that we can make sure that we keep paying down our debt and deliver balanced budgets, something that I believe members on the other side of the House are incapable of doing.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Prebble:** — With this budget, Mr. Deputy Speaker, our provincial debt drops to \$11.2 billion, down from \$15 billion seven years ago. As a percentage of our total economy, Mr. Deputy Speaker, our gross domestic product, the debt has dropped from 70 per cent of gross domestic product now down to 38 per cent of gross domestic product, all just done in less than a decade, Mr. Deputy Speaker, by members on this side of the House. And that is a significant accomplishment.

(1530)

Last night, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I heard the member from Carrot River Valley accuse our government of undertaking a social

experiment at the expense of the people of Saskatchewan. And he spoke very passionately, opposing what he described as that social experiment.

Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, let's be clear about who undertook the social experiment. It was the predecessor of many of the members of the Saskatchewan Party, namely the PC Party of Saskatchewan. The Tory government almost bankrupt this province, Mr. Speaker.

Its social experiment was one of spending money like water while cutting taxes and running a deficit that averaged more than a billion dollars a year. The interest payments on that debt alone, Mr. Speaker, the interest payments on that debt alone will burden us for at least another 30 years. That's the experiment that members on that side of the House and their predecessors levied on us. That's the experiment that we're trying to deal with now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, a failed experiment.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Prebble:** — But we're left picking up the pieces after, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the experiment was a disaster. It was such a disaster that members on that side of the House had to change the name of their party to the Saskatchewan Party, Mr. Deputy Speaker. They were forced to do that, they couldn't get elected in any other context.

Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to turn to the expenditure side of this budget where I believe that its greatest strengths are on the service improvement side of the ledger. Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have a balanced budget; steady progress on debt reduction; a small net tax cut of \$43 million; and at the same time we've made a number of important improvements to services.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Prebble:** — All the key service areas are receiving budget increases above the rate of inflation. The health care sector receives a \$63 million operating increase, an increase of well over 3 per cent, plus \$150 million for transition planning.

Post-secondary education receives a 4 per cent increase of \$10.3 million, again well above the rate of inflation. This is an increase that should help to minimize tuition fee increases for university students in my constituency and across our province, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

There is \$7 million in capital funds in this budget specifically earmarked for renovations to the Thorvaldson Building at the University of Saskatchewan and for the construction of a new kinesiology building on the University of Saskatchewan campus that I'm pleased to represent. And there is \$2.85 million in the budget to expand our nursing education program to provide for the graduation of 260 nurses in our province each and every year.

The budget also provides all graduating post-secondary students, who stay in Saskatchewan after graduation, with a tax credit of \$350 as a way of saying thank you to those who stay here and develop a career here.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the budget is also a step forward on the K to 12 education fund. There is a 4.7 per cent increase to school division operating grants for the year . . . for the calendar year 2000. So school divisions receive a 4.7 per cent increase in their operating grants in this calendar year. The basic per pupil rates are increased by \$262 per student. And there is an important increase in funding for the designated disabled program.

There will also be 13 additional pre-kindergarten programs in community schools across our province, Mr. Deputy Speaker. These are very positive initiatives.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, my children attend the Saskatoon public school system. The operating grant for that system, Mr. Deputy Speaker, will go up from \$34.4 million to \$37.5 million, or an increase of over \$3.1 million, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

What would have happened, Mr. Deputy Speaker, if the Saskatchewan Party was elected? If they had been elected — frozen, they campaigned on freezing education.

I find it interesting, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that now in the House, they're complaining that our 4.7 per cent increase is not enough. So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, they'll have to figure out which way do they want it. Do they want to freeze education, which is what they campaigned on during the election, or are they saying we should spend even more on education now?

Mr. Speaker, I think members opposite can't have it both ways. I believe, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that the real agenda is the one we saw in the election campaign — a freeze on education, a freeze on health care. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we won't ever do that on this side of the House.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Prebble:** — Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to turn to the issue of the environment, which is an issue that's very important for me, and say that there's some very positive initiatives around the environment in this budget.

First of all, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the budget for Saskatchewan Environment and Resource Management has been increased by 15 per cent up to \$116.924 million.

And there are some significant increases here, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that I'm very pleased about: \$2.5 million to meet our tree planting commitments is part of this budget; \$2.2 million to further our efforts to reduce the danger from spruce budworm; \$350,000 for a forest survey in the eastern part of our province to assess areas that need additional reforestation. Another \$200,000 in this budget taking . . . for Dutch elm disease, taking our total commitment to fighting Dutch elm disease and trying to prevent Dutch elm disease up to \$500,000.

And \$250,000 in this environment project to launch a project to clean up the abandoned tailings that the Gunnar and Lorado uranium mines, that I've long lobbied to have cleaned up, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I'm pleased that our Minister of the Environment is moving ahead with that. It's very positive.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Prebble:** — There's also, Mr. Deputy Speaker, some very important capital announcements in this budget over and above the capital dollars that one finds in the regular line departments. And one of those capital announcements is that we're going to have a new fund for transportation and environmental cleanup — \$5 million a year to be spent on that for every one of the next four years. It's a very positive move. Nice to see additional money for highways. Nice to see new dollars for environmental cleanup in this province, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

There's another capital item I want to make reference to and that is that this budget restores funding for social housing in the province of Saskatchewan for new social housing construction — \$5 million a year for the next four years for social housing initiatives in the province of Saskatchewan, including the northern part of Saskatchewan, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I'm very pleased to see that.

And also additional capital dollars for heritage properties, municipal infrastructure, K to 12 school construction; and an additional \$5 million in capital for the universities and SIAST (Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology) over and above their regular capital budgets. A very positive initiative, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Prebble:** — Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to return to the important issue of health care, and the importance of us to say no to the privatization of health care that is emerging in Alberta and that clearly some members opposite in the Saskatchewan Party want us to adopt.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, as members will know, the Tory government in Alberta has prepared legislation to allow privately owned hospitals to provide surgery at public expense. This is clearly designed to open the door to US (United States) corporate health care providers coming into Alberta and into Canada. And once in the door it may be difficult to stop the spread of these US-based, for-profit health care corporations across the country because of the provisions of the North American Free Trade Agreement.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'm proud that our financing arrangements in this province do not allow this kind of two-tier health care system.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Prebble:** — And I'm deeply committed to a good quality, publicly funded, and publicly operated health care system and believe it's critical for the federal government to say no to the Alberta model of privatization.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, no budget can address all issues in any one year. And there are some other important initiatives that are not in this budget that I'm anxious to see in future budgets. On the health care front, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'm anxious to see the restoration of the children's dental plan, especially for elementary school-aged children.

I remember, Mr. Deputy Speaker, with pride when the New Democratic Party government set up the children's dental plan

in the 1970s. And I remember with dismay, Mr. Deputy Speaker, when the predecessors of the Saskatchewan Party, the PC Party, when in government, laid off 400 dental nurses in this province and destroyed the children's dental plan. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am committed to . . . (inaudible) . . . working, to rebuild the children's dental plan in this province.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to work to see full budget funding for a comprehensive program aimed at reducing child abuse in the home and in our communities. I would like to see us follow the example of the state of Hawaii and institute regular follow-up home visits and support to all families who have a new child and are deemed by their history and circumstances to be at higher risk. The state of Hawaii has reduced domestic child abuse rates by over 70 per cent using this home visitation and support approach and I think it would be very positive for us to adopt it here.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Prebble:** — I would like to see a major focus on cancer prevention in next year's budget, Mr. Deputy Speaker, with a major initiative to promote lifestyle changes, including a healthy anti-cancer diet, exercise, and reduced exposure to cancer-causing substances. A wide body of literature has developed in this area and this information needs to be shared with all Saskatchewan residents.

