

The Assembly met at 13:30.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRESENTING PETITIONS

Mr. Elhard: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I stand today to present a petition on behalf of people of the Cypress Hills area asking that a halt be brought to crop insurance premium hikes and coverage reductions and the prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the provincial government to halt its plan to take money out of the crop insurance program and hike farmers' crop insurance premium rates while reducing coverage in order to pay off the provincial government's debt due to the federal government.

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

Mr. Speaker, this is signed by producers in the Golden Prairie, Maple Creek, Richmond, and Leader areas.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I stand today to present a petition on behalf of citizens throughout the province who are really concerned about the rise in the deductible for prescription drugs and the petition reads as follows, Mr. Speaker:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to immediately reinstate a reasonable annual deductible amount for prescription drugs in Saskatchewan.

And the signatures on this petition, Mr. Speaker, are from Prince Albert, Rosthern, Humboldt, and Alida.

I so present.

Mr. Gantfoer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise on behalf of the citizens concerned about the clause in the current tobacco legislation. The prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to immediately amend tobacco legislation that would make it illegal for anyone under the age of 18 to be in possession of any tobacco products; and furthermore, anyone found guilty of such an offence would be subject to a fine of not more than \$100.

The signatures on this petition today, Mr. Speaker, come from the communities of Archerwill, Tisdale, Naicam, and Nipawin.

I so present.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also have a petition to present. The prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to work with the federal government, First Nations' representatives, and with other provincial governments to bring about a resolution in the Lake of the Prairies situation and to ensure that our natural resources as a whole are used in a responsible manner by all people in the future.

The signators, Mr. Speaker, are from the communities of Langenburg and the city of Yorkton.

I so present.

Mr. McMorris: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition to present of behalf of the citizens of the province. The prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to make the necessary repairs to Highway 35 in the Indian Head-Milestone constituency in order to prevent injury and loss of life and to prevent the loss of economic opportunity in the area.

Mr. Speaker, this petition is signed by people from Weyburn, Rocanville, Estevan, Qu'Appelle, Regina, and Tyvan.

I so present.

Ms. Bakken: — Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present a petition on behalf of citizens of Saskatchewan who are concerned about the new tobacco legislation and the prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to immediately amend the tobacco legislation that would make it illegal for anyone under the age of 18 to be in possession of any tobacco products; and furthermore, anyone found guilty of such an offence would be subject to a fine of not more than \$100.

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

And it's signed by residents of Regina and Weyburn.

I so present.

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise on behalf of residents of Swift Current and area concerned about crop insurance in the province of Saskatchewan. The prayer of their petition reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the provincial government to halt its plans to take money out of the crop insurance program and hike farmers' crop insurance premium rates while reducing coverage in order to pay off the provincial government's debt to the federal government.

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

And, Mr. Speaker, the petitioners today are from the city of Swift Current and the town of Stewart Valley.

I so present.

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise on behalf of citizens of Saskatchewan concerned about certain inadequacies in the provincial tobacco legislation. The prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to immediately amend tobacco legislation that would make it illegal for anyone under the age of 18 to be in possession of any tobacco products; and furthermore, anyone found guilty of such an offence would be subject to a fine of not more than \$100.

As is duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

This petition is signed by the citizens of Carrot River, Yorkton, and Arborfield.

I so present.

Ms. Harpauer: — Mr. Speaker, I have a petition with . . . from citizens who are concerned about the deplorable condition of Highway No. 15, and the prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to use a portion of its highway budget to address the concerns of the serious conditions of Highway No. 15 for Saskatchewan residents.

And the petition is signed from the good people from Watrous, Semans, Simpson, Battleford, and even some people from Prince Edward Island were quite shocked by this highway, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Hart: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present a petition on behalf of citizens concerned with the recent changes to the crop insurance program. And the prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the provincial government to halt its plan to take money out of the crop insurance program and hike farmers' crop insurance premium rates while reducing coverage in order to pay off the provincial government's debt to the federal government.

And the signators to this petition, Mr. Speaker, come from the community of Southey.

I so present.

READING AND RECEIVING PETITIONS

Deputy Clerk: — According to order the following petitions have been received:

A petition concerning maintenance of service levels at Davidson and Craik health centres and addendums to previously tabled petitions, being sessional papers 7, 8, 11, 17, and 18.

NOTICES OF MOTIONS AND QUESTIONS

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I give notice that I shall on day no. 18 ask the government the following question:

To the Minister of Agriculture: will the waterfowl and wildlife damage compensation program continue to be offered to farmers in the 2002-2003 fiscal year?

Ms. Draude: — Mr. Speaker, I give notice that I shall on day no. 18 ask the government the following question:

To the Minister of Learning: what are the guidelines, regulation rules, and all other determining factors set up by the Department of Learning in order for school divisions to implement the School^{PLUS} model?

Mr. Gantefoer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I give notice that I shall on day no. 18 ask the government the following question:

To the Minister of Labour: for the year 2001, what was the total cost incurred by the Workers' Compensation Board for providing out-of-province MRIs to claimants; and further to this, what provinces were those individuals sent to and what were the travel costs and travel expenses, including meals and incidentals claimed?

And while I'm on my feet, Mr. Speaker, I'll also have a similar question:

For the Minister of Crown Investments Corporation: for the year 2001, what was the total cost incurred by SGI for providing out-of-province MRIs to claimants; and further to this, what provinces were these individuals sent to and what were the travel costs and travel expenses, including meals and incidentals claimed?

I also have a similar question for the year 2000.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Ms. Bakken: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I give notice that I shall on day no. 18 ask the government the following question:

To the minister responsible for Liquor and Gaming: could you please provide a list of all the communities in Saskatchewan where VLT machines are operating; the number of VLT machines in each community; and the total revenue that is generated from VLTs in each of these communities?

I so present.

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I give notice that I shall on day no. 18 ask the government the following question:

How many ministerial assistants, executive assistants, secretaries, and all other support staff are employed in the office of the minister for the Crown Investments Corporation? For each one, what is their name, their title, and their annual salary?

Mr. Hart: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I give notice that I shall on day no. 18 ask the government the following question:

To the Minister of Learning: in the 2001-2002 fiscal year, how much did school boards in Saskatchewan pay for high-speed Internet usage under the government's CommunityNet program?

Mr. Hillson: — Mr. Speaker, I give notice I shall on day no. 18 ask the government the following question:

To the Minister of Health: how many CT scans were operating in the province in 2001; how many hours total did the CT scans operate in 2001; how many hours per day on average did each CT scan operate; and how many CT tests were conducted in 2001?

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Hon. Mr. Melenchuk: — In your gallery are two visiting scholars from China. They are studying at the University of Regina for one year. Jane Cui and Mei Dai are accompanied by Beth Ross from the office of International Co-operation and Development at the University of Regina.

Ms. Cui is the Wan Li visiting scholar. The Wan Li Scholarship has been offered by the University of Regina since 1993, and each year a qualified and highly recommended person from the State Administration comes to Regina for a one-year period.

Ms. Cui is a nurse by profession and for several years she taught nursing at the Second Military Medical University. Since 1989 she has worked with the State Administration for Foreign Expert Affairs. In her current position she is in charge of organizing and sending Chinese training delegations abroad.

While at the University of Regina she will be working with Dean Garnet Garven of the Faculty of Administration in preparation for a joint project between the Chinese government and the University of Regina.

Ms. Mei Dai studied English at Beijing Foreign Studies University, and since 1985 has been working for the Foreign Affairs Department, National People's Congress. She has been involved in the hosting of international delegations.

Ms. Dai arrived in Regina in August of 2001 to become the current Qiao Shi Fellow. The Qiao Shi Fellowship was first offered in 1998 and each year one person is recommended by the National People's Congress to come to Regina for a 12-month period. While here in Regina, Ms. Dai has been auditing Faculty of Administration courses and has also taken one semester at the English as a second language centre to upgrade her English skills.

Ms. Cui and Ms. Dai are very interested in how public administration works here in Canada and greatly appreciate this

opportunity to see democratic government in action. And I would ask all members to join with me in welcoming Ms. Cui and Ms. Dai, along with Mrs. Ross, to the House this afternoon.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hart: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to join with the Minister of Learning in welcoming our guests from China here this afternoon to witness today's proceedings in the legislature.

I know we on this side of the House will try and make their visit this afternoon as interesting as possible. Welcome.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Through you I would like to introduce to the members of the legislature two of my constituents who are sitting in your gallery — Lois Zelmer and Adam Zelmer.

They're here today because Adam is wanting to see how this place works. He was part of the model legislature as a delegate from Campbell Collegiate when the last model legislature was held here and I know that he plans to come again when it's held here. He is interested in politics and he lives very close by to this place, and so I know that this is a big part of his life.

So welcome, both Adam and Lois.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Allchurch: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, to you and through you to all members of the Assembly, there is somebody sitting in your gallery that's very precious to me. She is the mother of my three sons. She's also the grandmother of our two granddaughters.

And I would like the Assembly to please welcome my wife Sheila.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to introduce to you and the members of the Assembly today. Seated in your gallery in the upper level is the Aitken family — Bill Aitken and Rhonda Aitken and their daughters Courtney and Deirdre.

Bill is a long-time firefighter in the city of Yorkton — been there now for 25 years — serving our community as a firefighter. Wife Rhonda works at the credit union, looking after the financial affairs of the people in Yorkton.

And their two daughters — Courtney is in grade 7 and Deirdre is in grade 5 at the St. Michael's School in Yorkton.

(13:45)

And just for the information of the House, Mr. Speaker, the St. Michael's School is the very first joint school facility that was announced in the province by the member from Saskatoon Nutana.

So I want to welcome this afternoon the Aitken family to the Assembly. I know it's a school break right now and they're here to enjoy the festivity of the House this afternoon. Welcome to the Assembly.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Wartman: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to welcome to the House someone who is no stranger to this House, Bob Long, who is seated behind me. A former member and cabinet minister and now Chair of the Highway Traffic Board. He's doing a tremendous job there.

I would like all to join me in welcoming Bob to the House.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Brkich: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to the members here, a group of 26 air cadets that are in from Davidson and surrounding communities. The surrounding communities are Bladworth, Craik, Loreburn, Hawarden, Kenaston, Hanley, and Simpson.

The group is 553 Sherlock. It's based in Davidson and the commanding officer is Wayne Morrison.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Wartman: — Mr. Speaker, as I was introducing our earlier guest, a couple more guests came in. A friend from my constituency, Ron Hitchcock, who is seated up in the gallery in the west. And with him is Gord Gunoff, both with IBEW (International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers). And I would like all members to join me in welcoming them to this House.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Hoopla Championship Basketball Tournament

Mr. Hart: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, on March 14 through to the 16 the city of Regina hosted the annual Hoopla Championship Basketball Tournament. Appearing once again at the provincial finals was the Wynyard High School girls basketball team, the Golden Bears.

The Bears, competing in the 2A division, were back to defend their gold medal from last year. In order to defend their title they had to first battle teams from Outlook and Shaunavon, and then once again they came face to face with the Notre Dame Hounds. These two teams, Mr. Speaker, have competed against each other for the gold medal in the last three years.

In the championship game the Bears were down 11 points with only 11 minutes to go. In that short space of time the girls scored a total of 23 points and only allowing the Hounds to score two points. Their amazing turnaround won them the game and the gold medal, with a final score of 77 to 66.

Once again I must congratulate the hard-working and dedicated youth in my constituency. Keep up the good work girls, and we hope to see you there again next year. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

McDermid School Wins International Award

Mr. Yates: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. McDermid School has been selected as the provincial winner of the 2001-2002 International Reading Association Exemplary Reading Program Award. This award recognizes outstanding reading and language arts programs at all grade levels. Its mandate is to draw the public's attention to outstanding programs in schools throughout North America.

Teachers Bonie Banting and Mary Ann Sjogren-Branch have worked on the program for five years and are very enthused about their work and have said, "We're thrilled to be recognized for what we're doing." To them the greatest reward is, "The progress we see day to day with the students."

Sjogren-Branch and Banting plan to attend the International Reading Association's annual conference in San Francisco in late April to receive the international award and present their innovative program.

Mr. Speaker, I am sure that all members wish to extend their congratulations to McDermid School on their fine accomplishments. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Constituent Elected President of the Canadian Cattlemen's Association

Mr. Stewart: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Neil Yahnke who ranches at Gouldtown in my constituency with his wife, Marilyn, was recently elected president of the Canadian Cattlemen's Association at their convention in Ottawa.

The Canadian Cattlemen's Association, Mr. Speaker, represents the interests of Canada's 100,000 cattle producers. And the CCA (Canadian Cattlemen's Association) under Neil's leadership will continue work in the areas of animal health, trade, and the environment.

Neil was recently presented the Saskatchewan Order of Merit in recognition of his leadership in the beef industry. He's also past president of the Saskatchewan Stockgrowers Association and the Saskatchewan Livestock Association. Neil was a founding chairman of the Western Beef Development Centre and a former chairman of the Canada Beef Export Federation.

Congratulations, Neil. And as a cattleman I know that under your leadership I will be well represented at the national level and that cattle issues will be advanced on the federal government's agenda.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Sod Turning in Montmartre

Hon. Mr. Wartman: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to draw the House's attention to a good event that happened in rural Saskatchewan — a sod turning — as Saskatchewan continues to develop. In Montmartre construction is already

begun on a new 4,000 square foot building that will house the regional library, the RM (rural municipality), and the village offices in Montmartre. It is anticipated that it will be ready by the end of May.

The library will have a new home with the assistance of a \$60,000 grant from the province's Centenary Fund. This will roughly triple the size of the library from the present 56 square metre space and it will accommodate additional resources and community programs.

Mr. Speaker, you will remember that the Centenary Fund was created by this government to accelerate and demonstrate our support for important infrastructure projects like this one that are happening over the next three years leading up to the province's centenary in 2005. Mayor Paul Hamelin said, "The new library is important to Montmartre as it contributes to the social and economic well-being of . . . (the) community (of Montmartre)."

So we congratulate them on this new building and on the continual building of their community. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Assiniboia Team Wins Provincial Hockey Championship

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the Assiniboia Southern Rebels hockey team once again have become the provincial Junior B hockey champions. Their season consisted of 38 games, of which they won the last 27 straight games.

The Rebels won four games against Pilot Butte, four games against St. Philips Rangers to win the south Junior B title, then they went on to the Junior B provincial championships by winning in three games against the Saskatoon Chiefs.

This is the 10th year of the organization, Mr. Speaker, and the Assiniboia Southern Rebels have won the league six times, have won four provincial titles, and the Western Canadian title twice. The first time they won the western championship was in 1995-96, and again last year winning the Keystone Cup.