Workplace wellness initiatives should be prioritized and a systematic attempt should be made by public health, Saskatchewan Environment, and the Department of Labour to reduce public exposure to carcinogens, including tobacco and pesticides.

Also, Mr. Speaker, I want to say a few words on the social policy front, specifically with respect to poverty.

And first, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to say that it's with pride that members of this House can point accurately to the fact — as the Canadian Council on Social Development has pointed out — that this is the only province in Canada that has had a reduction in family poverty in the last decade.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Prebble:** — The only province in Canada where there's a reduction in the number of children who are living in poverty, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

**An Hon. Member:** — What about Alberta?

**Mr. Prebble:** — In Alberta, poverty rates for children are up. In Ontario, where they've got a PC government, poverty rates for children are up. Only in Saskatchewan, Mr. Deputy Speaker, are poverty rates for children down.

Mr. Speaker, but that's not enough; we need to do more. It's time for a major initiative to reduce poverty in our province. We need to launch major employment opportunities that are specifically targeted to low-income neighbourhoods where unemployment is very high.

I believe, Mr. Speaker, that we need to have a higher minimum

wage in this province.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Prebble:** — I believe, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that we need to increase social assistance rates, especially for families with children. In my judgment, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is unacceptable for thousands of children and adults to be dependent on food banks in our province for their sustenance each month.

And we need to bring every person with a serious disability to an income level above the Statistics Canada poverty line. Mr. Speaker, I advocate that we institute a disability pension that will guarantee a decent life for every person with a serious disability, who is severely limited in their ability to work as a result of that disability.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, those are some of the steps that we can take to reduce poverty.

And I hear the Leader of the Opposition say, what about job creation? And I want to say to the Leader of the Opposition that it is with pride that in this decade, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have created more jobs than the PC government opposite ever created.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Prebble:** — What did we see in the 1980s? A loss of jobs. What have we seen in the 1990s? Across this economy with Saskatchewan consistently showing either the lowest or the second lowest unemployment rate in the country.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Prebble:** — Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to say to the Leader of the Opposition that not everybody can get work. People with a disability may not be able to work. And I say to the Leader of the Opposition that it's time in this province that we provided those people with a decent income to live on — a decent income to live on.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

(1545)

**Mr. Prebble:** — And I'm determined to work for that on this side of the House. And I think the member opposite will find that I've got lots of support on this side of the House.

So, Mr. Speaker, I want to say a few words about the environment and where we go in terms of environmental policy. And I'm anxious to see . . . first of all, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'm anxious to see our province give higher priority to a protected area strategy, setting a target of designating at least another 6 million hectares for protected status prior to our centenary in 2005.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, that would be an exciting contribution to the well-being of future generations in this province. It would be an exciting opportunity to protect biodiversity in our province.

I also want to see us continue to develop a comprehensive provincial strategy to tackle Dutch elm disease. Mr. Deputy Speaker, Dutch elm disease has now struck in more than 20 Saskatchewan communities and will pose a major economic, ecological, and aesthetic cost to our province unless it is contained.

The disease has already hit northeast and northwest Saskatchewan very hard, is doing a great deal of damage in the Qu'Appelle Valley, is at the doorsteps of the city of Regina, and is moving into central Saskatchewan.

In some of the worst hit communities like Carrot River, a large portion of the elms in the town are now dead. It would be particularly disastrous if Dutch elm disease claimed a large number of elm trees in Saskatoon, Regina, Prince Albert, and Moose Jaw where elms are central to the beauty of each city.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we need a comprehensive program to prevent Dutch elm disease in this province, particularly by pruning dead wood on elms so that the Dutch elm disease can't establish itself. And we've made an important start to achieving this with an increase of \$200,000 to fighting Dutch elm disease in this year's budget. But we will need to do much more if we want to win the fight.

Another important environmental and job creation investment we need to make, is in the area of energy conservation and renewable energy development.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I remember when the Tory government of Grant Devine destroyed the office of energy conservation we had in this province. And I am determined to see it rebuilt, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

And this time I also want to see our government move into green energy technologies with investments in wind power, solar heating, photovoltaics, and fuel cell technology . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . And the member from Kindersley says uranium mining.

And I say to the member of Kindersley, that my position in this House continues to be the same as it has always been. I don't believe that the government should be generating revenue from uranium mining. I don't want to see new uranium mines established in this province. Clearly my view is not a majority view in the government, and I accept that. But my view has not changed . . .

**An Hon. Member:** — What is it?

**Mr. Prebble:** — My view is that . . . The member from Kindersley says what is my view? And my view is that uranium mining . . . there should be no new uranium mines built in this province.

That is my view, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and that is . . . Mr. Deputy Speaker, members opposite want to know why, and I say to them two very simple reasons.

We have not solved the problem of disposing of high-level radioactive waste in the world; we have not solved that problem, and until we do, it makes no sense to mine more

uranium and contribute to more high-level radioactive waste which future generations will struggle to dispose of.

And I'll also say, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I oppose an expansion of uranium mining very simply because there's a well-established connection between the export of uranium and nuclear reactors and the spread of nuclear weapons technology, nuclear weapons proliferation.

And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition is clearly very interested at what I have to say. And he's saying, well, where do I stand on gambling. And I want to say to the Leader of the Opposition that I am not a supporter of video lottery terminals. I want to go clearly on record as saying that, Mr. Deputy Speaker. This form of gambling in my judgment takes a disproportionate amount of money out of the pockets of the poor, promotes bad values, and results in unfortunate addictions. And I hope we will find a way as a government of phasing out video lottery terminals from our communities.

Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'm proud to be part of a government that allows me to express my views clearly, to lobby for those views in caucus, and not to limit my right to expression in this Assembly, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We'll see whether members opposite uphold that same right, Mr. Deputy Speaker — we'll see if they do.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Prebble:** — Mr. Deputy Speaker, as a result of wanting to . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the members opposite are anxious to hear more from me — from their many questions — but I don't want to continue any further, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I want to respect the right of other members of this House to get into this debate. So I just want to close, Mr. Deputy Speaker, by saying that I want to return to the budget and say that what the Minister of Finance has brought down is a budget that we can all be proud of.

A \$43 million net tax cut. A balanced budget, the seventh balanced budget in a row. Steady reduction in our debt — almost \$4 billion knocked off the provincial debt. Steady improvements in public services, with education, health care, post-secondary education, and the environment all receiving funding increases well above the rate of inflation.

Strong support for the farm community in this budget, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And all this done at a time of record low government revenues from the agricultural sector of our economy. Specifically the grain and oilseed sectors, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Now to put together this kind of a budget in the face of that shortcoming in revenues from the agricultural sector, is a very significant accomplishment, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I think one that will be recognized as very positive by all the residents of this province.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'm pleased to support the main motion and I will be opposing the amendment. Thank you so much.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Weekes:** — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It gives me a great deal of pleasure to stand in the House today and reply to the budget on behalf of the people of Redberry Lake.

I'd like to begin by reading a number of responses to the budget by citizens of Saskatchewan. *Star Phoenix*:

Businesspeople ranging from auto body shop owners to antique dealers, expressed outrage that formerly exempt goods and services are now taxable.

"It's going to hurt the auto body business quite a bit," said Mike Oleksyn, owner of Antique Auto Body in Saskatoon. "People are already not fixing most of their cars because they have a \$700 deductible."

Auto body shops will now have to charge the PST on labour and used and reconditioned parts. Because the GST is already charged on these goods and services, body shops will be charging 13 per cent tax on their bills.