The next action for the Southern Rebels will be April 11-14 when they're hosting the Keystone Cup which will be held in Assiniboia.

Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate the Assiniboia Rebels, coaches, and management for the superb job they have done with this club. And I'd also like to congratulate an individual, a young individual on the team whose name I can pronounce, is my nephew, Denny Huyghebaert.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Student Receives Prestigious Scholarship

Hon. Mr. Axworthy: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to bring to the attention of this Assembly a remarkable student in my constituency of Saskatoon Fairview and at the same time to

congratulate him for receiving this country's most valuable university scholarship.

Mark Taylor is a grade 12 student who attends Bedford Road Collegiate. He was one of 10 Saskatchewan students who were finalists for the Canadian Merit Scholarship Foundation — one of 3,800 competing students across Canada. Only 32 awards are given annually, each of which pays for all of four years of tuition and residence at any Canadian university.

I know you're a teacher yourself, Mr. Speaker, so you'll recognize how remarkable this student is. He attained an overall average through high school of 98 per cent. But the award is more . . . it's for more than marks, exceptional as they are.

Mark is active in his church, has built homes for Habitat for Humanity. He's president of the SRC (student representative council), columnist for his school's paper, a member of his school's football and basketball teams, and an audiovisual whiz for his school's drama productions.

Mr. Speaker, both his father, Glenn, and Mark contribute the success of all of his children in part to our excellent public school system. As well with any Canadian university as his choice, Mark will be attending the University of Saskatchewan. Mr. Speaker, that decision speaks volumes about our city, our university, and our province.

And I know all members will join me in wishing Mark well as he continues his studies. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Canadian Cowboy Association Finals Rodeo

Mr. Brkich: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to talk today about a remarkable young man from the Bladworth area who late last fall won the national bull riding championship at the Canadian Cowboy Association's finals rodeo.

Eighteen-year-old Vincent Northrop won the 2001 championship on October 28 in Saskatoon. If anyone deserved to win the championship it was Vincent, who has been riding various stocks since his early childhood.

Vincent, who is currently a first-year student at Dickinson State University in North Dakota, decided to compete the CCA (Canadian Cowboy Association) rodeo finals, hoping that he would finish somewhere in the middle of the 10 competitive bull riders in this category. However, his great abilities and relaxed manner resulted in an overwhelming victory for Mr. Northrop.

Vincent's father, Mr. Bill Northrop, is very proud of his son for capturing this championship and says:

I've always thought he's been a good rider. I've heard from experienced cowboys, since he was a junior steer rider, who have said that he was going to make a great bull rider someday and he has.

You know, Mr. Speaker, climbing aboard a raging bull takes a lot of courage, but for Vincent riding bulls is a natural fit. At his

father's automotive shop in Davidson, Vincent's trophy saddle is on display for customers and friends to admire. This recent championship is one of which the Northrop family and the members of this House should be very proud.

I would ask that the members join me in congratulating Vincent Northrop on achieving such a high level achievement in the bull riding arena.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Air Transport Association of Canada 2001 Innovation Award

Mr. Forbes: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Air Transport Association of Canada has recognized the Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Technology, Kelsey campus, and the Saskatchewan Aviation Council's innovative approach to commercial pilot training.

These partners have received the ATAC (Air Transport Association of Canada) 2001 Innovation Award for its commercial pilot diploma program.

Mr. Speaker, this innovation award recognizes Canadian flight schools, air taxi, and charter operators that have demonstrated innovative best practices for increasing safety and product quality that serves as an example for others to follow and learn from.

Claude Naud, vice president of SIAST (Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology) programs said:

The national award speaks well of our ability to respond quickly to the needs of business and industry and our continued commitment to quality programming.

Well, Mr. Speaker, need I say more? But I think I will. It is a real accomplishment to receive this award, Mr. Speaker, since this is the first year of the operation of this program. Commercial pilot program instructors are leaders in Saskatchewan aviation industry.

Currently there are 23 students completing ground school training and Janet Keim, the president of the Saskatchewan Aviation Council commented that:

Through a unique partnership of Saskatchewan flying schools, charter and airline operators, and SIAST, we are providing a first-class program with close ties to provincial aviation employers.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ORAL QUESTIONS

Funding for Water Quality Improvements

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, yesterday the minister of Sask Water announced that Justice Laing's report from the public inquiry investigating the

contamination of North Battleford's water supply would be released this Friday in North Battleford. The announcement even took the mayor of North Battleford by surprise.

Mr. Speaker, the minister says that when he releases the inquiry report on Friday, he will also reveal the NDP's plan to deal with the many water quality concerns of Saskatchewan people.

Well we already know what the plan is — the plan is cut funding to Sask Water in this provincial budget by over \$1 million.

To the minister: how is it that Sask Water is going to do more to improve water infrastructure and water quality for Saskatchewan communities when Sask Water has \$1 million less to work with?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Mr. Speaker, for that member's information, a meeting has been arranged with the mayor tomorrow afternoon at 3 o'clock. The mayor has agreed to the meeting and all the information will be shared with the mayor at that time, Mr. Speaker.

This Friday we'll be releasing the report, and it'll be certainly putting forward our response by this government to begin working in partnership to again address some of the challenges that we have in the water quality in this province.

And, Mr. Speaker, for the record, the \$1 million cut in Sask Water is for infrastructure work on our dam system. We have 50 dams in this province, Mr. Speaker; that dam system will be downgraded in terms of some of the work that is needed this year, Mr. Speaker. So the cuts clearly are not related to water quality work, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Well, Mr. Speaker, I realize there are a lot of people that would agree with the minister's assessment of his system. Mr. Speaker, the contamination of North Battleford's water supply left thousands of people ill — no laughing matter.

Presently SERM (Saskatchewan Environment and Resource Management) says there are 50 communities in the province under boil-water advisories or boil-water orders, and that there are 33 communities that lack minimum water treatment facilities.

Yet a report compiled by the minister's own department last year indicates that 90 per cent of the province's small towns need to upgrade their drinking water systems to meet minimum health requirements and guidelines. The report says 460 small towns and four smaller cities need some form of water treatment upgrade.

Mr. Speaker, how is it that after the water crisis in North Battleford, all of the concerns expressed by Saskatchewan residents and communities, and Sask Water's own report indicating the supply and treatment of drinking water is a concern for the people of this province, how is it that the NDP

(New Democratic Party) can still cut not only Sask Water's budget by a million dollars but the entire budget of Saskatchewan Environment and Resource Management by over \$10 million?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Mr. Speaker, day after day in this Assembly we hear that opposition party criticizing the government and wanting more money for highways, they want more money for health care, they want more tax cuts, they want more agriculture support, Mr. Speaker, and they want \$300 million from this province to meet some of the water challenges.

There's more and more and more and more, Mr. Speaker. And what I'd tell that member on this whole water quality file is, we are working in partnership with the community and we'll meet some of those challenges over time. And I would ask that member to stop playing silly politics and start being fair, Mr. Speaker, with this whole challenge of water quality.

And I'll point out in our whole effort, Mr. Speaker, we are going to be fair to the people of Saskatchewan to make sure they have a good, decent cost for meeting some of the water quality objectives of this province.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the NDP have known for well over 10 years that this province was facing serious water concerns. They had a cabinet document that warned them. They had officials in SERM, Sask Water, Municipal Affairs, and Sask Health warning them. They've had communities across this province requesting assistance for water treatment upgrades, for help with testing and training, and for a few dollars to help them haul water while their wells were down.

Now they've cut the water quality budget; they've cut SERM's budget. They are telling people, get ready to pay three times more for your water and they refuse to take one ounce of responsibility for the water infrastructure disaster we are facing in this province.

Mr. Speaker, why is the NDP dumping the entire financial burden of water quality and treatment of infrastructure onto municipalities in this province?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Mr. Speaker, this government for the past 10 years have been cleaning up that party's mess, Mr. Speaker. And certainly meeting some of the challenges in concert with the communities in safe water quality is something that we want to make sure we continue doing; and it make take us another 10 years, Mr. Speaker. This is not an overnight solution. We've maintained that time and time again, Mr. Speaker.

And what I want to point out, Mr. Speaker, is we want to be fair to all the people of Saskatchewan. Sixty-five to 70 per cent of our residents get their good quality water now, Mr. Speaker.

There's another 30 per cent that may or may not have . . . (inaudible) . . . challenges. We want to concentrate any resources we have in concert with these communities to make sure that 100 per cent of our communities are served with good quality water.

And I would point out, Mr. Speaker, it has been a tough climb ahead for this province to come back from that deficit that party left this province in the early '90s. And we will continue building on the legacy of managing the finances of this province well, and continue building on this partnership, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Mr. Speaker, it's absolutely amazing that after 10 years of dithering we now have the insult that is this NDP government's budget for safe drinking water.

You know, the minister went even further yesterday. He said that water bills for residents whose communities didn't have adequate water treatment facilities will double or even triple.

Once again, it is clear the NDP government plans to pass the buck; to download the costs of safe water infrastructure onto municipalities and taxpayers.

Now we know there's a cost to their don't worry, be happy strategy. At least 460 communities need infrastructure upgrades according to Sask Water. Are all of these towns and villages going to be hit? And what about the residents of the city of North Battleford. Is the minister saying their water bills are going to triple because they were unfortunate enough to get sick?

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Mr. Speaker, I'll point out not only that that party put us in debt in the early '80s, and not only now do they vote they want money spent all over the place, Mr. Speaker, but now they get up, and they stand in their place, and they vote against any budget that we have to improve SERM or Sask Water's ability to serve the people of Saskatchewan. That is a confused lot, Mr. Speaker.

And I would point out, Mr. Speaker, that we are going to not download onto our partners — the villages and the towns and the cities — we are going to work with them to upgrade their facilities so they're able to serve the people of Saskatchewan with good, safe water, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

New Gaming Agreement with First Nations

Ms. Bakken: — Mr. Speaker, my question is for the minister of Liquor and Gaming. The NDP government is currently negotiating a new gaming agreement with First Nations.

The whole issue of gaming in Saskatchewan received intense scrutiny after the financial scandal at SIGA (Saskatchewan Indian Gaming Authority). And there are still huge questions about the Liquor and Gaming department's role in the controversy.

Yet we hear that an agreement is close at hand and it will be for a very long term, a term of 25 years. I wonder if the taxpayers of Saskatchewan are comfortable with this government locking them into a 25-year contract.

Mr. Speaker, in light of the concerns over the recent problems, both with Liquor and Gaming, and SIGA, I would like the minister to explain why they are negotiating a 25-year agreement.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker and I welcome the question from the member opposite, although she will recognize and realize that it's not a public forum to negotiate any agreements that are currently being negotiated in good faith.

But I would like to remind the member also that we've come a long way since 2000 when people recognized there was a problem. That problem's been fixed.

We have every confidence in the SIGA Board. We are negotiating in good faith. They have achieved the benchmarks that were set by this government after moving swiftly to ensure that the Provincial Auditor became involved; and now that those benchmarks are being achieved, we continue to negotiate in good faith, and we will have a good agreement with our partners and our friends.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Bakken: — Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, we realize that a new agreement with First Nations people has not yet been signed. It is safe to assume though that perhaps the monetary issues have already been settled.

On page 61 of the budget document in *Estimates* of Government Relations and Aboriginal Affairs, it shows that last year the government paid 14 million to the First Nations for the gaming agreement. But for this budget year, Mr. Speaker, the estimates show the government will be contributing 10 million more for a total of \$24 million.

Mr. Speaker, my question to the minister: has the new gaming agreement been finalized and is the additional \$10 million a result of the new agreement?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well the short answer to the member opposite is no. It has not been signed.

But I can tell the House, Mr. Speaker, and I want to tell anybody that's listening. Throughout the negotiations that we undertook last summer, we have continued to negotiate in good faith. And the progress that SIGA has made has been excellent. We have every confidence in our partners.

And, Mr. Speaker, I'm somewhat surprised. Perhaps there is a lack of communication in the members opposite, because there is an article of March 1 in *The StarPhoenix*:

In a departure from his party's previous comments of the activities of Saskatchewan Indian Gaming Authority . . . (and I'm quoting), Hermanson praised the FSIN for running a successful gambling business and complimented it for addressing the "governance challenges" at SIGA (Mr. Speaker).

What's going on?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Bakken: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it is reported that the FSIN (Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations) would like to . . .

The Speaker: — Order, please. Order.

Ms. Bakken: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is reported that the FSIN would like to have this new agreement signed before the end of April and the Premier has said a deal is close . . .

The Speaker: — Order. Order, please. The member may start over.

Ms. Bakken: — Mr. Speaker, it is reported that the FSIN would like to have this new agreement signed before the end of April and the Premier has said a deal is close. Yet there are still many questions about the police investigation into the activities of former SIGA members. And there are questions about the Liquor and Gaming Authority role in the events as well.

The RCMP (Royal Canadian Mounted Police) have concluded their work and turned the results over to the Justice department. But the Justice department says no decision will be made on any charges until the fall because of a change in Crown prosecutors.

Mr. Speaker, will the Justice Minister explain why a new Crown prosecutor was assigned to this case after the report was received from the RCMP?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Axworthy: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I think the member needs to be aware that the economic opportunities for First Nations people in this province are limited, Mr. Speaker.

And, Mr. Speaker, she should make sure — she should make sure, Mr. Speaker — that she's part of the solution to economic development and opportunities for First Nations people, and not forever, Mr. Speaker, pick on negative aspects of what might be taking place. She should be upbeat about the opportunities and work with First Nations people and not be opposed to them as she obviously is.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Bakken: — Mr. Speaker, the reason we raise these issues is because the people on this side of the House are concerned about the dollars that go to the First Nation Fund and to the First Nations people of this province.

Mr. Speaker . . . Mr. Speaker, as long as there are unanswered questions about . . .

The Speaker: — Order.

Ms. Bakken: — Mr. Speaker, as long as there are unanswered questions about what was going on at SIGA during the tenure of Dutch Lerat and about how much the NDP government knew about it, there will be a cloud over any new gaming agreement that is reached. It would be in the best interests of the new SIGA Board, First Nations people, the provincial government, and all taxpayers of Saskatchewan that this province lift it before any new agreement is reached.

The minister told the media that it is unfair to link the SIGA investigation with the new gaming agreement. But it is already linked in the public's mind because the two parties involved, SIGA and SLGA (Saskatchewan Liquor and Gaming Authority), are also the two parties involved now.