Oleksyn said many shops, particularly small ones such as his, do not even make a 13 per cent profit. Essentially, he believes the government is robbing Peter to pay Paul by charging more PST while reducing personal income tax.

"I think I'm shutting down," Oleksyn said in frustration.

Can you believe that — he thinks he's going to shut his business down.

Rob Hill, owner of Great West Warehouse, says it's going to be difficult tallying up receipts when people buy more than one item at his store.

Because the first \$300 of every used piece of furniture and appliance is tax-exempt. The cashier will have to assess the 6 per cent PST on the amount above \$300 such as taxing \$90 of a \$390 purchase.

"You have to go through that on every item," Hill said. "Once again, we're doing the government's paperwork."

Brian Hosaluk, antique store owner:

"I'm totally, totally furious . . . I just can't believe they'd implement anything of that . . . nature."

"What else are they going to do to drive everyone away from this province?"

Tax: home buyers to pay more.

Ron Shule, operation manager at Village Auto Sales, said the PST expansion will mainly affect low-income customers.

Larry Stewart, broker and manager of a Saskatoon Re/Max Realty office, said charging PST on real estate fees will also affect first-time home buyers who are already scrambling to amass legal and other fees.

"When the GST was in place, that put some hardship on.

Now they slap on PST — it's just going to eliminate a lot of first-time home buyers."

First-time buyers usually buy homes ranging up to \$100,000. At the upper end, buyers will be paying \$450 more than they are now on top of the \$500 in GST, said Stewart.

Ron Deutscher, advertising director of The StarPhoenix, said the advertising tax will affect media outlets, advertising agencies, and their customers.

"Right now, advertisers have allocated so much of their advertising budget, so where is the six per cent going to come from? It's going to come back in cutbacks someplace."

They'll either (come back on their advertising or) cut back in their advertising or in their creative services, agency work, stuff like that. That's bad for the (whole) economy as a whole."

View on the street of the expanded PST.

Betty in Saskatoon:

"It really is getting out of hand with all these new taxes. There are far too many taxes and no one can afford to buy things anymore. I can't believe that they are taxing things like pet food and bedding plants. It really is a shame."

Kathy from Saskatoon:

"I think the expansion of the PST is unnecessary and very harmful. Lowering income taxes is not good enough. It's getting so one parent can no longer stay at home because the cost of everything is so great. Families are the real ones that suffer because of this. The change to the tax is really unacceptable."

Dwight Percy who does commentary with CJWW radio:

No rhyme or reason to PST lists. The utter confusion that reigns today in our marketplace about the application of the provincial sales tax is the final piece of evidence that this piecemeal sales tax policy is fundamentally flawed and needs to be completely revamped. A whole host of goods and services not previously taxed whereas, of Thursday morning subject to PST. As you look through the list of what's in and what's out, you quickly realize one thing — this makes no sense whatsoever.

Now this problem isn't new. There should be a warning sign on the GST (goods and services tax) and PST legislation that reads: don't look for logic. But that still can't rationalize the complete utter mess that the sales tax system has become, because in the future it's going to become worse not better.

While the Minister of Finance on budget day spoke of a historic tax cut, what did the people of Redberry Lake and the people of Saskatchewan get? They got a historic tax increase, Mr. Speaker. Yes, a tax increase. This province is in desperate need of a vibrant, growing economy, desperate need to be in a

position to compete not only with Alberta, who doesn't have a PST at all, but also compete in a global economy.

Let's take a closer look at the NDP's incredible vanishing tax cut. Mr. Speaker, the NDP's so-called historic tax cut will save taxpayers virtually nothing this year. When the recent SaskTel and SaskEnergy rate hikes are taken into account, when the smoke clears, Saskatchewan taxpayers are going to realize they've been burned by this NDP government one more time.

Let's look at an example of a family with \$25,000 total income. This year that family will save a total of \$121 in taxes, a total of \$10 a month. But when we subtract the \$3 a month increase in their SaskTel bill and the \$5 a month increase in the SaskEnergy bill, that family saves a grand total of \$2 a month — \$2 a month, Mr. Speaker.

In total, the NDP's incredible vanishing tax cut reads like this: total tax cut for this year, 43.7 million; SaskEnergy rate hike, 31.2 million; SaskTel rate hike, 9 million; total utility rate hikes, 41.2 million. Tax cuts, gone.

During the election campaign, the Saskatchewan Party's election platform *The Way Up* laid out a common sense plan for the Saskatchewan people, Mr. Speaker. Our bold new election platform designed to create a brighter future for Saskatchewan — the Saskatchewan Party offered a realistic alternative. We believed then as we do now that Saskatchewan farmers will do a better job of spending their hard-earned money better than the government will every time.

Saskatchewan still shoulders one of the heaviest tax burdens in Canada. Every month almost half of Saskatchewan families' paycheques goes to pay their taxes.

On election night the Saskatchewan people voted for lower taxes. On budget day, what did they get, Mr. Speaker? They got a tax increase with a promise of a tax reduction next year, maybe the year after that — who knows?

Effective midnight budget night, the PST was expanded to apply to repair services, real estate fees, non-prescription drugs, maintenance contracts, bedding plants, pet food, dry cleaning, vet fees, security investigation services, credit bureau and collection services, telephone answering services. And on July 1st, Mr. Speaker, the PST will be added to include professional services including legal, accounting, architectural and engineering services, building services, advertising services, and employment services. Yes, some tax cut.

(1600)

In Agriculture, the department was cut by \$50 million; and a bit of good news, property rebate of \$25 million per year over two years. Yes, a bit of good news until along comes the Minister of Education. Saturday April 1, *StarPhoenix* headline: "No cash? Hike the mill rate." I quote the Minister of Education: "School divisions can raise mill rates if they're having trouble meeting their budgets this year . . ."

The article goes on:

Responding to concerns from the Saskatchewan School



Trustees Association (SSTA) that local boards will be forced to close schools and cut staff, Melenchuk said boards can look at raising local taxes to make up any shortfall.

It goes on to read:

Raising mill rates is a complete reversal from the promises Melenchuk made during the election campaign last fall, where he promised to increase the provincial share of education costs to 45 per cent from 40 (per cent).

Well we can mark another Liberal campaign promise down to political rhetoric.

One has to wonder where were the Liberal-NDP coalition this winter. Over the past few months there was tax revolt meeting after tax revolt meeting in the constituency of Redberry Lake alone which I am very proud to represent. I have attended more than a dozen tax revolt meetings and at every meeting the ratepayers have voted in overwhelming numbers to withhold their property taxes.

The ratepayers at meeting after meeting were concerned if they actually withheld their taxes, what affect it would have on their services, and their schools, and RMs. But people wanted to send a message — yes send a message to the government that the education portion of the property tax was too high, much too high. Well once again the government did not listen. With one hand they put money in the property taxpayer's pocket, and with the other hand they took the money out of the property taxpayer's pocket.

The Highways budget, Mr. Speaker, has finally reached the government's commitment made many years ago. I hope for the good of the province and the good of the residents of Redberry Lake that it's not too late.

I would like to tell the House of a situation that has developed in my constituency. Mr. Speaker, Highway No. 40 running from Hafford to Blaine Lake has become virtually impassable. A number of trucks and trailers have been damaged driving down this stretch of highway due to the size and number of potholes. People are changing their patterns of business because of the condition of this highway. Residents on the west side of the potholes are shopping and delivering produce only to the Battlefords, and residents living on the east side of the potholes are now only travelling to Prince Albert or Saskatoon.