Mr. Speaker, why is the government intent to sign a new gaming agreement before the results of investigation are made public?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again I want to let the opposition know, I want to let the members of this House know that we are negotiating an agreement with SIGA. And it will be a good agreement with our partners and our friends, Mr. Speaker.

I am somewhat amazed. I quoted earlier what the Leader of the Opposition is saying. I'd like to quote further from what the Leader of the Opposition said. That's why I'm a little confused about the questioning.

I may . . . (and this is a quote) I may surprise some people by saying that I believe the financial success of the Saskatchewan Indian Gaming Authority . . . is one of the great and largely untold business success stories in Saskatchewan.

The Leader of the Opposition, Mr. Speaker:

I have had the opportunity to meet with SIGA CEO Ed Bellegarde and I am impressed . . . (by) the direct and business-like approach both SIGA and . . . FSIN have taken in addressing the governance challenges that arose in 2001.

I'm not sure, Mr. Speaker, whether they're talking to one another over there, but we know what we're doing on this side of the House.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Bakken: — Mr. Speaker, if the minister is so sure that this new gaming agreement can be in no way linked to the SIGA scandal, will he stand in the House today and say that no one negotiating this new agreement for SIGA or the FSIN and no one negotiating on behalf of the provincial government is or was in any way involved with the RCMP investigation into the SIGA scandal?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(14:15)

Hon. Mr. Osika: — Mr. Speaker, thank you. I just want to reiterate again — and the member should know — that the status of the criminal investigation is under the purview of the Department of Justice, and that is still ongoing.

Now I'm going to continue to quote some more, Mr. Speaker, because I don't think they've got their lines together.

Quote from the Leader of the Opposition:

Of course, I am not privy to the discussions, but I understand SIGA and the FSIN are in negotiation with the province on the completion of a new casino operating agreement to replace the one that expired last March. I recognize the importance of getting a new agreement signed as soon as possible (an agreement, an agreement) that serves the best interests of both of First Nation peoples and the non-Aboriginal communities of our province."

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Balanced Budget Legislation

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my questions are for the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Speaker, more and more questions are being raised about the NDP's fudge-it budget. Now even Janice MacKinnon is refusing to back the government on whether the budget is even legal under the NDP's own balanced budget legislation.

Mr. Speaker, Janice MacKinnon was asked point-blank whether the NDP is breaking its own balanced budget law. And all she would say was, "no comment."

The NDP is violating their own balanced budget law. They have to change their Fiscal Stabilization Fund law because the budget is breaking this law as well.

Mr. Speaker, if this budget is an honest document, why does the NDP have to go to such lengths to skirt around its own laws?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Well you know, Mr. Speaker, if the opposition would think about what they say one day and then the next day, they'd realize that usually what they say is there is no Fiscal Stabilization Fund. Today what they say is don't change the legislation to allow you to access the funds in the Fiscal Stabilization Fund.

Well which way is it, Mr. Speaker? It can't be both ways.

But I want to say to the opposition and to the people of the province, Mr. Speaker, that when they say that we should not access the savings in the Fiscal Stabilization Fund, which the member just acknowledged exists, what they're saying, Mr. Speaker, is they don't agree with a budget that does not increase the PST (provincial sales tax). But the people agree with it.

They don't agree with a budget that continues with personal tax reductions, but the people agree with it, Mr. Speaker.

They don't agree with building the schools, but the people agree with it, Mr. Speaker.

They don't agree with fixing the roads, but the people agree with it, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, yesterday the minister said the Crowns will not have to incur more debt in order to pay their dividend to the General Revenue Fund. Again, the minister's own budget doesn't match his words.

In 2001-2002, the government took \$200 million dividend from the Crowns. During that same period, total Crown debt grew by \$143 million. So the NDP is just moving debt from one account to another account. They're growing the debt outside the General Revenue Fund to hide the deficit inside the General Revenue Fund.

Mr. Speaker, you know what? They're really using their Visa card to pay for their MasterCard. Anyway you look at it, it's more debt, Mr. Speaker. And according to Janice MacKinnon, it's against the law.

My question, Mr. Speaker, is why is the NDP violating its own balanced budget law by hiding debt in the Crowns?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — What we're doing, Mr. Speaker, is we're building — we're building the highways, we're building the schools. And I'll tell the member opposite and the people of the province what the Crowns are doing, Mr. Speaker — they're building too.

We're on public record as saying that infrastructure in the Crowns should be funded by debt, and it should be borrowed, it shouldn't be paid on a cash basis by the taxpayers, Mr. Speaker.

Why did the debt of the Crowns go up last year? I'll tell the member why, Mr. Speaker. Because SaskPower built a new generation capacity at Cory and Queen Elizabeth to keep up with the demands of a growing economy. That's one reason, Mr. Speaker.

And the other reason, Mr. Speaker, is because SaskEnergy subsidized our heating costs by \$70 million. And what I want to know from those members, Mr. Speaker, are they opposed to the Crowns building electrical, power-generating capacity? Yes or no, Mr. Speaker?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the minister seems to forget about the fact that last year his very government sold \$220 million worth of Crown assets and put them into general revenue and Crown debt.

Mr. Speaker, there's one way the NDP could give us an honest picture of the province's finances. They could listen to the Provincial Auditor and give us a budget that shows the complete picture.

The auditor says, and I quote:

It's time for Saskatchewan to change. The government should focus on its overall financial planning information on the entire government.

That's what the auditor says, Mr. Speaker. No more phony-baloney transfers from a so-called rainy day fund that does not exist. No more borrowing in the Crowns to hide the deficit in the General Revenue Fund. All the NDP accounting tricks would be eliminated if they just followed the auditor's recommendation.

Mr. Speaker, why is the NDP refusing to give Saskatchewan people the complete picture of the government's finances?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Well, Mr. Speaker, they used to wait at least a day before they flipped and flopped, but now it's happening within five minutes. We're back to having no funds in the Fiscal Stabilization Fund again.

But I want to say to the members opposite, Mr. Speaker, this is what the CIBC (Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce), the Bank of Commerce World Markets, says about the governance in the Crowns. They say, quote: "they have an enlightened dividend policy based on cash flow."

The Conference Board of Canada says they rate the governance structure amongst the best in Canada, Mr. Speaker.

The Institute of Public Administration of Canada awarded the Crown sector in Saskatchewan the Governor General's gold medal for our governance and performance management systems.

I ask you, Mr. Speaker, how many medals have those people over there received for their financial management? Not very many, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, if the NDP has nothing to hide . . .

The Speaker: — Order, please.

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, if the NDP has nothing to hide, why are they so touchy about following the auditor's recommendation? If the NDP has nothing to hide, why are they refusing to give us the complete picture of the government's finances? If the NDP has nothing to hide, why do they have to change accounting practices? If the NDP has nothing to hide, why won't Janice MacKinnon back up their budget?

Mr. Speaker, where there's smoke, there's mirrors. Mr.

Speaker, why won't the NDP give the people of Saskatchewan a complete and honest picture of the province's finances? What are they hiding?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Mr. Speaker, what I want to know is why the opposition is hiding? Why are they grasping at straws? Why, Mr. Speaker, don't they talk about building the schools? Or to put it another way, why are they opposed to building schools, Mr. Speaker?

Why are they opposed to more money for municipalities, Mr. Speaker? Why are they opposed to fixing the highways, Mr. Speaker? Why are they opposed to more money for the health system, Mr. Speaker? Why are they opposed to more money for education, Mr. Speaker? Why are they opposed to personal income tax cuts, Mr. Speaker? Why are they opposed to no increase in the PST?

Could it be because they wanted our budget to be like the Alberta budget, and the BC (British Columbia) budget, to raise the PST and raise health care premiums? It didn't happen. They have nothing to complain about and they're sorely disappointed, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker, on a point of order.

The Speaker: — I'll entertain the member's point of order at orders for the day.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Pension Benefits Amendment Regulations Announced

Hon. Mr. Axworthy: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, this government is committed to fair and efficient marketplace regulation. We're especially committed to a retirement system that responds to the evolving needs of Saskatchewan retirees.

Over the last two decades, changes in the marketplace have seen a shift from defined benefit pension plans to retirement products that allow for more individual control. With this shift, attention has come to bear on the limitations the government places on pension money and retirement.

This government has received numerous requests from retired persons, pension plan members, and financial advisors for discretion in accessing locked-in retirement savings in retirement.

Today, Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to announce we're taking steps to keep pace with these shifting demands. The Pension Benefits Amendment Regulations, 2002 were proclaimed on April 1, 2002 and these amendments give retirees greater ability to manage their own affairs.

People with a locked-in retirement accounts now have the

option of converting their pension funds into Registered Retirement Income Funds, RRIFs, Mr. Speaker, at retirement similar to the way RRSPs (Registered Retirement Savings Plan) are converted to RRIFs. The option is available to former pension plan members who've money in a locked-in retirement account and are eligible to retire. It's also available to individuals with existing life income fund and locked-in retirement income fund contracts.

Mr. Speaker, I should point out that these . . . that pension plans are permitted, but not required to offer a RRIF as an option at retirement. A prescribed RRIF has no maximum retirement limit . . . withdrawal limit, rather. Retirees have the ability to determine for themselves their level of income and taxes are payable on withdrawal only.

Mr. Speaker, we've developed these amendments in response to requests from retirees seeking greater control over their retirement income. We believe these changes demonstrate this government's respect for the ability of retirees to manage their own affairs. And we encourage retirees, Mr. Speaker, to contact their financial institution, financial advisor, pension plan administrator for more information on transferring money to a prescribed RRIF.

Information also, Mr. Speaker, concerning these new regulations is available on the Saskatchewan Justice Web site. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I rise to respond to the minister's statement. But first off, I'd like to indicate that we do not have a copy of the ministerial statement which is, I believe, customary in the House that we would have that copy. And I understand that there has been some miscommunication and I think that the opposition deserves that copy and I hope that this is the first, the first, and last time.

But I do want to make comment to the points raised by the minister because, Mr. Speaker, my office, and as Finance critic I have been contacted by many people and I . . . During the time that the government released its white paper in the fall to obtain suggestions from people to . . . for people to consider the options that were being put forward, many people recognized that indeed there was a time to update the pension regulations to ensure that people had the abilities to decide on their own monies. Because after all, Mr. Speaker, any monies that are in a pension fund are the . . . under the ownership of the individual. And people would like to have that freedom.

So in the options that I saw in the white paper, and that many people saw, there was anticipated changes that were going to be for the better of individuals to plan their financial positions in retirement. And I understand from the brief comments that I heard from the minister that indeed those regulations have now been changed.

As indicated, I think the minister has said that those regulations are available on the government Web site. And I would ask that any of the people who have contacted opposition members — and we have had many people contact us — would indeed choose that Web site and obtain all of those regulations and see

how those regulations pertain to their own individual retirements plans.

So that would be the position that we would take that, indeed, until we see the regulations and until we hear from people as to how individuals are affected, we would trust that the government has indeed made the choices for the betterment of the people of Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 17 — The Public Employees Pension Plan Amendment Act, 2002

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 17, The Public Employees Pension Plan Amendment Act, 2002 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. 18 — The Saskatchewan Pension Plan Amendment Act, 2002

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 18, The Saskatchewan Pension Plan Amendment Act, 2002 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. 19 – The Superannuation (Supplementary Provisions) Amendment Act, 2002

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 19, The Superannuation (Supplementary Provisions) Amendment Act, 2002, be now introduced and read the first time.

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

STATEMENT BY THE SPEAKER

Ruling on a Point of Order

The Speaker: — Before orders of the day and before taking the next point of order, I would like to deal with one that's . . . I heard yesterday.

Yesterday the Opposition House Leader, the member for Cannington, raised a point of order concerning the procedure for addressing points of order with respect to the proceedings of question period. In this regard I reviewed the practice of this Assembly, as well as the applicable parliamentary authorities.

When question period was instituted as part of the daily routine in 1976, it was done so on the recommendations of the Special Committee on Rules and Procedures. The third recommendation of that report reads as follows, quote:

Mr. Speaker will not entertain points of order during oral

question period. Points of Order may be raised on Orders of the Day.

A review of the record shows that this recommendation has been adhered to without deviation since 1976. Speakers have not permitted points of order to be raised by members during oral question period. This is to prevent members from disrupting questions on substantive issues by raising procedural issues.

Nevertheless, while not addressed in that report it is a matter of common practice for the Speaker to intervene during question period when there is a breach of order. Although the role of the Speaker in this regard is noted in two rulings of the Chair, dated May 27, 1985 and December 22, 1986, more noteworthy are the many interventions the Speaker has made during question period over the years.

I will end this ruling with another quote, this time from page 424 of the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*. In noting the procedure for points of order, it is stated, quote:

If a situation arises during Question Period that the Speaker believes to be sufficiently serious to . . . (recommend) immediate consideration, for example unparliamentary language, then the matter is addressed at that time.

I hope this ruling clarifies the practice of this Assembly with respect to the points of order and the Speaker's interventions during question period. I would like to close by reminding all hon. members that the appropriate time for members to raise a point of order concerning question period is on orders of the day.

POINT OF ORDER

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my point of order deals with the statement by the minister for Sask Water who stated during question period that the Sask Party was responsible for the governance of the province during the 1980s.

Mr. Speaker, the Saskatchewan Party was only formed in 1997 and no one on the opposition side was part of Executive Council in either governing party of the 1980s. The problems of the 1980s were a result of both the NDP and PC (Progressive Conservative) governance, not the Saskatchewan Party, Mr. Speaker . . .

The Speaker: — Order. I believe what's happening here is the member knows this is not a point of order; this is a matter of debate. The point is not well taken.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

WRITTEN QUESTIONS

Mr. Yates: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. By leave I request permission to table responses to written questions no. 34 and 35.

The Speaker: — Responses for 34 and 35 have been tabled.

SPECIAL ORDER

ADJOURNED DEBATES

MOTION FOR COMMITTEE OF FINANCE
(BUDGET DEBATE)

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Cline that the Assembly resolve itself into the Committee of Finance, and the proposed amendment thereto moved by Mr. Krawetz.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I just have . . . I've got a few more comments dealing with the budget this year, Mr. Speaker. And when I started yesterday, I noted that the Minister of Learning and the Minister of Social Services — although they'll be disappointed that I'll be coming to an end — followed with great enthusiasm yesterday and I want to thank them for that.

Mr. Speaker, yesterday I read a number of headlines in the newspapers across the province, very pessimistic headlines. Very pessimistic headlines, Mr. Speaker, dealing with deficit budgeting and overall debt increasing in the province.