In this world of global markets and the need for value-added products where marketing decisions can change with the push of a button to anywhere in the world, this Liberal-NDP government can't even ensure that people that live along Highway No. 40 have the option of trading anywhere in Saskatchewan, let alone anywhere in the world.

It is incredible, Mr. Speaker, that with the budget address we are told that the liquor and gaming fund now has 695 million in it. Where was the government when the farm leaders and farm community of Saskatchewan looking for 300 million of that fund to pry another billion out of the federal government for rural Saskatchewan and the agriculture community.

And now to find out that the renamed Fiscal Stabilization Fund, or fancy slush fund, now has 405 million in it, leaving a big question mark. Where did the difference of 695 million in the liquor and gaming fund and the 405 in the Fiscal Stabilization Fund go? The sum of \$290 million effectively disappeared.

Mr. Speaker, the health care department has had its spending essentially frozen in this budget, and again we are asked to wait and see what the federal government is going to do about it. The people of Redberry Lake are asking a different question.

On their behalf I have written the Minister of Health. In this letter I have passed on the concerns — concerns that arise from the closure of the Carrot River Hospital, the uncertainty over the Shellbrook Hospital, and with the recent hiring of Ms. Louise Simard as CEO of SAHO, the architect of the present-day health boards, a person that closed 52 hospitals — some might say Ms. Simard is the mother of hospital closures — the people of Redberry Lake are asking: will the Health minister give a commitment that the Hafford hospital will not be closed and converted to a primary health centre or wellness centre this . . . or wellness centre. I await the minister's reply.

This government, Mr. Speaker, has pitted urban against rural, farmer against non-farmer, old against young, union worker against non-union worker, doctor against nurse, nurse against nurse, and incredibly now has pitted man against the animals.

It has come to my attention that a man had a sick dog. He brought the dog to the small animal clinic at the University of Saskatchewan. The staff checked the dog over and could not find out what was wrong with the dog. The vet suggested that they keep the dog overnight. The vet would take the dog to an MRI (magnetic resonance imaging) unit and have the dog scanned. The cost would be \$750.

The owner of the dog was outraged. He said his wife has been on a six-month waiting list for the use of the MRI. Further investigations confirmed that animals are usually in the human MRI two to three times a week, Mr. Speaker. Talk about a two-tier medical system. If a person has the money, they can go to North Dakota or Alberta for faster and better health care or, if you happen to be Puff or Spot or for that matter Scotty, and receive better health care than Dick or Jane can in Saskatchewan.

I would like to touch on my critic area, labour, and particular, CCTA (Crown Construction Tendering Agreement). Mr. Speaker, the long-awaited cancellation of the CCTA has not taken place but will be extended to allow for an effective transition under the amended Act. Guidelines for the tendering of all government construction projects will also be adopted. All of these elaborate rules and regulations are to be put in place to, I quote: "reducing the tensions within the industry and having a level playing field in which to operate."

Well, Mr. Speaker, what tensions? The construction industry hasn't had a strike since the late 1970s. And as far as a level playing field, we live in a global economy where countries compete with each other, industries compete with each other, and businesses compete with each other. We must give our homegrown companies — both union and non-union companies — the right to bid on all jobs in Saskatchewan, whether they are

government or non-government contracts. The taxpayers of Saskatchewan cannot afford to pay an extra 20 to 30 per cent per construction job just to keep peace between the NDP Party and a few union leaders and their financial support for the NDP Party. Let's hope the son of CCTA is not worse than the CCTA itself.

I'd like to read some comments from the *Leader-Post*:

Construction companies threatening to leave province.

Some construction companies are threatening to leave the province if the government follows through on proposed amendments to the Construction Industry Labour Relations Act . . .

The Saskatchewan Construction Association, which represents both unionized and non-unionized contractors, is upset with the minister's response to the industry's concern about the proposed legislation.

"We didn't get a good hearing from Crofford." said Brian Barber, vice-president of Dominion Construction Co. in Regina, following a meeting with Crofford Tuesday.

The amendments to the 1992 legislation would eliminate 'grandfather' provisions under the controversial . . . (CCTA) that allowed firms to operate double breasted.

Manley McLachlan, the association's executive director, said the amendments proposed by Crofford's department would effectively impose unionization on employees of non-union construction firms.

"She didn't seem to be interested in letting people determine their own status," McLaughlin said.

The amendment would also prevent contractors from hiring non-unionized subcontractors. "It's going to be severely limiting the opportunities for non-union trades."

McLachlan added, the amendments are supposed to ease "tensions" in the construction industry, despite the fact the industry has had virtually no strikes or lock-outs for 18 years. "What problems are they trying to fix? The industry is doing very well."

I'd like to also read a letter from a journeyman with Christian Living in Saskatchewan:

I am writing to express my disgust and frustration regarding the NDP government and their undemocratic plans to impose unionization of the construction industry . . .

**The Deputy Speaker:** — Order. We've had interesting debate today on a fairly wide-ranging number of issues. I just wish to remind all hon. members that the matter before the Legislative Assembly is the budget for the year 2000 and 2001. And I'm trusting . . .

Order. Order, order. Order, order. Order. Order. I of course am going to be providing the hon. member an opportunity to tie his

comments into the budget.

**Mr. Weekes:** — Well thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Weekes:** — My comments concerning the CCTA I think reflect on the budget. When the government Crown corporations have to pay an extra 20 to 30 per cent and they increase the utility rates to the people of Saskatchewan, I believe that's part of the increased cost of taxation in this province. I know it not only affects the taxpayer in particular, it affects the members of the construction industry also.

I would just like to read one quick comment from a construction worker who phoned me, or contacted me, who was concerned with the CCTA legislation and how it reflects on the economy of Saskatchewan. It goes on to read:

I seriously hope that you consider recent proposals to replace the CCTA with legislation changes to construction workers in this province will not be positive. The effect on the economy, Mr. Speaker, of this province will be that raised construction costs will make it less inviting for people to live and build here.

I am wondering why I am not given a chance to vote if I want to be unionized. Do I live in a communist country? Why is my government sneaking this proposal to the House? Maybe they know the opposition to these proposals will be enormous.

My livelihood depends on your decision and I may be forced to relocate in a different province to find a provincial government that will support me.

I think it's fundamental to this province and to the budget that when we bring in laws that cost our Crown corporations more money and the Crown corporations pass those utility rates onto the taxpayers, and also the potential loss of jobs and the loss of taxpayers to this province.

And I believe that this gentlemen is right on course.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, the NDP has broken its promise in the last election of reducing income tax without expanding the PST. The NDP also said they could run the province on \$4.5 billion a few years ago, this budget is 6.4 billion.

The budget does not meet expectations or requirements and the people of Saskatchewan are concerned about its sustainability, Mr. Speaker. This budget can be best summed up by the actions of friends of mine.

They are medium-sized farmers, both husband and wife have off-farm jobs. They are selling their farm and buying a small business in Alberta. Yes, they waited until this budget came down and when they heard the budget they decided to sell their farm and buy a small business in Alberta, Mr. Speaker.

My friends don't support this budget, my constituents in Redberry Lake don't support this budget, and I will not be supporting this budget. But I will be supporting the amendment

moved by the member from Rosetown-Biggar and the Leader of the Official Opposition.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Harper:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great, great pleasure for me to enter into this budget debate.

But before I do so, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to introduce a couple of guests who have joined us in the west gallery, Don Hallam, who is my constituency assistant and his young friend that has joined him here today. Dion is a student in the Imperial School and also had the opportunity to be . . . having my pleasure of entering the school and visiting with a class here a few weeks ago.