Today I'd like to change that a little bit, Mr. Speaker, and talk about some headlines in the paper that are very optimistic. And why they are optimistic is because they deal with the Saskatchewan Party.

I'll just read some of them out to you, Mr. Speaker, and I know the ministers that I mentioned before will be quite enthused with this also. Sask Party delivers plans . . .

The Speaker: — Why is the member for Moose Jaw Wakamow on her feet?

Hon. Ms. Higgins: — Leave to introduce guests.

Leave granted.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Hon. Ms. Higgins: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And I'd like to thank my colleague for giving me a few minutes of his time.

To you and through you to members of the House, I would like to welcome in the west gallery, Winston Lewis, a constituent from Moose Jaw. Winston is also a business agent with the Service Employees' International Union in Moose Jaw. And it's good to see him here. I hope he enjoys the proceedings this afternoon. Welcome.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

SPECIAL ORDER

ADJOURNED DEBATES

MOTION FOR COMMITTEE OF FINANCE
(BUDGET DEBATE)

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed

motion by the Hon. Mr. Cline that the Assembly resolve itself into the Committee of Finance, and the proposed amendment thereto moved by Mr. Krawetz.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'll just go over some of the optimistic headlines that we see across this province in newspapers. And all of them are dealing with Sask Party plans that we have for the future of this province, to grow this province, and to grow this province by 100,000 people.

Mr. Speaker, *Rosetown Eagle*: "A plan to grow Saskatchewan, to grow a province, Saskatchewan Party." "Grow Saskatchewan meetings all about sharing ideas," and I quote Mr. Hermanson.

"Residents inquire about opposition party's plan to grow Saskatchewan," P.A. (Prince Albert) *Herald*, Mr. Speaker. *Gull Lake Advance*: "Take control for a brighter future, Sask Party." And it just goes on and on and on, Mr. Speaker.

The one thing you'll notice, Mr. Speaker, connected with the Sask Party — its optimism for the province of Saskatchewan, something that this party is all about on this side of the House.

Mr. Speaker, it gets very tiring to hear all the pessimism coming out of that side, all the excuses why, number one, we're losing jobs; number two, we're losing people; number three, why we have to have deficit budgets two years in a row; number four, why we have to increase the debt instead of, as they have in the past, reducing the debt.

Mr. Speaker, for once it's nice to hear some optimism from this side of the House in this House about the future of Saskatchewan.

Some of the reasons, Mr. Speaker, that people around this province are so optimistic when they talk to people in the Saskatchewan Party, number one, is probably the idea of lowering incomes taxes further. We talk about reducing taxes on growth and productivity, something that would help businesses in this province thrive, would bring businesses back to Saskatchewan instead of what's happening now — chasing them every which way, whether it's east, west, or south, Mr. Speaker. We're losing businesses and we're losing young people.

We also talk, Mr. Speaker, about delivering smaller and smarter government. We talk about economic expansions, Mr. Speaker. We talk about providing quality educational . . .

The Speaker: — Order. Order, please. Order, please. Order, please.

Mr. Bjornerud: — I thank you, Mr. Speaker. I see today, Mr. Speaker, we have much more enthusiasm on this side. I should go on for a while longer.

Mr. Speaker, I think it's such a good feeling to hear people with some optimism in this province of what we can do on this side of the House with all the natural resources we have in this province — if you look at Manitoba, Mr. Speaker, who would give anything to have our natural resources, but on that side they're actually doing better with less because they've had less

socialist governments in that province of Manitoba.

Mr. Speaker, I could go on again and I know members on the other side would hope I would, but I think I have to come to an end now and let some of the other members on this side, Mr. Speaker.

I have to say, Mr. Speaker, that I cannot support this budget, but I certainly can support the amendment to the budget. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for . . . I was going to recognize the member for Regina Qu'Appelle Valley, but I want to ask, why is the member for Moose Jaw on his feet?

Hon. Mr. Hagel: — Mr. Speaker, I ask leave of the Assembly to move a motion in regards to granting a leave of absence to certain members.

The Speaker: — The motion at this time cannot be accepted by the Chair because we are into a debate on the budget speech. And so there's a motion on the floor. We'd have to have adjournment of the motion before we can do that.

So I recognize the member for Regina Qu'Appelle, the Minister of Highways.

Hon. Mr. Wartman: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is for me a real honour to be able to stand and speak in favour of the budget of this province.

Mr. Speaker, a tremendous amount of very good work has gone into developing and producing this budget. It is a budget which is designed to build this province. It's a budget that is based on hope.

But I tell you, Mr. Speaker, it's also a budget that is grounded in reality and part of the reality that we have had to face in this past year has been some decline in the economy. We've seen — worldwide — we've seen the effects of September 11. We've seen a drop in gas and oil revenues. And there have been a number of factors which have seriously affected not only this government but governments all across the country — actually, throughout the world. But all across the country we have seen the impact.

We have seen massive cuts in British Columbia, cuts that have resulted in thousands of people losing their jobs. We have seen budgets cut for highways. We have seen budgets cut for health, for all kinds of programs in both Alberta and British Columbia. And I have to say that with the hard work that has gone on, the long-term planning that has gone on by this government, we are not compelled to make those kind of cuts here in Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, we have been accused by the members opposite of all kinds of games around the budget, but I have to say I think one of the biggest problems is the confusion and the lack of understanding on behalf of the members opposite. They have looked at this budget, and I am convinced by the language they use, by the things that they're saying, that they really do not have a good grasp of how this budget is developed, how it

operates — because it sticks within our guidelines.

This is a budget that is based, as I say, on long-range planning. We had surplus come in over the past few years. Those surpluses were put into a Fiscal Stabilization Fund. Now as the Minister of Finance alluded to before, we don't have drawers of cash that we put this money into. This money is a budget line, Mr. Speaker, and it is available as a surplus.

Now what I want to ask the members opposite when I hear them talking about this budget, is how can they on one day say that we should be spending this surplus, and on the next day say that there is no surplus; there is no Fiscal Stabilization Fund.

And just so that I can remind them, I would like to quote some of their confusion. Mr. Speaker, the Sask Party has said that this fund doesn't exist. And then they have also said that we should spend this money. And I would like to quote. In November of 2000:

Krawetz said he wants a fall session of the legislature to debate how to spend the money.

And I would like to quote also from the Moosomin MLA (Member of the Legislative Assembly) report:

The Saskatchewan Party has called upon the Minister of Finance to confirm (if) he is indeed sitting on a secret bundle of cash, and if so, recall the Legislature so it can be debated . . . how . . . best (to) spend this windfall.

All through that whole season they railed on about this money that was in the so-called windfall as they set it up, but was in the Fiscal Stabilization Fund or was designated for that.

The Leader of the Saskatchewan Party, and I quote:

Saskatchewan Party Leader Elwin Hermanson called Friday for a special session of the legislature to debate how the province's . . . 370 million oil and gas surplus should be spent.

And that was in *The StarPhoenix* December 2, 2000. Mr. Speaker, these quotes show the tremendous confusion that there is on that side of the House.

(14:45)

They talked about this government engaging in jiggery-pokery when it was putting together its finance . . . its budget, and, Mr. Speaker, I would have to say — and I'll reference my response to the Speech from the Throne — I don't think it's a matter of jiggery-pokery on their side; it's a matter of piggery-pokery. They have been looking at their plan, talking about their plan around this province, and saying that they've got this plan and it's going to grow Saskatchewan. Well even their own members have said there's no substance to it.

And what I said was that it was a pig in a poke, and yet they only have the poke out there — the bag; they don't show us what's inside. There is no plan, Mr. Speaker. They are confused. They are engaged in piggery-pokery with the people of the province.

And, Mr. Speaker, we have a plan — a very clear plan. We have a budget that is well grounded and solidly based.

I want to talk about some of the things that we're doing with this. This budget is built on four pillars. And those pillars, Mr. Speaker, are meant to grow the economy — to grow our environment. We are investing in infrastructure that supports economic development. We are ensuring that there will be quality education. We have increased the funding for education significantly, and we are ensuring that there will be quality education.

Mr. Speaker, we do this because we have looked around the world and we have seen very clearly that we must build the human capital in order to build the capital in the economy of our province. We look to Ireland and we have seen what they did in their planning over there. We don't have the same kind of massive investment of Eurodollars, but we can see some of the very positive things that they have done that we can also engage in.

And one of those things that we can engage in is shoring up our education system — right from pre-kindergarten on through post-secondary education. And so we put more money into that.

And we have also, Mr. Speaker, recognized that we need facilities in order to develop our education system in this province. And we have determined that one of the ways that we can enable those facilities to be built is by enabling the educational institutions to take out a mortgage-type loan in order to build those. Mr. Speaker, this is good, solid financial planning. It is engaged in by governments across this country and it is the kind of planning that will enable this education system to thrive.

The CGAs, (certified general accountant), if I might just quote from the column of Bruce Johnstone in *The Leader-Post*:

... the CGAs (looking at this type of financing) say it's fine to finance infrastructure with debt, as long as the term of the debt doesn't exceed the life of the asset being funded.

Well, Mr. Speaker, there is no way that the debt is going to outlive the term of these assets that are being built. This kind of financing is up front; it is clear to the public that we are working to try and build the province and make it strong. We are supporting the education structures in this province.

Mr. Speaker, we hear so much gloom and doom along with the confusion from the other side of the House, and one of the things we hear is about all the young people that are leaving our province. But, Mr. Speaker, we must remember that there have been studies done that have shown very clearly that over 75 per cent of the graduates of our universities are staying in Saskatchewan and finding good jobs and that over 90 per cent of the graduates of the SIAST and the technical schools are staying in this province and finding good jobs. Why? Because we are building a solid economy here and because those jobs are available.

Yes, we know that young people do leave the province, Mr. Speaker. I was one of those young people who left the province.

I went off and worked on the oil rigs; I worked in the mines to make some money, to have an adventure. But I came to this province that I love. I came back here to try and build a good, solid province for the future and I am very happy that I'm engaged in that task with a government that has a solid foundation and is building for the future.

When I ran for this government, Mr. Speaker, when I ran to be elected in '99, one of the things that I was very proud of is that we had moved beyond that period in the '80s where there was so much waste, where the money of the people of this province was just blown away and threw us into terrible debt. And I was proud of the financial stewardship of those people who had come into government in the '90s, the New Democratic Party. And I was proud that I had an opportunity to run for this party and to carry on that inheritance.

And, Mr. Speaker, that's what we're engaged in at this point, is carrying on that inheritance, giving sound stewardship, sound financial planning that will build a successful province. We have been engaged in a number of things, Mr. Speaker, that are going to help us in this process.

One of those pieces of work that has been going on out there engages the people of our province. It's called the Action Committee on the Rural Economy — ACRE. I was privileged to sit on that committee as an elected member. And I have to say that there was such a disparate group of people there with ideas and political persuasions very different from my own, but the ideas and the thoughts and the analysis was brought together and the recommendations that are coming forward from the ACRE committee are going to be, I think, a tremendous help in building a thriving province.

Mr. Speaker, one of the other things that we are doing in this province is we are building the highways. We're building better roads in this province because we need an infrastructure that will support our economy. And I am privileged and I am thankful for the opportunity to serve this province as Minister of Highways and Transportation.

Even in these very, very difficult times, Mr. Speaker, we were able to generate a budget of \$300 million plus this year to be able to continue our program of building the highways, repairing those rural roads, working with municipal partners to make sure that transportation infrastructure is developed that is, that is mindful of and supportive of the needs that are there in rural Saskatchewan and that are there as we seek to build the economy.

One of the wonderful pieces of this work that I've discovered is that we have throughout the province groups called area transportation planning committees. Those groups are made up of people in local regions who look at the highways and the roads in their areas, and they set priorities. They say that these roads, these pieces of the transportation infrastructure need our support. Mr. Speaker, this budget enables us to give that kind of support to meet those priorities.

The critic opposite, the Highways transportation critic opposite, the member from Cypress Hills, was heard to say in Moose Jaw at a meeting of their Grow Saskatchewan planning committee, I believe it was, he was heard to say that the \$300 million for

budget . . . for highways was adequate, but what he would do would be to make sure that they did more in terms of quality instead of quantity.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I look at this province and I look at the transportation infrastructure here and we recognize that some 90 per cent of the traffic is on 7 per cent of the roads in this province.

So I wonder when I hear the member opposite talk about doing quality instead of quantity is he going to forget about all those rural roads out there that need repairs and maintenance that are very costly? Is he going to forget about all the kind of partnerships that are made with the municipalities that enable us to set aside heavy haul roads so that we can repair the thin membrane surface highways? Is he going to just focus on a few main corridors alone? Is that what he's talking about when he's talking about quality not quantity?

It makes me wonder. Because I tell you, Mr. Speaker, that we are focused on trying to build the whole of this province. Yes, we set priorities, but I can tell you that in those priority settings we are not neglecting those distant rural roads where the few people are. We are not neglecting the roads of the North — \$34 million this year; over 10 per cent of the transportation budget going into supporting transportation in the North.

Mr. Speaker, I think this government is very responsible in its development of a budget, and I think that the work that has gone into this shows that we have a very, very clear plan for the future and we will build this province.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Wartman: — We will build the infrastructure of this province. And one of the things that I have to say, I am very glad to see is, Mr. Speaker, the insightful and foresightful way that we have been dealing with the issues around developing ethanol as an industry in this province. A lot of thought and work has gone into this process. Myself, Mr. Speaker, I spent over a year and a half working on this issue before I was appointed as Legislative Secretary last year. A tremendous opportunity for our province.

When I was elected, I was elected in a constituency that has roughly 20 per cent rural, and I believed that it was very important to try and find ways to support that rural part of our economy. When I looked around, when I listened to what people were saying, I realized that one of the ways that we might help do this — though it was not a new idea, but it was one that had not developed — was to see if an ethanol manufacturing operation would be good for this province.

So I began to study that; and I thank people like Darren Anholt, who is with Associated Engineering and lives in my constituency, for the support and the work that he gave in helping me get an understanding of that in the early part of our term back in '99 and 2000.

And I would also have to say that I'm very thankful for the co-operation of caucus, as I was able to do presentations for the whole of caucus back then and bring in people like Dr. Keith Hutchence from the Research Council who is really an expert

on this whole issue of ethanol.

And, Mr. Speaker, with all of that background then, the Premier appointed me last year and I was very fortunate to be able to meet with a wide range of people throughout the province and to help put together a greenprint on ethanol that this government could use as a print to help develop this industry in the province.

With courage and foresight, our Finance minister helped draft a budget that would enable this industry to grow. The cap was taken off the 15-cent-a-litre tax on ethanol, and this industry has potential to bring a lot of jobs into the province, to bring a whole new industry into the province that will help the environment. Because even a 10 per cent blend of ethanol with gasoline reduces greenhouse emissions by about 30 per cent.

So I have to say again, Mr. Speaker, that the one thing that I am very thankful for is that this is a government with a plan, that this is a government with a purpose. We are well-grounded financially; we have a history of solid financial stewardship; we have a budget that is transparent for those who will look with eyes to see and who are willing to try and actually understand what this budget is about. It is transparent; it is clear. The Fiscal Stabilization Fund, which was set aside for difficult times, is being used in difficult times.

An Hon. Member: — Do you really believe that?

Hon. Mr. Wartman: — Mr. Speaker, the member opposite chirps over, do I really believe that. Yes, I absolutely believe that and yes, I understand it, Mr. Speaker. And, Mr. Speaker, that Fiscal Stabilization Fund is keeping us from having to do the kind of things that are being done in the provinces to the west of us.

It is enabling us to support our education system. It is enabling us to put another \$129 million into the health system so that we can continue to have good, publicly funded health care for the people of this province.

Mr. Speaker, if it were not for this forward planning that had put this Fiscal Stabilization Fund in place, we would have to make the same kind of cuts that they're doing to the west of us, that they're doing in the rest of the country. And we are not having to do that.

Mr. Speaker, I am very thankful for the planning and the work that went into building this Fiscal Stabilization Fund and the planning that went into enabling this budget to be progressive and not a cutting budget.

We see . . . we hear very often that we have to stimulate our economy by cutting the taxes. Well, Mr. Speaker, I have to say that we have done a tremendous job so far in cutting those taxes: cutting the personal income tax; cutting the corporate tax; raising the threshold so that small Saskatchewan businesses have a better advantage.

And, Mr. Speaker, I am happy to way that when KPMG does its study of the countries in North America, where does Canada's . . . where does Saskatchewan show up there? Right up near the top. Saskatoon, Regina, some of the best places in this North

America to do business. Why? Because we have set the conditions so that that can happen.

With those conditions set, we are seeing businesses move into this province and we are encouraging that movement. We are seeing capital come into this province and, Mr. Speaker, we are going to do even more to build this province and to help it thrive.

Mr. Speaker, I would say that when we look to the North of our province we see again the kind of tremendous potential to build. And we are working with partners in the North to build the economy there. We are seeing tremendous steps forward in building plants, wood product plants, in Meadow Lake, in Hudson Bay. We are seeing forest industry that, even though it was hammered by the softwood disputes and the attacks by the United States on our industry, we are seeing that it is still moving ahead even with all the impediments that are there. And I am thankful for the planning that has gone into helping that industry move ahead, and the work that has gone into partnering with the First Nations people who live in the North, with the Métis people who live in the North, so that there is jobs, so that there are . . . so that there is good, adequate education, that there is transportation infrastructure that enables these things to move ahead.

(15:00)

Mr. Speaker, this budget will help this province thrive and I am happy to be part of a government that is building the province and doing it in ways that are thoughtful, creative, and based on sound financial management.

The Sask Party, I want to say once more, Mr. Speaker, the members opposite, I believe are very confused on this whole front — very confused. They flip one day from there being no Fiscal Stabilization Fund to the next wanting to spend it.

And I'd like to quote again Mr. Krawetz . . . pardon me, Mr. Speaker, for mentioning his name. I would like to quote the member from Canora, he says:

The NDP has been claiming that it is using its so-called 'rainy day account' - the Fiscal Stabilization Fund - to balance the budget. Yesterday, in response to questioning from the Saskatchewan Party, the Provincial Auditor said there is no money in the Fiscal Stabilization Fund so the government is actually running a deficit.

Now, Mr. Speaker, our Finance minister has said very clearly, that if you're looking at the difference between what we bring in in revenue and what we're spending, yes, there is . . . there is a cash deficit. However, however, Mr. Speaker, with that . . . with that shortfall, we have a counterbalance that is based on long-range planning.

And, Mr. Speaker, I would like to quote again from Bruce Johnstone's column where the Institute of Chartered Accountants — of which our Provincial Auditor is a member — where the Institute of Chartered of Accountants is quoted as saying:

. . . this week's budget is balanced because transfers from

the Fiscal Stabilization Fund offset . . . (that) over-expenditure . . . in the current fiscal year . . . (and it will again) in the next fiscal year . . . which is also known as . . .

Well, it doesn't really matter he says. But the fact is, that the Institute of Chartered Accountants recognizes that this Fiscal Stabilization Fund and this way of budgeting is a very good, positive way of budgeting. Mr. Speaker, the confusion reigns amongst the green and yellow on the far side over there. We have a plan; we understand how this budget works and it will work for the good of the people of this province.

Mr. Speaker, there are many aspects of this budget that I would like to speak to. I think that we see in so many ways that it will build our province. We see the potentials within the Canadian Light Source synchrotron in Saskatoon. We see an institute that is being set up to enable that light source to be developed and used as fully as possible. We will see tremendous returns from this, Mr. Speaker.

We also see in the Innovation Place in Saskatoon tremendous developments. I was fortunate enough to meet with the people from the ag-biotech sector and to hear what some of the potential is within that sector for helping to build the economy in this province. They receive support from this government for research and development.

Mr. Speaker, the same can be said for the research park here in Regina where we are looking at technologies to help develop recovery for oil and gas.

Mr. Speaker, this government is doing many, many wonderful things to help build the economy of this province, and again I say that is built on good financial stewardship, sound management. We have an open and transparent plan that the people of this province understand, even if those few who sit opposite us do not.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you very much for this opportunity to speak on behalf of the budget. I want to say that I will be voting in favour of the budget and I certainly will not be voting in favour of the amendment. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it's a pleasure to rise today to address the budget speech and to speak on behalf of the people of the Cannington constituency who I have the privilege to represent, Mr. Speaker.

For those of you who don't know where the Cannington constituency is, Mr. Speaker, it's in the very southeast corner of the province, an area that has much grain farming, Mr. Speaker, both mixed farming, grain and cattle, as well as a large portion of Saskatchewan's oil industry is centred in my constituency, Mr. Speaker.

Because of that we see a number of things happening, Mr. Speaker. The people of Cannington constituency and the whole of the southeast area of the province, Mr. Speaker, pay a large amount of taxes. Those taxes are paid, Mr. Speaker, through royalties on the oil, through income taxes on the salaries earned

or on the business profits that are made, either farm businesses, Mr. Speaker, or commercial businesses, construction companies, etc. Fuel taxes, capital taxes and indirectly, Mr. Speaker, property taxes. While the provincial government itself does not levy those property taxes, they have to be paid to the school boards and to the municipalities to offset the money that the provinces are no longer supplying to those entities.

And fact is our school division, Mr. Speaker, receives very, very little money from the province. You could even say almost a token amount of their budget actually comes from the provincial government. The major portion, 95 per cent or so, comes from the property tax base, Mr. Speaker.

But when the people of the Cannington area, when the people of Southey, Saskatchewan look at the government services that they're receiving in return for all of those taxes, they wonder where the money has gone, Mr. Speaker.

Roads like 361, highways, it does have a sign there that says highway on it. It does have a number; it says 361, Mr. Speaker, but it's not a safe road to drive. It's full of potholes, it's full of rocks, it's full of mud in the spring — virtually impassable, Mr. Speaker. And what's happening is a large portion of the traffic that travels east/west through my constituency avoid that particular highway. They take the grid roads if they have to travel, or they swing many miles out of their road to take another highway, Mr. Speaker.

And yet that is one of the main oil-haul roads generating millions and millions and millions of dollars, Mr. Speaker, for this provincial government in royalties, for this provincial government in fuel taxes, and yet, Mr. Speaker, none of it is returned to that highway.

Mr. Speaker, those are some of the issues that the people of Cannington want me to raise in this House at this time in dealing with the budget — the inequities of this provincial government and its inadequacies in delivering services to the people of Southey, Saskatchewan.

We've seen, ever since the NDP have come to power, the loss of hospitals, health-care services. We've seen the diminishing of government offices in the areas: Highways, depots have been closed down; SaskPower offices have been closed; SaskEnergy offices, Mr. Speaker.

An Hon. Member: — And that's progress.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Yes. And as the Minister of Finance last year from his budget used to say, and that's progress.

Well, Mr. Speaker, it may be NDP progress, but it's certainly not progress for any of the people living in that area, Mr. Speaker. It's much more reminiscent of the turn of the century — the 19th, not the 21st, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I'd also like to deal with some of the realities of the budget. The member from Regina Qu'Appelle Valley was talking about the realities of the budget. But in his fantasy world his realities are much different than those faced by the real people of this province, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the member from Regina Qu'Appelle lives in a rose-coloured world. It's all tainted by his philosophy. And it's tainted, Mr. Speaker, by his undying belief in socialism. It has nothing to do, Mr. Speaker, with the real world of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to read an article that I found in one of the local papers — if I can find my notes on it now — that dealt with the . . . newspaper from, from Lumsden, Mr. Speaker. And I was just looking at that. Oh well, I'll come back to it later, Mr. Speaker . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . No, that's not the one. Thanks. It's the one before that.

It was called "Voodoo Economics," Mr. Speaker. It was called, "Voodoo Economics" . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . No, it's not in that one either. And it dealt with putting money, Mr. Speaker, in an account. So at the end of this editorial, Mr. Speaker . . . and I'd like to read you the whole thing but I'll paraphrase it since I can't find my piece of paper that dealt with it.

It talks about the employee who at the end of the month has an additional \$200 left in his account. And so what he . . . what does he do with it . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . The Minister of Agriculture has it there for me. Unfortunately he's not sending it over, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the employee has \$200 left in his account at the end of the month. So he has a choice of things to do with this money. He can put it in the account and call it a savings account, as what the government did last year in formation of the Fiscal Stabilization Fund. They had a little money left — 700 and some million dollars — and so they put it in their savings account. Or they could have, Mr. Speaker, paid down the mortgage.

Well the person there says that I'm going to put it in a savings account and he tells his spouse about it. So the spouse . . . But what he doesn't tell the spouse, Mr. Speaker, is that he actually put the money on the mortgage because he paid down some debt. That's what the government did, Mr. Speaker. They took the money they had placed . . . that they had told us about in the Fiscal Stabilization Fund and then paid down the debt — their mortgage.

Well the person we were talking about, Mr. Speaker, his spouse goes to the bank and says, well my husband says that I've got \$200 left over. She goes into the bank account and there's no money. So I'd like to read actually what the article says, Mr. Speaker. And it calls it "Voodoo Economics." So, Mr. Speaker, and to quote:

Most of us would use option B (which was paying down the mortgage). But let's say we . . . used option A like the government did. When our spouse went to use the money and found the account empty would he or she feel that they had been lied to? Probably.

Mr. Speaker, that's exactly what the government is doing. They told us they had a savings account. They said the money is there, we're going to use it for a rainy day, but they turned around and paid down the mortgage. Which is a good thing, Mr. Speaker. It's not a bad thing to pay down your mortgage; it's a

good thing.

But when the people, Mr. Speaker, went to go to that savings account there was no money.

An Hon. Member: — The cupboard was bare.

Mr. D'Autremont: — The cupboard was bare. And so, Mr. Speaker, they feel like they've received the same treatment as the spouse in this particular case had been done. And to again, to quote, Mr. Speaker:

When our spouse went to use the money and found the account empty, would he or she feel they'd been lied to? Probably.

Mr. Speaker, that's exactly what this government has been doing.

Mr. Speaker, the government has used this type of technique not just with the Fiscal Stabilization Fund, but also with their new Crown Educational Capital Fund.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I remember back in 1991-92 sitting in this House when the NDP under Roy Romanow were first elected, about half of the members opposite were elected also. Not the ones that are chirping right now, but a good number of the members that are here were a part of that organization and remember these events.

As they were developing the budget, Mr. Speaker, for 1992 what the government did is they said that, Mr. Speaker, it's not right; it's not proper accounting to have all of these monies out there unaccounted for; it's not right to have amortized debt in the school boards for school construction; it's not right to have loan guarantees, Mr. Speaker, that are not accounted for in the legislature.

All of those extra things, Mr. Speaker, that deal with the Consolidated Fund, that deal with the debt of this province, Mr. Speaker, need to be reported to this House and accounted for in that year.

So what happened, Mr. Speaker, is the government brought in all of this additional debt into the budget of that year correctly, Mr. Speaker, and showed it as a part of the consolidated debt of this province.

(15:15)

In 1995, under the leadership of Janice MacKinnon, the then Finance minister, and the premier, Roy Romanow, they brought in a Bill to not allow those kind of things to happen again, Mr. Speaker. Unfortunately, this Premier and this Minister of Finance are not following the rules as laid out in 1995 under that piece of legislation.

And the fact is the ex-minister of Finance, in the newspaper today, indicated that she did not agree with the current budgeting method and accounting method, Mr. Speaker. That she stood by the words that she had talked in 1995, speaking against using Crown corporations to finance public debt, Mr. Speaker, using those kind of accounting methods that do not

clearly indicate to the House, to the people of Saskatchewan, what the true financial picture of the province of Saskatchewan is.

The government could do the things that it's doing, Mr. Speaker, if it provided summary financial statements which outline totally and clearly all of the finances of the province of Saskatchewan — outlined the consolidated debt, outlined the economic activities in the Crown corporations so that you have one lump sum, Mr. Speaker, that shows the fiscal position of the province of Saskatchewan.

And the Minister of Finance is failing to provide that. He says, oh well we'd provide that, Mr. Speaker. But he provides it six months to a year and a half later, not at the time that the budget is presented, not at the time that he seeks approval from the people of Saskatchewan through their elected members of this House to approve the expenditures of the province of Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker. It happens later, much later, when it becomes less apparent as to what is actually happening, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, there are a number of issues in this particular budget that I think the people of Saskatchewan need to become aware of. Mr. Speaker, we have boil-water orders across this province in communities that deal with the health of people and individuals.

Mr. Speaker, the facts have not been established but there is one incontrovertible fact — Saskatchewan leads in the disease of muscular . . . MS (multiple sclerosis), Mr. Speaker. And that in a lot of cases, people feel, it is related to our use of groundwater as our source of drinking water, Mr. Speaker. And when you use groundwater as a source of drinking water, it needs to be treated, it needs to be ensured that it is safe.

In cutting back, Mr. Speaker, on the funding to provide for safe water and not providing assistance to municipalities to provide that safe water, Mr. Speaker, we are endangering — we, as in the Assembly, Mr. Speaker, then as the government responsible for that, Mr. Speaker — are endangering the lives of people in Saskatchewan. And I think it's unconscionable, Mr. Speaker, that they continue to allow this to happen.