So I'd ask all the members to offer our guests a warm welcome.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Harper:** — Mr. Speaker, it is truly a pleasure for me to have the opportunity to enter into this budget debate on behalf of the constituents of Regina Northeast. And this is truly a historic budget, Mr. Speaker. It is a budget that I take great pride in being able to participate in. It is a budget that is bold, thoughtful, forward looking, and visionary. And I want to take this opportunity to congratulate our Minister of Finance on putting together such a great budget.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

(1615)

**Mr. Harper:** — I believe that any time that you have the opportunity to enter into a debate on a budget that outlines growth and opportunity is something very, very positive and something I'm very proud of.

Mr. Speaker, this budget does what I think budgets should do. It outlines a very positive vision of the future. It outlines a very positive vision for Saskatchewan's future — a future where people can live in this province, grow in this province, prosper in this province, retire in this province, and enjoy the bonds of family and community.

It's also a budget that outlines that available in this province will always be the effective public service that people have grown to get used to in this province, and enhance each person's ability to live here with meaningful existence.

It's also, Mr. Speaker, a budget that outlines opportunity for our young. After all, the youth are our future, the youth of today are the leaders of tomorrow, and we want to make sure we equip them with the best possible tools to meet the challenges of the changing times.

Truly, Mr. Speaker, this is a budget that allows us to enter into the new millennium with change and opportunity. The key areas of plan of growth and opportunity are good fiscal responsibility and good government, sustainable and effective health care, an economy that's growing with jobs and taxation reforms.

And, Mr. Speaker, I have always enjoyed the budgetary process that government goes through as it develops the budget. I've always enjoyed that process because to me that personally is a very exciting time. It's a time when members of the government get to discuss ideas, get an interchange of thoughts.

And in this budget, Mr. Speaker, it was even more exciting and more interesting because of our coalition makeup. And during the process of deliberation, the process of debate, both at the caucus level and the committee level, I found that very, very interesting. Because as that debate developed and went on, we had some very good ideas put forward by NDP members, and those ideas were used. We had good ideas put forward by our Liberal coalition partners and those good ideas were used.

And, Mr. Speaker, I just want to assure you that if the Saskatchewan Party ever had a good idea, we'd use it too.

Mr. Speaker, the record of this government stands alone. There's no question about that. The record of good fiscal management, good fiscal responsibility, and good government. That's clearly indicated. And what is really historic, and that is seven consecutive balanced budgets. That, Mr. Speaker, we all have to be very proud of.

And I, Mr. Speaker, as a member of the government, will take my fair share of credit for that. But I also want to acknowledge that much of the credit goes to the Saskatchewan people who hung in there with us through the tough times after the devastating mess that we inherited in 1991. A government that left, a Conservative government that left this province on the brink of bankruptcy. Some \$14.7 billion in debt. And to have taken this province and whipped that economy with that debt load and have brought it to the point it is today is truly a credit to this government, but is truly a credit to all people in Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, we have reduced Saskatchewan's debt from almost 70 per cent of the gross national product to 38 per cent today, and continuing to fall to 31 per cent by the year 2004.

If that isn't sound fiscal management, I don't know what is. What this demonstrates is good solid confidence in our economy, the ability to manage things in this province through good times and bad.

We're doing this, Mr. Speaker, in light of some of the worst times in our agricultural economy since the 1930s. But still we have been able to grow the economy of Saskatchewan at a rate of over 2 per cent per year since 1992.

And that clearly reflects in what the bond companies think of the job that we've done here in Saskatchewan. It clearly is indicated by the fact that we have a straight A credit rating with all the bond companies in Canada. That, we can be very, very proud of.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Harper:** — The responsibility for a balanced approach and support for long-term period sustainable economy and growth since the 1970s. We have, Mr. Speaker, despite the worst times in agriculture, we have the strongest economy that we've

experienced since the '70s. Mr. Speaker, good government is something every citizen in a democracy expects and deserves.

And I believe, Mr. Speaker, there are certain rules that any government of any particular stripe should follow. And I think, I think Tommy Douglas put it the best when he said that the true measure of the wealth of any country is not in how much gold or silver it may have, but rather on how it looks after the less fortunate in our community. And that, Mr. Speaker, I am proud to say that is what this budget does.

This budget brings forward continued increased investment in our health care system. Mr. Speaker, this year we are going to be increasing the base funding for health care by \$63 million. An additional transition fund of \$150 million will be added to the health care services.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I have sat in this House and listened to the opposition members wail away and suggest that we have a dilapidated, out-of-date health care system. Well, Mr. Speaker, I would like to draw to their attention a couple of situations which I have had a little bit of personal experience at.

In 1992 when we — I mean my wife and I — were living on a farm just north of Norquay, Saskatchewan, my wife suffered a heart attack. And the only place that she could receive proper medical attention at that time was Yorkton, where she could receive the latest medicine that would reduce the effect her heart attack would have on her heart and reduce the amount of damage.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I would like to relate to you a story about Mrs. Dahlin at Norquay. She had her heart attack in October. Her husband rushed her to the health care clinic there in Norquay, where today she received that very same treatment, that very same medicine, reducing the time to receive that treatment by the time and distance it takes to travel from Norquay to Yorkton — some one hour. Anybody in the medical field will tell you that the sooner a patient receives treatment after a trauma, the better the chances are of that patient's recovery.

It gives me a great deal of pride to say that we have been able to expand the services in rural Saskatchewan so that people all over this province have real good emergency service cares at their local community and at their local health centres. And that gives me a great deal of pride, Mr. Speaker.

And on that note, Mr. Speaker, I'd also like to say that I've heard many, many times from the opposition benches how dilapidated our health care system is; and how people are being neglected, and so on and so forth; and how they spend hours and hours, if not days and days and months and months, waiting for services.

Well on February 20, Mr. Speaker, at about 11:30 in the morning, Sophie Burym who lives in Sturgis was found by her daughter, passed out on her living room floor suffering from a heart attack and a stroke.

The daughter immediately called the Preeceville ambulance, which picked her up from her house — picked Sophie up from her house — transported her to Preeceville where she was

stabilized, then transported to the Pasqua Hospital here in Regina. And by 4:30 that afternoon she was in intensive care receiving the services she required.

Mr. Speaker, I think that's a pretty good record considering that on a normal driving speed Preeceville is at least three and a half hours non-stop from Regina. I'm pleased to report, Mr. Speaker, that Sophie is on her way to a full recovery and soon on her way back to full, independent living. And I think that's a good news health story.

All of this, Mr. Speaker, has been done, has been done by the provincial government. When we take into account that in 1967 when medicare was made a national program by the federal government of the day, there was a commitment by the federal government that they would fund 50 per cent of health care costs. That means, Mr. Speaker, that they would fund 50 per cent of every health care dollar spent here in Saskatchewan.

Well it saddens me to report, Mr. Speaker, that today the federal government's responsibility has only been 13 per cent of every dollar spent here. That means, Mr. Speaker, that the province, the taxpayers of Saskatchewan, the people of this great province have been backfilling the difference.

I think they've done a tremendous job. I think they deserve a lot of credit for the quality health care system we have here in Saskatchewan. In fact, Mr. Speaker, the best health care system anywhere in Canada is right here in this province.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Harper:** — And that is, Mr. Speaker, as a result of continued support to health care system from this government. In fact, Mr. Speaker, we are spending over . . . in the last two years we have increased health care spending by over 17 per cent, and I think that's something we can all be very proud of.

Mr. Speaker, we grow the economy and at the same time we have a responsibility to those in our economy and in our society who are less fortunate. I'm pleased to see that this budget addresses that.