The NDP continuously run around this province and proclaim themselves to be the protector of the little man and the saviour of the province. And yet, Mr. Speaker, their actions do not belie their words. And fact is they work exactly counter to the image and the words that they like to portray. They are not, Mr. Speaker, the people they claim they are.

Mr. Speaker, there is one group in our society that we have all been taught to respect and to honour. And those are our citizens, Mr. Speaker, those are our seniors. And yet as I've been in this House and listened throughout the 1990s, as I listened from my truck radio in the 1980s, not being a member of this House, the NDP has traditionally said they were the defenders and the protectors of our pioneers and of our seniors. That it was those big bad Conservatives or anyone not of the NDP persuasion, Mr. Speaker, that were the enemies of seniors.

Well, Mr. Speaker, we saw during the 1980s a change to the drug plan as an example. Grant Devine and his government

raised the deductible on drugs from zero to \$125 a year — \$125 a year. And I remember a number of the members opposite, Mr. Speaker, decrying the inhumanity of that action, Mr. Speaker, that seniors were going to have to choose between drugs and food at a deductible of \$125, Mr. Speaker.

And so then what did the NDP government do in the 1990s? It was so shameful that people had to pay \$125 a year on a drug deductible that the NDP government raised it up to \$1,700, Mr. Speaker. Can you imagine the amount of shame that must be involved — if it was so shameful at \$125 — how immense must that shame be on the NDP to have raised it to \$1,700, Mr. Speaker?

And now, Mr. Speaker, under this budget, where has it gone to? It's gone to the \$1,700 plus, Mr. Speaker, a percentage of your income up to \$50,000 — a huge increase, Mr. Speaker; a huge increase that all of those seniors out . . . throughout Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, are going to find difficult to deal with.

If they had to choose, Mr. Speaker, between drugs and food with \$125, they must have to choose now between drugs and food and accommodation and clothing and everything else in their life, Mr. Speaker. All thanks to the NDP members opposite, Mr. Speaker — all thanks to the NDP members opposite.

And, Mr. Speaker, the member chirps opposite there, from Regina Qu'Appelle Valley. His members, Mr. Speaker, went down to a by-election in 1987 in the Wood River constituency saying, if you don't elect us, the government will close every hospital in their constituency.

Now the member opposite might think that's fearmongering. It was his party that was doing it. The reality of the situation, Mr. Speaker, was that when his party became government they closed all but one hospital in that constituency.

So the words of those members were indeed prophetic. The government closed the hospitals but it was the NDP government that closed those hospitals, Mr. Speaker. It was the NDP government.

Mr. Speaker, then we take a look at the long-term care of seniors, Mr. Speaker. The members opposite, when they were in government during the 1970s, put a freeze on the construction of nursing homes throughout this province. Nobody was going to get any older, I guess, under the NDP socialist utopia. Well, Mr. Speaker, as we all know and we all hope to continue, we all got older and we all hope to continue getting older, Mr. Speaker.

So what happened, Mr. Speaker? Throughout the 1990s the NDP government opposite removed level 1 and 2 care from public, forced people to provide it privately, Mr. Speaker. And now what they've done, Mr. Speaker, is raise the maximum that it costs an individual in long term care, the seniors of this province, the people who built this province, Mr. Speaker, have changed it from \$1,500 a month to 3,800 plus dollars a month, Mr. Speaker.

A marginal tax rate, Mr. Speaker, a marginal tax rate for people

over that \$1,500 limit of 90 per cent — 90 per cent, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it's not just going to be our youth leaving this province, it's going to be our seniors now.

Mr. Speaker, crop insurance is another area in which this government has been destroyed, virtually, by this government. They've taken away the spot loss hail which will drive a large number of people out of crop insurance, Mr. Speaker. And yet the governments both federally and provincial are saying: if you're not part of our program of crop insurance you get nothing, Mr. Speaker.

All I can say, Mr. Speaker, about the actions of this government is that they have lost their moral compass. They have no concern, no care, and no compassion, Mr. Speaker, left for the people of Saskatchewan.

The only point their compass now points to, Mr. Speaker, is how do the NDP stay in power? That is the only imperative that is now in place for this government; it's power, power, power, and nothing but power. The old statement, Mr. Speaker, that power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely is approaching this point for this government, Mr. Speaker. They have lost their moral compass, they have no idea why they want to remain in government other than to be in government and in power, Mr. Speaker. That's the only reason.

Mr. Speaker, Will Shakespeare in his poem, *Julius Caesar*, expressed it properly, Mr. Speaker, in dealing with the members opposite — the Premier and the Minister of Finance. Mr. Speaker, as Mark Antony said of Brutus, Mr. Speaker, “. . . Brutus is an honourable man.”

Mr. Speaker, this government has failed on all counts. Mr. Speaker, I will not be supporting this budget but will be supporting this amendment. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Forbes: — . . . I first would like to thank the members of the House on both sides for their kind welcomes over the last few days. I truly appreciate this as we do have an awesome task before us. And I know and I'm confident, at the end of the day, all of us in this House have the best interests of this province at heart. We do serve by the grace of the electorate and they will be the ones in the end who make their decision about the quality of our work. And so it should be in a strong democracy like ours.

And I am indeed honoured to be here with all the members of the House. Until, of course, when the writ is dropped. So thank you very much for this opportunity to speak.

My comments, Mr. Speaker, will be as a rookie with a pair of fresh eyes as this is my first budget and I try to make sense of all of this, reading and listening and that type of thing. And at the end, Mr. Speaker, I must tell you that I will be supporting this budget and the motion made by the Minister of Finance and seconded by our Premier. I must say, Mr. Speaker, that the budget is good and responsible and I have confidence in both its contents and architects. And I think it's open and transparent and well built.

Mr. Speaker, my comments will focus on three main points. The first is how this budget, Meeting the Challenge for Saskatchewan People, dovetails with the Throne Speech, Province of Opportunity.

And the second is the context of this budget. And I think that's really, really important.

And finally the alternative. I was very interested in reading the opposition's amendment, and I want to spend a moment at the end to talk about that because I think from that flows a strong indication of the quality of their work and their credibility.

So first I would like to say that I was delighted to support the Throne Speech that sets the stage for this session. The speech speaks of creating a province of opportunity, and in fact building communities of opportunities. It speaks of hope in the face of these trying and challenging times.

Now we've already talked a bit about the Throne Speech, and we've talked about the four pillars: investing in the economy and in the environment; investment in the infrastructure; the provision of quality education; and helping self-reliant families. And these are four critical pillars.

The challenge, Mr. Speaker, is how do we build these pillars with integrity and strength. And the budget before us today does this absolutely. As the title says, it meets the challenges for Saskatchewan people.

(15:30)

Mr. Speaker, I want to highlight five areas that I believe are the right things to be doing today in Saskatchewan. They build these four pillars and I say this with some conviction. And I say this because just six months ago I was out knocking on doors of people . . . of homes in Saskatoon Idylwyld. And I say this too because I know that I was listening and hearing carefully what resonated with these citizens of Idylwyld. And I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that the good people of Idylwyld represent a good cross-section of Saskatchewan, including a practical sense of rural and northern issues.

And the five areas I would like to draw attention to, of course, are . . . the first one being the health action plan. And I'm really excited to see that this budget supports this with over \$129 million — new dollars — to support this. And for what the people are looking for in Saskatchewan are things like the 24-hour, toll-free telephone health advice line. They're also looking for primary health care teams, training spaces, and support for the waiting lists — that was a big one when I knocked on the doors — and Canada's first Quality Council, and the list goes on and on. And really important to see that that was made a priority.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Forbes: — And the second priority, Mr. Speaker, was learning. And this is a commitment to life-long learning right from childhood to the synchrotron. And I just think the spectrum in Saskatchewan is very exciting, starting with the early childhood development strategy. I think this is critical and it's going to be launched in 18 communities across this

province to ensure that people . . . that children have a strong start to education in Saskatchewan.

And this is really critical, particularly in my riding that has so many community schools and so many children, and also SIAST, the private schools downtown, and so many students from the university.

Mr. Speaker, it's also really important that our government has set a course that is based on inclusion and diversity. And I heard just a minute ago about our moral compass and I think this speaks volumes about our moral compass when we talk about inclusion and diversity.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Forbes: — Now we see, we see that learning is a key investment. And I'm most happy to see the importance of learning in this budget — some \$1.2 billion. And this is a critical thing. Over 10 years ago when we paying more on the debt and now it's . . . we're paying twice as much for education, and that's excellent. And I am . . . really important to say that there's no freeze here and I know that this is a priority for the Sask Party talking about a freeze in education.

Now the third priority I'd like to talk about and this one is one that really speaks volumes to my, my constituency, but I know right across the province, is safe communities. Mr. Speaker, my constituents have raised this issue as one that's very important to them. And I'm pleased to be supporting this budget as it supports two very important elements in building a safe community.

And the first and the most obvious one is the increased number of police officers on the street and I think that's a critical piece. But more important than that, it attacks and it fights the roots of the causes of crime, for example by attacking those who prey on children, and sexual exploitation, and by fighting poverty.

The budget supports this by supporting community schools and keeping kids in school. The minister talked about our high rate of keeping kids in high school and I think that's very, very critical.

There also adds \$1.3 billion in job supports for families by building independence. And where is the freeze? It's not happening here, Mr. Speaker. This is a priority for our government.

Number four, housing. This also is a very important piece for the people of Saskatchewan. This is exciting news. The Minister of Finance announced that there will be a major housing initiative of some 1,000 new housing units over the next five years. He spoke of the importance of good quality, affordable housing as an essential part of every family's quality of life and the foundation of strong, vibrant communities. He is so right and we are very much looking forward to the details as this is announced in the next few weeks.

Now the fifth priority, and it's not — it's right up there in terms of importance; it's not the last, but I think it's critical — is the economy. Mr. Speaker, the quality and strength of our economy is essential to building a province of opportunity, and I believe

this budget supports this as well. The budget speaks to all sectors of the economy — the investors with the corporation tax . . . capital tax, the small business support, the personal income tax cuts, and the supports for those building independence program.

Mr. Speaker, this budget does set the stage here in our province to become truly a province of opportunity.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Forbes: — Now, Mr. Speaker, my second main point though I want to talk about — and it's a phrase that's often used — is context is everything. And so it is today, as we in government wrestle with the unfortunate circumstances that challenge everybody around the world and North America, not only in Saskatchewan. And I'm speaking of course of the drought, the downturn of the natural gas, the oil crisis, and the fallout of September 11 tragedy. But I believe we have a responsibility, as the minister says, to build a path of stability in time of strife, a path that protects people today.

Unfortunately, I'm not convinced by the actions or the words of the opposition that they fully grasp the context of the world today as they speak of Grow Saskatchewan — an interesting metaphor as if the opposition believes that we live in a glass terrarium and all we need to add is water. Well we do need water, that's for sure, but we are much more than that today. Our economy is diversified and we are building.

Mr. Speaker, as the new guy, I was and still looking forward to much substance to come out of this House.

But I must say how disappointed I was to read the amendment put forward by the opposition. Here I believe was a golden opportunity to see a plan, an indication of what they would do. But, Mr. Speaker, they ducked. In my neighbourhood, it's very easy to complain. And I think many of us have run into people like that — complaining and the grass is always greener on the other side. It's more challenging to come clean with what you would do differently.

Say, for example, what about the Crowns? I was fortunate in January, February to sit in the Crown Corporations Committee meetings and hear and see and talk about, ask about how they were doing the financial records. And here, here was the information. And they act as if they've never had this information. And I wonder, what is their plan? And it's, no comment. And I know the people in Idylwyld, when I knocked on the door, this worried them . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . That's right. Yes. So I am concerned, and I know the people in Saskatoon Idylwyld and right across the province are concerned.

So in conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I do have confidence in the main architect of this plan, the Minister of Finance, as they do support the plans for our government and we have committed ourselves to the people of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, when some six months ago I put my name forward, I argued for a principled, open, and transparent approach to government — one that put people first, that valued our resource and our planet, and one that values a co-operative

approach to meeting the challenges that face our province. This government and this budget does exactly this. So I must say I will not be supporting the amendment, but in fact supporting — and I'm delighted to support — the main motion.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased to enter into the debate on the budget. And it's pretty obvious that I'll be supporting the amendment because the budget didn't do very much for anybody in this province. We hear the rhetoric about a game plan and a plan. Well look behind the real budget and there's really nothing there.

Mr. Speaker, I think it's worthwhile to know that in the budget, through smoke and mirrors, the Minister of Finance talked about a surplus of \$45,000. Even though that's very, very subjective, he said \$45,000.

Well at \$12,000 a minute this government spends, that's less than four minutes that this government could operate with their version of a surplus. My goodness — four minutes. How can we stand them for four minutes? We sure can't stand them for any longer than that.

Another little aspect of this \$45,000 surplus, so-called surplus, Mr. Speaker, is that's one bureaucrat away from a deficit. For goodness' sake, what would have happened if Upshall hadn't been unceremoniously fired? They'd be in a deficit right now if Upshall had of kept his job. That's how foolish this budget is.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it's intuitively clear that this government is married to a socialist system and now it's spending its whole time trying to justify the socialist system it's wrapped around.

The bottom line of this budget, Mr. Speaker, is the debt is going up the same as last year. And I don't believe there's anybody anywhere that can dispute the fact that the debt went up last year.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we hear from the Minister of Finance about voodoo economics. Well let me suggest that if what we have is voodoo economics, his budget is the doo-doo of the voodoo economics.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would like to talk a little bit about some of the comments that I've heard reference the budget from here in town and in my constituency — a smoke and mirror budget. Well there's no doubt about it, it's a smoke and mirrors budget. But the good part of it is, all the government had to buy was the mirrors because the smoke came from the fire that had the pot on the stove with some books in it.

And another comment that I received, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is it was a 3-D (three-dimensional) budget — 3-D: deception, deceit, and deficit. Now a 3-D budget, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I think you have to go back a few years ago to look at 3-D movies. And that's what was needed in this budget, a set of those special glasses to read through all of the rhetoric and the tricks in this budget.

And if you remember 3-D movies, how you sat in a movie theatre, things would try and jump out at you, well I think that's what this did in the budget. Things were jumping out all over.

Another comment that I quite liked in the budget — it was called a Halloween budget. Maybe we should have had a fall sitting so this budget could have been introduced on Halloween day because this budget contains one whole pile of tricks and very, very few treats.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I, like some of my colleagues, I'd like to read into the record some of the comments from the media around the province with respect to this budget. *Leader-Post*:

The government is blaming everything except itself for what have been steadily deteriorating times in Saskatchewan.

The mood of this province has been getting darker and darker and it can be felt just about everywhere. Our population is sliding. Young people are leaving the farms their parents and grandparents worked.

And that's a very, very sad situation. People are leaving. Young people are leaving and now seniors are leaving.

The province needs the kind of creative thinking that is going to produce revenue, jobs, and stature. It needs the new or expanded kind of industry that is lasting, and to find it and develop it will take incredible vision.

That's from *The Leader-Post*, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Incredible vision — something that is totally lacking on that side of the House.

Bruce Johnstone, *The Leader-Post*:

You have to hand it to Finance Minister Eric Cline. He certainly knows how to make salad — chicken salad out of, well, chicken feathers.

Very, very profound.

Murray Mandryk's article following the budget calls Eric Cline's budget "Fiddle-faddle" and "jiggery-pokery." Good way to explain it.

Talks about the budget as a fairy tale that he's reading to his daughter, and he quotes:

Even pixie dust won't make this budget fly.

Randy Burton in *The StarPhoenix*:

The people taking the hit for this "tough" budget are the little old ladies in long-term care homes, the people who need prescription drugs and the smokers whom no one wants to defend.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to also talk about another article in *The StarPhoenix* editorial, and I would invite members opposite to read this, because this is really what people of this province think of the budget and I'm going to paraphrase some of it.

... at times such as these — when resource revenues are down, many taxpayers are fleeing, farmers are barely scraping by on the parched prairie and the global economy is struggling to overcome the terrorism-inspired tailspin — that the farcical nature of Saskatchewan budget-making comes fully into focus.

(15:45)

It goes on, Mr. Deputy Speaker:

No matter how hard Cline and the Lorne Calvert government try to make the province's books and their management of them look good, however, it's impossible to ignore the disquieting feeling that they are about to take Saskatchewan people on a scary ride we've been on before — one we've spent the better part of a decade trying to forget.

You need not look any further than Cline's capital funding scheme for the newly named Learning sector to understand the problem. No amount of explanations from the finance minister can alter the reality that his move to gas the full ... capital comments from the government's books by funnelling them through a new Crown entity and amortizing them through operating grants to universities in the K-12 system is no more than accounting jiggery-pokery.

This, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is a very, very good quote.

Cline and his boss deserve a whack to their noses with a copy of the 1992 report by the Don Gass commission to remind them of their obligation to provide taxpayers with complete transparency on public spending instead of concocting odious bookkeeping methods that make it impossible to understand the government's finances.

Of course, the entire spending plan Cline presented was riddled with typical political gobbledygook that renders the budget based on the general revenue fund nearly meaningless.

Rather than make the tough choices, the government has opted to procrastinate. If it's an election Premier Calvert is buying time for, he should go ahead and call one without delay. Saskatchewan can't afford to carry on this charade for long.

And I support that comment, Mr. Deputy Speaker. This government has opted to procrastinate. In fact, I understand they're going to join the Procrastinator's Club but just haven't got around to it yet.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would like to read into *Hansard* a letter I received from the Hotels Association of Saskatchewan.

When we have this government that goes out on a bus tour, they obviously are not listening to the people of the province; I don't know to whom they are listening but it sure isn't the general public. They probably put some plants in each of the towns so that they can get off the bus and shake hands with one or two people and then claim it a success because one of their

forerunners greeted them as they got off the bus. If they listened to real people in this province, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I think they would have a totally different outlook on this province.

But I'd like to read in a letter that I received from the Hotels Association of Saskatchewan.

Yesterday's budget announcement by finance Minister Eric Cline is, in the opinion of the Hotels Association of Saskatchewan, an assault on the financial viability and outright survival of the hospitality industry in rural Saskatchewan.

Recent increases to beer by the Saskatchewan Liquor & Gaming Authority and the breweries, now coupled with Mr. Cline's announcement of a 42.9% increase in the Liquor Consumption Tax will have a dramatic effect on the sale of beer, wine and spirits in hotels, nightclubs and restaurants throughout the Province. (The) . . . increase in the LCT is not unprecedented, as a similar increase was imposed on beer and alcohol sales in the early 80's. A 10% LCT then had a devastating effect to beverage sales that virtually forced properties to close their doors. The experiment of increasing the tax was later . . . (removed), but not until serious financial damage was inflicted on numerous properties.

It is getting increasingly difficult to understand this government's marketing strategy and political agenda as it strives to increase revenues through liquor and gaming initiatives to neutralize a deficit budget. The recently introduced Tobacco Control Bill 56 and now an increase to the Liquor Consumption Tax, are two more reasons why hoteliers will have a difficult time in attracting customers to their establishments, customers that the government is relying on to generate an additional \$15 million dollars in revenue by increasing the number of VLTs in the Province.

Obviously, the Ministers of Health, Finance, Rural Revitalization and SLGA were not in consultation when this budget was put together. But then again, maybe they were.

It is clear to the Association that if this government is contemplating using this budget as the springboard to an election, they have obviously decided that rural Saskatchewan is not on the radar for (an) electoral victory. We would like to remind the government that tax increases and legislative changes that restrict consumers' social lifestyles are borne by urban voters as well.

That, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is what it's like in rural Saskatchewan.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it's very, very clear, it's very, very clear to me that this sanctimonious government is just happy with managing the downward spiral. Who are the creators of doom and gloom that we hear about all the time? The government is the creators of doom and gloom as we can see by this particular letter from the hoteliers association.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would like to talk about my constituency. I'd like to talk about some of the initiatives that

others have talked about, but I'd like to bring them up to some actual facts of what's going on in rural Saskatchewan, specifically in my constituency of Wood River.

Ethanol, we hear an awful lot about ethanol. Right out of our platform, was introduced. But there's one very, very key issue that was in our platform document that was not included in the legislation. That key issue was legislating a percentage blend of ethanol in gas.

Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the government, the government has said, well we will put legislation in place to put ethanol blend in once it's up on line. How does that attract an investor? They want to do it in reverse. Well the fear in the ethanol industry is if you don't legislate the percentage of blend in gas, how are we going to get investors in? They don't really trust the government.

So in the mind of an awful lot of people is, this is another ploy by this government to expand a Crown corporation, or to build a new Crown corporation, typical of the socialist system. Because now they can sit back on their haunches and suggest that, well nobody wanted to invest in ethanol, therefore we will do it through CIC and make it . . .

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

Hon. Mr. Melenchuk: — By leave to introduce guests, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Leave granted.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Hon. Mr. Melenchuk: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. In the Speaker's gallery today we have a school group from Ray, North Dakota. Over 30 grade 7 and 8 students who are here touring the Legislative Building and having an opportunity to look at debate within the Assembly today. And just to talk to the kids a little bit about what's going on, what they're watching right now is the debate on the budget address.

And the opposition members and the government members are talking about what they think about the budget that was brought down here less than a week ago.

Now Ray, North Dakota is straight east of Williston and it's, I think, straight south from the Estevan port, I think, in that location. Okay. Anyway I'd ask all members to welcome the students and their chaperones from Ray, North Dakota to the Assembly today.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

SPECIAL ORDER

ADJOURNED DEBATES

MOTION FOR COMMITTEE OF FINANCE (BUDGET DEBATE)

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed

motion by the Hon. Mr. Cline that the Assembly resolve itself into the Committee of Finance, and the proposed amendment thereto moved by Mr. Krawetz.

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I also would like to welcome our guests from North Dakota. It's near home for me. I live down on the very south part of the province. And so welcome. You're in time to hear one of the best speeches in this House.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I was talking about the ethanol in gas. And the fear is still there within the ethanol industry that this government through, again, some jiggery-pokery is going to make it into a Crown corporation.

Wouldn't it have been simple, wouldn't it have been simple had if you legislated ethanol as it come on line and say, we will have 5 per cent in seven years. Now it gives industry some incentive to invest in this province because they know it's there. And it's not going to import ethanol, as I heard one member from the government side say. That's absolutely ludicrous. But if you legislate it, it gives some confidence to investors to invest.

By this particular methodology, why would somebody invest knowing full well if you put \$200 million into a plan . . . or into a plant and the government decides, oh well, we want to make it a Crown corporation, then you're investment is basically lost. Or else you're in competition again with the government. My goodness.

Let's talk about roads. We had the Minister of Highways get up — and I think he was talking about roads; it was very hard to tell what he was talking about half the time — and he talked about putting a bunch of money into all of these roads. But why would our member say such things as putting money into a good highway?

Well isn't that kind of ridiculous? You go throw a little bit of money here and a little bit of money there, and then next year you have to do the same thing. That's very evident in the southwest part of this province. They throw a token amount into the highway, and guess what? The next year they have to do exactly the same thing.

I would also like to talk a little bit about roads, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in relation to rubber asphalt roads. As members are probably aware, we have a rubber recycle plant in Assiniboia. Now here's a perfect example to expand an industry in this province — a perfect example. What was suggested by the rubber company is rubber asphalt and to put roads in . . . test bed of a road of 20 kilometres.

I spoke to the manager of the plant and his words to me were: we have a machine that's ready to come up here; we have money that was being donated in the neighbourhood of \$100,000 to put in a test bed in this province. All we need is a go ahead from this government or the Department of Highways.

Guess what the answer is? We will study it. That's the only answer.

There's been 30 years of study going on in rubber asphalt and

yet this government wants to study it. My goodness! And what we have lost, we've lost the capability of putting a test section in.

I've looked at some of the history of the rubber asphalt. I'll hear a member say, well, it doesn't work as good in cold weather. How about Nebraska? They have some pretty chilly weather in Nebraska. It's been there for years. So in essence what this government has done is lost \$100,000 that was going to be geared for a test section of highway in rubber asphalt. That's the way this government is operating.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, some of the concerns in my constituency are very much the same as my other, my other colleagues here have talked about — long-term care homes. I don't believe I have to say any more than that. It is just devastating for our seniors in long-term care homes.

Did this budget actually do anything to reduce medical waiting lists? I don't think so. How about prescription drugs? How can anybody on that side of the House get up and defend it? How can anybody over there get up and defend the increases in long-term care homes? And it's gone up 100 per cent in some cases.

How about stop loss hail? Stop loss hail — 200 and some per cent. How can anybody on that side of the House defend that?

How about rain roulette or Saskatchewan roulette on the forage insurance? I have not seen anything so ridiculous for ages and ages. I just, I just can't understand how they could come up with some hare-brained idea such as you can insure your crop anyplace in the province, even in Alberta or even in Manitoba.

Now how about water? I would, I would really like to hear more about this water. The minister — whichever one would answer it in question period, who knows — would get up and give a song and dance about how we're studying the water situation, we're studying it and we're going to study it and we'll make sure we study it to death.

(16:00)

But what's happening to the people that have . . . the towns and the villages that have serious water problems?

I would bring to the minister's attention the village of Kincaid is going on three years. Did anything from this government help them? They come down and they did a little bit of a survey and said, you have a problem with your water; it will cost you X number of dollars. So then we have another bureaucrat that comes down and says, oh he was all wrong, it will cost you twice as much. And a third one come down and said, the other two were wrong, it's going to cost you — I think it was — \$250,000 to repair the water in a village of 100 people.

So what's going to happen to this town? That's typical socialism. Blame it on somebody else.

How about the town of Cadillac in my constituency? They're in the very same boat with water.

Now I just ask members across the way, does \$80 million in

Australia help either of these water problems in Saskatchewan? I don't think so. How about the money in Chile and in Mexico, is that going to help them? And I would also like to suggest that 80 million in Australia, what's it for? High-speed Internet. And yet we don't have cell coverage in areas of rural Saskatchewan but we can spend \$80 million in Australia. It just doesn't make sense.

The way this government operates, Mr. Speaker, is very, very typical of the premier of BC, Mr. Glen Clark, a while ago. And Mr. Clark was on national TV about three nights ago. And I would like to quote, I would like to quote, what Mr. Clark said on TV the other night, and it was over his little scandal, bingo-gate. It was about his bingo-gate in BC. And this is a quote from Glen Clark, he said — his question about his knowledge of the bingo-gate — and he said:

I instructed my staff to ensure that I was insulated from the decision-making process.

Is that not a socialist statement? Is that not what this government wants to do on a continuing basis? Insulate themselves from the decision-making process. Why do we have boards? Why do we have SAHO (Saskatchewan Association of Health Organizations)? Who closed the 52 hospitals? Oh, it wasn't us; it was SAHO. That's just the way this sanctimonious, socialist government operates.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'd be remiss if I didn't touch base a little bit about how ridiculous this government operates. And I mentioned it last year and I'm happy to mention it again because there's been no improvement. We have . . .

The Deputy Speaker: — Order, order. I am straining to hear the member for Wood River, and I'm having difficulty. Order. Would members please come to order.

Mr. Huyghebaert: — I would just like to touch base one more time with our cattle industry in this province, and it really shows how this government has crippled this province over the last number of years of socialism.

We produce 1.5 million head of feeder cattle in this province, and we ship 750,000 of them to Alberta to be fed. And along with those 750,000 head of cattle, we ship young men and women to feed them, and we ship our grains to feed the cattle. That's exporting the commodity, the commodity to feed them, and our young people. That is the result of 10 years of socialism.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, there is no way that I can stand and support this budget, but I sure will be supporting the amendment.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Hamilton: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I'm pleased rise today to speak in favour of the government's 2002 budget.

The reason why, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is clear. This budget sets a foundation to provide for the generation of a progressive, environmental, economic development agenda; to continue the

enhancement of our infrastructure that supports economic development; to solidify the strengths of quality education; and to take action on programs that target the creation of healthy and self-reliant families, a prerequisite to successful participation in an expanding economy.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the past year has been a difficult one. Sixty per cent of our farmland and pastures have been affected by drought; agriculture subsidies in Europe and the US (United States) continue to hurt our farmers; a reduction in the oil and gas prices has affected the revenue stream negatively; softwood lumber duties are set to severely damage the forestry sector; and the general slowdown in North American economy — all set the stage for a year of belt tightening and fiscal responsibility.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the members opposite say that we're blaming everyone on the face of the earth but ourselves, but I'd like to set the record straight.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, you cannot formulate a budget without looking at the global impact on your economy and without looking at the world around you. I wonder if they would construct a budget with disregard to all of those environmental impacts and the economic impact on a province such as ours.