And I'm proud to report as a part of the budget that today we have 6,000 less people on social services than we had five years ago. And, Mr. Speaker, that is positive. We're giving a hand up to those people in our society, unlike the members of the Tory Party opposite. We're not giving them the back of our hand as they would do.

With that, Mr. Speaker, we also have a claim to Saskatchewan Action Plan for Children which plays a key role ensuring that Saskatchewan people and families have the support they need to develop, to live in dignity and independence.

We have supplied support to children and families most in need through the services of nutrition programs, school allowances, infant care for teen mothers, early childhood intervention, and social housing. Very positive, personal, human things, Mr. Speaker.

And as we all know, our youth are facing increasing costs in education and increasing need for training beyond the high

school years. I remember, Mr. Speaker — and this may date me a little bit — but when I graduated from high school some years back, with a grade 12, it was quite acceptable at that time to go out and get a reasonable, quality-paying job with a grade 12 education.

But as the world has changed, and I think over the long haul, Mr. Speaker, for the better, that no longer is the case. Today grade 12 simply does not give you the qualifications to meet the requirements of today's workplace. So there is a desperate need to put into place a vehicle to encourage those of our young youth to seek education beyond grade 12 in a post-secondary field of their choice. And I'm proud to say, Mr. Speaker, this government has outlined a very clear road to achieve that.

Speaking of roads, Mr. Speaker, of course that brings me to our highway system — the highway system in which we are going to be spending \$250 million this year in our budget. The largest expenditure ever on Highways and Transportation in this province. Good news, Mr. Speaker.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Harper:** — Mr. Speaker, I should probably break now. I should probably apologize to you. I know that the opposition members really get upset when they're referred to as Tories and I have a tendency to slip into that every once in a while, Mr. Speaker. And that isn't their name. Their name is the Saskatchewan Party.

And I suppose maybe the reason I have this problem is that every time I think of the Saskatchewan Party, I can't help but think of the old car I drive. I drive an old '85 Ford car, Mr. Speaker, and to be quite honest with you, that car of mine needs a tune-up. It's not running too good. It needs a muffler and it has over 200,000 kilometres on it, and quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, it needs a paint job. And I know that if I took that car to Elite Auto Body on Henderson Road, they would do an excellent, excellent job of painting it. And I know, Mr. Speaker, that that car would come out of the body shop shining, bright, and looking as good as new. Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, it would still need a tune-up, it would still need a muffler, and it would still have 200,000 kilometres on it.

(1630)

And that, Mr. Speaker, is like the Saskatchewan Party. They have a new paint job, but when I sit in this House and I listen, it's the same old Tory rhetoric, the same old Tory policies, the same old Tory suggestions; and if they were ever in government, Mr. Speaker, it would be the same old Tory results in this province.

Mr. Speaker, the budget also sets up a Centenary Capital Fund of \$30 million. Through the fund we will be building a bridge to a new economy. We will do that with \$5 million a year more for municipal infrastructure; \$5 million a year more for transportation and highways; \$5 million a year more for capital investments for the universities and SIAST and regional colleges; \$5 million more for school capital projects; \$5 million more for social housing; \$5 million more to upgrade our parks and heritage properties. Mr. Speaker, if that isn't good news then please tell me what is.

Mr. Speaker, we have outlined in . . . or I should say the Finance minister has outlined in the budget speech, *A Plan for Growth and Opportunity*, the need for a new tax system — a tax system that's competitive, fair, and simple.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I had the opportunity the last couple of mornings to spend in my constituency office and field some calls and return some calls that had come in while I was out of the office. And for the most part those calls that I was getting, people were asking me why did we have to change the taxation system to make it competitive, fair. So I explained the situation around it and the circumstances we were facing in this province.

But after about the fifth or sixth call that asked me why we had changed the taxation system or the need to a new taxation system that was competitive and fair, I asked them why nobody asked me about the simplistic part of it. And quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, the answer was that they understood why we had to make our taxation system simple. It was so the members from the opposition could understand it.

Mr. Speaker, it is easy, it is easy for the opposition members to suggest that we should be spending money left, right, and centre. And I believe our Finance minister today indicated that their comments so far have added up to well in excess of a billion dollars over budget. Same old Tory policies of the past.

But that's not good fiscal management. That's not what brought Saskatchewan to where it is today. What brought Saskatchewan to where it is today is the ability to manage the funds of this province properly, in the best interest of all Saskatchewan people.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Harper:** — And that, Mr. Speaker, I think is demonstrated very, very clearly in our budget.

And what is also demonstrated here, I think, is the fact that through the price Saskatchewan people have paid to deal with the Tory debt that we inherited in 1991, and a sophisticated, methodical, thoughtful plan of addressing that debt, maintaining the growth of this province, we are able now to hand back to Saskatchewan people some very positive things.

Such as effective January 1 of the year 2001, Saskatchewan will eliminate the flat tax. Saskatchewan will eliminate the debt reduction surtax and the high income surtax. They will all be gone, Mr. Speaker. That is going to put more money in the pockets of the people of Saskatchewan and not put at risk the future of this province, their future in this province and that of their children.

Mr. Speaker, there is certainly I think good news in our budget in regards to the taxation system having now only . . . we will have only three categories: 11 per cent on taxable income of up to 35,000; 13 per cent on taxable income over 35,000 and up to 100,000; and 15 per cent taxable income over 100,000. These rates will be phased in over three years and then when fully implemented, over 70 per cent of Saskatchewan taxpayers will be paying income tax at the same rate as Alberta people are. That, Mr. Speaker, is a positive step forward.

The base tax credit will increase to \$8,000. The spousal, or equivalent to spousal credit, will also increase to \$8,000. The child tax credit of \$2,500 per independent children — pardon me — dependent children, and a senior supplement of \$1,000, Mr. Speaker, all of this put together will mean 55,000 low-income earners in Saskatchewan will come off the income tax rolls.

Mr. Speaker, I'm very proud to be able to stand in this House and say that I'm a small part of that. Thank you very much.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Harper:** — The fundamental message here, Mr. Speaker, is that every taxpayer will pay less and that has to be good news to everybody.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Harper:** — And for low-income people, Mr. Speaker, as a result of the need to expand the PST, we have implemented a sales tax rebate program but for people under \$10,000 — a family with an earned income of under \$10,000 — will be able to receive \$264 a year rebate. Mr. Speaker, this family in question would have to spend over \$4,100 on taxable items in order to break even on that. In many cases, Mr. Speaker, there will be a net gain in income for those in our society who have a family income, an earned family income, of less than \$10,000.

Mr. Speaker, I hear chirping from the opposition benches and I just wanted to share with you and my opposition colleagues that a while back here I had the opportunity to take part in a Commonwealth parliamentary tour to Washington, DC (District of Columbia) and Annapolis, Maryland.

And on that tour I was fortunate enough to be joined by the member from Swift Current and his lovely wife Tami. And I think overall we had a great time because we had a great group we met with. We met with three elected individuals from New Brunswick and two from Quebec.

And as well as the tour itself and the information, and the shared information with our United States colleagues, I think I enjoyed as much the opportunity to socialize with my colleagues from Canada here.

And in our discussions . . . And we compared our legislatures, we compared the operations of government and so on, and one of the questions raised there in our little get-together one evening was if any of the legislatures in Saskatchewan here have a translation service.

And I thought of course Quebec would. But I find out that in the Quebec legislature there has no translation services. Therefore, most of the members . . . in fact all the members predominately speak French.

And I thought, you know, Mr. Speaker, it might be something that we would want to consider here in Saskatchewan in this legislature. Perhaps, Mr. Speaker, if we had a translation service here we on the government side might be able to understand what the opposition is saying.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Harper:** — Mr. Speaker, I had the opportunity on Saturday last, before the rains came and chased me in, I had the opportunity to spend about four and a half hours out visiting constituents in my constituency. And I did this I suppose maybe a bit for a selfish reason — I wanted to say what they had to say as far as feedback to the budget was concerned.

And I found, Mr. Speaker, that at that time of the day — and on a Saturday is a good time to call because you get the vast majority of people home — I was really, really pleased with the response that I was getting at the doorstep. Overwhelming, people were giving us two thumbs-up positive response on our budget.

And, Mr. Speaker, I just want to say that I always enjoy getting out in my constituency and talking to people because you learn a lot. You learn what people are thinking; you learn some of their ideas; you learn a whole bunch of things.

And, Mr. Speaker, I just want to close in sharing a little story with you that I ran into on Saturday. And I knocked on the door of a gentleman who welcomed me quite warmly in fact. We had a nice little chat.

And then he says to me, he says, Ron, he says, do you know the difference between the Saskatchewan Party and a car battery? And I says, no, Mr. Speaker, sir, I certainly do not know the difference between the Saskatchewan Party and a car battery. He turned to me and he said a car battery has a positive side.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Harper:** — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure, on behalf of the constituents of Regina Northeast, they have requested, Mr. Speaker, that I extend my support in this legislature for the budget and against the amendment.

Thank you very much.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Toth:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I don't know if I can really say it's a pleasure to stand in this Assembly to speak to this budget at this time. But certainly I consider it an honour to stand and represent the constituents of Moosomin in the Assembly and just address some of the concerns that we have with the provincial budget that was just brought down in this Assembly about four days ago.

It's interesting, Mr. Speaker, as we review the budget and we listen to the comments from the members opposite, we listen to the rhetoric coming from the Minister of Finance in telling the people of Saskatchewan how pleased they should be with the budget that's been brought down. And yet, as you begin to dissect the budget, Mr. Speaker, and as my colleagues and I have been hearing over the past number of days, we're finding that this budget isn't all that it's made out to be.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, as a Saskatchewan Party member and the MLA for Moosomin and one of the founding members of the Saskatchewan Party, we're certainly pleased at least that this

government has in some ways listened to a lot of the proposals the Saskatchewan Party put forward.

Now the government talks very strongly about tax reduction, and it brags about the fact that over the next few years the people of Saskatchewan will eventually see a net tax reduction and they'll see actually some money in their pockets at the end of the day.

However, Mr. Speaker, when I talk about that tax reduction, my colleagues and I take great pride in the fact that for the last two years — since the inception of the Saskatchewan Party — we have talked about the need for real tax reduction. And, Mr. Speaker, I say real tax reduction. Because as you look at the budget in front of us today and the budget that we're currently debating, and you look at what the government has proposed and what the government is actually taking from people, behind their backs, there is no real net tax reduction.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, what I find very interesting too — as we listen to this current government talking about their taxes, talking about the leadership — it's interesting how they continue to go back to the former government of Grant Devine. And in many cases they continue to espouse the views of Grant Devine, but they neglect to tell us the number of benefits that they have received as a result of initiatives through the 1980s.

They forget to tell us about the fact that they had the privilege of selling off assets and shares in a number of enterprises; actually netted \$1.3 billion for the coffers of this treasury so that this minister could, indeed, bring forward what he considers a positive budget.

They neglect to tell you as well — and they talk about the debt and they talk about the overall debt in the province of Saskatchewan — but they conveniently neglect to tell us about the debt that Mr. Blakeney started. The debt that Mr. Blakeney left us with. They continue to forget to tell us about the debt that the hon. member, the Premier of this province, already has passed on to the people of Saskatchewan since he was elected in 1991.

And, Mr. Speaker, one of the areas that they totally don't want to discuss is the unfunded pension liability, which since 1991 has grown by over \$1 billion. Mr. Speaker, eventually somebody's going to be left holding the bag when people need, or actually require, and need to have their pensions covered, someone's going to be left holding the bag.

And I would suggest to you, Mr. Speaker, that the party that's going to be left holding the bag is the Saskatchewan Party. They're going to have to answer for the fact that that unfunded liability is now being drawn on and someone has to put the money into it.

Just as Grant Devine had to face in 1982 with the demise of the Investors . . . not the Investors Group, but there was a group investment portfolio in this province that went under. And the only reason that it was bailed out was because of the unfunded liability. Pioneer Trust, that's correct, Pioneer Trust.

And, Mr. Speaker, so I find it interesting, I find it very interesting that the members opposite continue to criticize, and

like to criticize, but at the same time they're sure grateful for a lot of the economic development and activity that they have taken advantage of.

Mr. Speaker, we think about . . . we look at the budget, we talk about economic development in the province of Saskatchewan. And it's unfortunate, Mr. Speaker, but one of the best and the loudly proclaimed opportunities that we may have had in the province of Saskatchewan was in the area of uranium development.

And, Mr. Speaker, just recently a number of my colleagues and I had the privilege of touring the mines of McArthur River and McClean Lake. And I can tell you the employees and the management of those two mines think very highly of what they're doing. And they're very conscientious of the environment, Mr. Speaker, they're very conscientious of protecting their employees. But however, Mr. Speaker, the thing that they really are disappointed in is the fact that we continue to be hewers of water and cutters of wood.

(1645)

We continue to send the raw product out to Eastern Canada when we had an opportunity back in the late '80s, early '90s to begin to add value added, which would mean real job creation in the province of Saskatchewan. Which would present the province of Saskatchewan with an added tax base with which to provide the services we have in this province.

Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker, we take a look at this budget, we see a number of editorials that have appeared shortly after the budget. And, Mr. Speaker, are the editorials really praising the budget? Are the editorials really espousing the virtues of the budget, of the tax breaks?

Mr. Speaker, one of the editorials, Tuesday April 4, *Leader-Post* editorial: "Tax comments get failing grade."

Mr. Speaker, I think this one here comes from . . . actually it was . . . I'd like to quote:

Education Minister Jim Melenchuk put his foot firmly in his mouth Friday when he told the Saskatchewan School Trustees Association (SSTA) that if they don't think they are getting enough money from the provincial government for education, they always have the option of raising school mill rates.

Mr. Speaker, that's one of the concerns that my colleagues and I have been hearing over the last few days; one of the real concerns out there.

The Minister of Finance tells us he's giving the people of Saskatchewan a real tax break and yet at the same time the increases in education. School boards across this province are finding themselves at the brink of either cutting programs, closing down schools, cutting jobs because they just don't have enough money to raise — and in this budget, Mr. Speaker — to meet the needs, ongoing needs of the school districts.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, what we're finding as well is, I think, the rural municipalities were hoping and were being led to believe

by this NDP-Liberal coalition that after the budget they wouldn't have to worry any more about any more tax revolt meetings, because the Minister of Finance has said he would put \$25 million into the pockets of property owners in this province to offset the higher tax and the mill rate as a result of the education off-load onto local taxpayers.

Well, Mr. Speaker, let me say this. My feeling and my view is that the tax revolt meetings will not cease. In fact they will begin to escalate as the ratepayers and the people who have been organizing the tax revolts take a closer look and as they talk to those school districts. And the school districts and divisions talk about reducing services or else increasing the mill rate, as the Minister of Education, the Liberal leader, the Minister of Education is saying if you don't have enough money, then go to the tax base.

And I guess, Mr. Speaker, our concern is that the school districts will eventually actually have to go to the mill rate. They'll have to go to the property owner to increase the mill rate in order to continue to provide the services which, at the end of the day, Mr. Speaker, will mean the \$25 million . . . the tax credit or tax refund into the pockets of individuals may be a saw off. It may be a break-even but it won't be a reduction, Mr. Speaker.

In fact as I read, as I read the editorial it says . . . it goes on to say:

The Liberal leader's statement certainly didn't win him any friends with local ratepayers across the province or the SSTA and likely caused heartburn among his NDP partners in the coalition government.

Mr. Speaker, it goes on to say that:

The minister might think \$1 billion is enough to run the system, and indeed that is a substantial sum, but to suggest trustees increase local . . . (rates) to make up any shortfall was irresponsible.

That's what the editorials are saying about this government, saying about the Minister of Education, saying about this Finance minister. It's totally irresponsible to think that if you haven't received enough money, you can go back to the tax base.

That suggestion, this editorial says:

. . . ignores the reality that municipal taxes in the province are already onerous, with taxpayers in several rural municipalities already having voted in favour of tax revolts.

Also, Mr. Speaker, when we look at the budget and we look at, we look at education, while we're talking about education and the property tax on education, talking about the fact that this, "Tax comments get failing grade."

Another article and editorial says, "Budget confusing, auditor says." Mr. Speaker, I would have thought that the Provincial Auditor would have had some positive comments for this government. I would have thought that the Provincial Auditor,

deciding to leave this province to go to B.C., he'd be having something positive to say.

But while the minister is trying to tell us that his budget is such a . . . has presented such a rainbow effect in this province that at the end of the rainbow, there's that, there's that golden pot — Mr. Speaker, it's anything but.

What is the auditor saying? He's saying:

Saskatchewan's budget is as confusing as ever after the government closed out its old rainy-day fund but set up several new funds, the province's auditor says.

Mr. Speaker, what's he talking about? He's talking about the fact that the province is talking about putting its:

Retained earnings of \$695 million made up . . . of the money the government expects from its liquor-and-gaming operation, cleaning out what critics have maligned as a murky pool of taxpayers' money.

Well, Mr. Speaker, in my opinion and in the opinion of my colleagues, that fund was nothing else but an NDP slush fund. And because it's now become open, it's out in the open, the NDP and this Finance minister are deciding they've got to find another place to put it.

I'd like to continue to quote from this article:

But the same budget directs \$660 million towards several newly created funds in 2001. Wayne Strelieff, Saskatchewan's provincial auditor, said the fresh crop of new funds only complicates Saskatchewan's already-confusing budget reporting system.

He says:

"To me, it's almost like you don't have respect for taxpayers when you create all these things," Strelieff said in an interview. "It means you have to do a lot of questioning to find out what's going to happen this year."

After hearing those comments, Mr. Speaker, it's no wonder that Mr. Strelieff has decided it's time to leave the province and pursue greener pastures.

Mr. Speaker, if you look at this budget and to listen to this Finance minister and to listen to all of his colleagues tell us how good it is, I think what we're finding out, and what my colleagues and I are finding out, that more and more people are beginning to realize that this is nothing more than another tax grab.

The Minister of Finance can tell us that he's giving you some money. But actually, Mr. Speaker, the people of Saskatchewan basically believe that what the Minister of Finance is doing is robbing Peter to pay Paul.

They're pulling from one pocket and putting it in the other pocket, telling you, you should be thankful. You should be grateful that he's actually given you back something that he pulled out of the pocket. Actually a little bit of what he took out



of your pocket.

And my colleagues have actually expanded on what the Minister of Finance is taking. And we're also finding out, Mr. Speaker, that it's not just what we already know the Minister of Finance has taken out of our pockets, but we're finding out on an ongoing basis that the Minister of Finance is actually digging deeper and deeper into our pockets to the point that there's no bottom left in the pocket. There's nothing but a hole.

Mr. Speaker, when we talk about this budget, talk about the tax increases . . . And my colleague from Biggar mentioned the fact that the utility rate increases already have eaten up the little tax saving there is this year. The fact that the expanded PST took place April 1, midnight April 1, took all of the few dollars that were left in your pocket — took it out of your pocket.

Every fee we have in this province, every fee in this province, Mr. Speaker, is going up. Which means more and more money out of our pockets so that measly \$120 this year . . . Actually at the end of the day we'll be fortunate if we're even \$30 short at the end of the day.

Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker, we talk about the tax. And the Minister of Finance and the Premier and his colleagues would lead us to believe that this budget that was just presented the other day should be such a positive budget that people should be flocking to this province.

But if you pick up *The Leader-Post* today, what do we have? The headline is "The last straw."

The NDP-Liberal coalition government has just slammed the door on me and my business here in Saskatchewan.

For years now, I have been debating moving to Alberta because of Saskatchewan's tax structure. Last week's provincial budget has forced me out, no question about it.

As of July 1, 2000, my business will be forced to tack on the six-per-cent provincial sales tax . . . to our bills, which will make our work six-per-cent more expensive than our competition.

And, Mr. Speaker, this individual is talking about a company that's been doing from 350 to \$500,000 worth of business per year in the last seven years, and this individual is taking his company and moving it to Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, if this budget was such a positive . . . had such a positive influence on the people of Saskatchewan, why are we continuing to lose, not only people, but businesses to Alberta. Why, Mr. Speaker? Because people look at Alberta and what they . . . at the end of the day, when they look at . . . take their bottom line, their bottom line, the moment they cross that border, increases by some 4 to \$5,000 per family — 4 to \$5,000. So what's a thousand dollars four years down the road, Mr. Speaker.

My guess, Mr. Speaker, is that the reason the Minister of Finance is talking a thousand dollar saving four years down the road is he's hoping that the people of Saskatchewan will buy that when we get to the next general election.

Mr. Speaker, I don't think they will. I believe the people of Saskatchewan can hardly wait for this coalition to fall apart or for the next election to be called so that they can go to the polls and elect a real tax-slashing government to the province of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, this Finance minister would like us to believe by increasing the provincial sales tax we should be grateful. And he condemns the Saskatchewan Party for the fact that we said you cannot lower income taxes, and not increase or expand the provincial sales tax.

Mr. Speaker, our platform said we could lower the provincial income tax without expanding the sales tax. And we would work to reduce the sales tax so that people would have a real reason to continue to live and reside in this province.

And, Mr. Speaker, as well, when we talk about what is this budget doing for young people to stay in the province, the Minister of Finance, the Minister of Education stand up, and Post-Secondary Education, stand up and tell us well we have a \$350 bonus for you if you find a job in the province of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, on budget day I talked to a number of students and they laughed at that. You know what they said? That was no different than the thousand dollar promise of tuition fees for all first year university students. Mr. Speaker, what they said is we want to see real job creation. We want to have an opportunity for real jobs, not \$350 if you find a job.

Mr. Speaker, my guess is they're going to have a difficult time finding real job opportunities in the province of Saskatchewan as a result of this budget because this budget has nothing in it to give businesses a reason to come and establish and build the value-added that we believe is necessary for this province to prosper so that people can look at raising their families, living within the province, raising their families, raising their children, and building this province, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, it's time that the people of this province had an opportunity to really elect a government that would work at building the province rather than tearing it down, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, when we talk about job creation, and we've certainly had in the . . . just on Tuesday, April 4th, *The Leader-Post*, "Summer job program axed in budget . . ." My son happens to be a university student here. He was telling me just recently, he said, Dad, you've got to do something about job opportunities.

He was going . . . he's been applying all over, and other university students have, and the comments at the university were: this is the lowest number of job opportunities for young people that they've ever seen in the province of Saskatchewan. And what do we have this year as a result of the budget . . .

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

The Assembly recessed until 7 p.m.