Well it's clear they would. As the member from Idylwyld stated earlier that they want to live in a contained, little area and only look at what affects them directly and not the circumstances that surround us globally. As their leader stated, Mr. Deputy Speaker, they would be able to meet their economic targets if there was good weather and there was more money from the federal government.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, our budget is an all-weather budget, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Hamilton: — I wanted to outline the context for our budget, Mr. Deputy Speaker. That was the bad news surrounding this year's budget but there is much, much good news, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The good news is that the Saskatchewan New Democratic Party is continuing its tradition of being good fiscal managers delivering our ninth consecutive balanced budget.

The Fiscal Stabilization Fund has been an invaluable tool as a fiscal shock absorber against market dips. Moreover this government has been able to avoid increases in the PST, avoid increases in personal income taxes, and the creation of health care premiums that are only going up in our neighbouring provinces.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, our budget and how we speak to budget issues and the economics does not change depending on the weather. It does not change depending on what room we're in, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Because there are those who would go to the Public Accounts Committee and tell you — members opposite would tell you — that yes, the statements that we provide to the Public Accounts Committee and this Assembly are a good overall reflection of the province and the state of the economy in this province, and then stand in the Assembly and say, no that's not so.

There are others that would stand one year in this Assembly and say, for example, that they want to have a recall of the legislature as quickly as possible to be able to understand how they could spend the windfall that was set aside as the Fiscal Stabilization Fund.

One coalition . . . one Saskatchewan Party Finance critic said in the paper, in *The Leader-Post* of November, 2000 that the coalition government should be giving everyone an opportunity to debate how that windfall would be spent. And his suggestion? Give everyone an energy rebate.

Well we only need to look to Alberta who was deregulating and had the . . . putting forward their goal of deregulation and deregulation, and have to subsidize the hikes in their energy costs to some \$16 billion.

And we all know about the wonders of the member opposite who would put forward when we should be able to purchase energy and how we were going to be able to give a good deal to the people of this province. And we know the millions of dollars that that promise would have cost the people of Saskatchewan.

Then we have Saskatchewan Party leader . . . I'm sorry, this is a quote from the Saskatoon *StarPhoenix*:

But Saskatchewan Party leader Elwin Hermanson has said the government can afford to introduce deeper tax cuts immediately, given that the net provincial revenue is projected to be \$370 million higher than expected because of booming oil and gas royalties.

Now that was December of 2000 — spend, spend, spend. It's no wonder the members opposite took exception to the comparison to the Devine Tories in the '80s, because like their predecessors, Mr. Deputy Speaker, these members can only spend.

Last year I remember members getting up — spend more on highways, spend more on education, spend more on health care, spend more on energy rebates. Spend more was the slogan of the day last year in this Assembly from the members opposite.

But when they got outside of the Assembly they talked about their platform to cut taxes which would grow the economy, and what would they do in the meantime? Freeze spending. Freeze spending everywhere in government to pay for their unsustainable tax cuts.

They do not put forward a plan to ensure the Saskatchewan economy does not have to endure the spikes and the collapses of a boom and bust economy. No, they're like our neighbours in Alberta.

And even today we heard from members opposite who said spend more on water, spend more on agriculture, spend more, spend more. And outside of this Assembly it's not spend more; it's freeze expenditures in government, frozen until they can pay for their unsustainable tax breaks.

Well they don't like to be called spend, spend, spend Tories, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but I call 'em as I see 'em.

I outlined the bad news that surrounds us as we deliberate this provincial budget, but the good news is, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that the Saskatchewan New Democratic Party will deliver on good fiscal managing.

There are so many initiatives in this budget that it's really hard for me to highlight just a few. But today I want to spend a few moments talking about what's important to the people in my constituency, Mr. Speaker.

First I would like to highlight some very important initiatives undertaken on taxes and economic development.

Since 1993 this government has consistently lowered taxes. This is the fifth consecutive year that Saskatchewan residents will see personal income taxes rates go down on their personal income tax form.

We've heard much from people who talk about how can we retain skilled . . . a skilled workforce and also retain professional people in Saskatchewan. And the tax measures in this budget will do that.

One of the most significant improvements in competitiveness is the reduction that's occurring in the marginal tax rates, which is the rate at which the taxpayer pays income tax on the next dollar of income earned. Saskatchewan's top marginal tax rate under the pre-reform tax system was equal to 19.9 per cent. And under the reform, the top marginal rate will decline by 4.9 percentage points to 15 per cent — the third lowest rate in Canada.

While this improvement is dramatic, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the marginal tax rate of an individual earning \$50,000 also declines significantly — from 18.1 per cent to 13 per cent.

What does this mean for attraction and retention of a skilled workforce in the province of Saskatchewan? With this budget, the lowest sales tax . . . we see the lowest sales tax except for Alberta. And in Alberta, Mr. Deputy Speaker, they have substantial health care premiums.

What do we also see with this budget? The second-highest personal tax credits and the only universal child tax credits of any province in this country.

What do we see with this budget? The third-lowest top provincial marginal rate at 15 per cent, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

In 2002 an average Saskatchewan family will pay almost one-third less in income tax than in 1993 — an annual reduction of more than 13,000 . . . \$1,300.

On top of that the budget also sees a 40 per cent reduction in small-business income tax rates since 1991. The level of income to which this rate applies has increased by 50 per cent. Moreover, this government has increased the corporation capital tax exemption for Saskatchewan-based businesses to encourage capital development and job creation in this province — jobs for the people of this province and the future of this province, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

(16:15)

These tax cuts, coupled with initiatives such as the provincial research and development incentive for the resource sector, an extension of the ability of Saskatchewan companies to access the provincial R&D (research and development) tax credit, the commitment to fully implementing personal income tax reform to encourage the attraction and retention of skilled workers, the elimination of the fuel tax on ethanol produced and sold in the province all show this government's commitment and dedication to keeping Saskatchewan prosperous and competitive without leaving anyone behind.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, as a result of this government's fiscal management, the outlook for Saskatchewan's economy is good. This commitment has resulted in three Dominion Bond Rating Service adjustment surplus . . . I'm sorry, three Dominion Bond Rating Services adjusted surpluses out of the last four fiscal years and a virtual balance in other years.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it's not of a concern to me if the member opposite can't somehow understand that the economy in this province is good, that they ponder and contemplate what does this mean, that it's gloom and doom.

It matters to me that there have been significant reduction in the DBRS (Dominion Bond Rating Service) defined debt to GDP (gross domestic product) ratio, GDP ratio. It matters to me what the bond raters are saying and the fiscal creditors that are talking about the province's budget. And what do they say? That the province's balanced approach to fiscal planning has not only strengthened its financial profile, but has contributed to the improvement in Saskatchewan's economic fundamentals.

Financial institutions have lauded this government's approach. Standard and Poor's says that we have:

Consistently falling tax-supported debt burden, due to good budget performance.

Moody's Investors says that:

. . . the presence of the Fiscal Stabilization Fund provides additional comfort that budgetary performance will remain on track, even in these difficult times.

So it matters not to me, Mr. Deputy Speaker if the members opposite don't even know that there is a Fiscal Stabilization Fund, if Moody's Investor Services can find it, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Even in these difficult times we will remain on track and that is a result of:

. . . the Province's demonstrated ability to manage its fiscal accounts, even under adverse economic circumstances, (says Moody's) Moody's believe's Saskatchewan's fiscal position will not be in jeopardy.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, Regina Wascana Plains has a high number of young families and university aged children. In my constituency, they will be happy to see that this government has placed learning as a top priority.

Mr. Speaker, in terms of education this government has

allocated \$1.2 billion, an overall increase of \$78.6 million, or a 7.2 per cent increase over 2001 to 2002. This also includes \$90 million in grants and loans for capital projects.

In Wascana Plains, Mr. Speaker, they understand when we talk about good debt and bad debt. I had a conversation the other day when people were saying that they understand that when you have a investment in infrastructure and capital projects, that those kind of projects invest in the infrastructure of our province, and can be allocated over a period of time.

It's the bad debt which saw in the day . . . in the '80s where it was borrowing to pay for programs today that left our children to pay for them in the future, that is catalogued as bad debt in the minds of the people in my constituency.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in the K to 12 school operating grant system there will be an increase of \$10.8 million; a \$6.7 million or 2.3 per cent increase in operating grants to universities, their affiliated colleges, Aboriginal institutions, SIAST, and regional colleges. A capital expenditure program of \$40 million for K to 12 schools, and 50 million for the two universities, SIAST, and regional colleges for building improvements.

These investments, coupled with amalgamation of the departments of K to 12 and post-secondary education and skills training into one new department, the Department of Learning, will create better efficiency and better serve the public in terms of its educational needs. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it stresses a focus from this side of the House on lifelong learning.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to contrast this education plan with that of the Saskatchewan Party's plan, but it's cold enough outside, we don't need more things to be frozen in here too.

Representing a rural-urban constituency, I would now like to mention this government's investment in a key area, Mr. Deputy Speaker, highways. I would like to highlight the importance of this in our budget.

A strong infrastructure is vital for economic development and the safe movement of goods and of people. Thus, with a budget of \$300 million, this year's highway's budget keeps us on track to meet the 3-year \$900 million funding commitment and our 10-year \$2.5 billion commitment to the highways in this province.

This budget will allow for 700 kilometres of reconstruction and paving work on Saskatchewan's highways this year. It includes completing 24 kilometres of twinning on Highway No. 1 west, with complete twinning west to the Alberta border by the fall of 2004.

It allows for the reconstruction of 150 kilometres of thin membrane surface, resurfacing of 370 kilometres of paved highways, and partnering with 35 municipalities on 18 different initiatives to manage traffic on 460 kilometres of thin membrane highways in this province.

All this, Mr. Speaker, with no increase in the gas tax. In fact, Mr. Speaker, we've heard members opposite say that there's only a small portion of the tax gas . . . or the gas tax budget that goes to highways construction in this province. Not so. Last

year, Mr. Speaker, 100 per cent of the gas tax collected in this province went to the highways in this province.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Hamilton: — Mr. Speaker, this government says rural Saskatchewan is a priority and has delivered on that promise. With the amalgamation of the rural revitalization office into the new Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Revitalization, this government has created a higher degree of cost saving and efficiency that can now be passed on in the form of better service to our municipalities.

Being a natural fit with agriculture, this new department will continue to look at ways to invigorate growth and to seize opportunities in rural Saskatchewan. As we have done so in the past, Mr. Speaker, we will do so in the future.

Because agriculture and rural Saskatchewan is such a priority, this budget increases funding for crop insurance by \$14 million. It's investing \$3.9 million for continuation of the Conservation Cover Program and \$4.4 million for the family farm opportunities initiative which helps farmers assess their situation, improve their skills, and undertake diversification and development initiatives on their farms.

We have faith in the farmers in this province, Mr. Speaker. I wish they would stop with the gloom and doom and show the faith that we have in rural Saskatchewan.

Finally, for revenue sharing, this budget provides a \$10 million or 18.2 per cent increase in revenue sharing grants to rural, urban, and northern municipalities to use as they see fit to make the needed improvements in their communities.

This is revealing this government's commitment to all the people of Saskatchewan no matter where they live.

Now, Mr. Speaker, health is not usually on our minds until something happens. The members opposite have bought into the rhetoric of the Alberta people in American style of health care and says, when it does matter to you, when you need it, you're on your own. Look for increased health care premiums or look to the American model where they leave more people out of the system and it is more expensive than it is per capita anywhere in this nation.

Mr. Speaker, not on this side of the House. Mr. Speaker, not as long as I represent the constituency of Regina Wascana Plains. This budget increases health care spending by \$129 million to \$2.3 billion. It reveals the government's commitment to sustainable, universal, and quality medicare system in the province of Saskatchewan.

On top of that health research funding has increased by 80 per cent — \$10 million will be allocated for new medical equipment; \$24 million for capital improvements and construction; an increased base funding to begin the work on key initiatives such as encouraging primary health care teams of doctors, nurses, and other health care providers to promote accessible front line care to people across Saskatchewan; a 24-hour toll-free telephone line for health advice, expanding support for seniors and people with disabilities who want to

remain in their own homes; improving the management of waiting times; providing more training spaces for health care providers; and the return service bursaries for students studying in selected health care programs.

And the list goes on and on, including Canada's first Quality Council promoting excellence and more effective health spending, and the formation of 12 regional health authorities to replace the current 32.

A clear commitment on this side of the House to quality, accessible, publicly funded medicare and a clear indication from the members opposite that it's a pay-as-you-go and look after yourself kind of service.

Mr. Speaker, before I close I'd like to bring some attention to the family initiatives that were brought forward in this budget. The building independence strategy is important to me. It's as a result of the first-hand experience I had on the board of inquiry into hunger and poverty when I was serving on Regina city council.

Many issues were identified and recommendations were made. The building independence strategy puts into place many of those recommendations. With what results, Mr. Speaker? Well as my esteemed colleague, the Minister of Social Services, said yesterday, we have seen a decline in social assistance caseloads for 87 straight months.

Since 1993 we have reduced child poverty by 30 per cent. We now have over 32,000 units of low-income housing with plans to build up to 1,000 more, and increase funding for things such as legal aid, employment supports, child care for those with special needs — just to name a few.

Again, Mr. Speaker, this government's track record and the budget that we have put forward is comparable to the warm, sunny days that we're looking forward to ahead as we see spring emerge and summer, rather than the opposition's preference for continuing the cold winter freeze — freeze on all the budget expenditures that they would put forward.

Now, Mr. Speaker, they say they are about growing Saskatchewan. And I say, as does an article from *The Wilkie Press* in March of 2002, the jury is still out. Is it grow Saskatchewan or is it gut Saskatchewan?

An Hon. Member: — The latter.

Ms. Hamilton: — The latter. The jury is still out, but I have a fear that what we're talking about when they say grow Saskatchewan is to grow the debt; to grow the numbers of people who are unemployed; to grow the fear as the member opposite tried to do today with the long-term care scare; to grow the kinds of things that we saw happening in this province in the '80s, because many of those members gave advice to the government of the '80s.

So really, Mr. Speaker, I want to tell you there is one question that I am asked more often than any other question in the constituency I represent and they say, how could we vote for the members opposite when day after day all we hear from them is the complaints, the continual breaking down of what's being

done, the gloom and doom, the negative comments on the economy or the province of Saskatchewan? How can they vote for someone when they don't see them putting forward what they really are all about?

Not one positive reaction or initiative. As my colleague from Idylwyld says, they have the opportunity in the Throne Speech debate — it wasn't there. They have the opportunity in the budget speech debate — it's not been there.

Mr. Speaker, they're ducking. What they would do when they really say grow Saskatchewan means gut Saskatchewan.

(16:30)

They carry a cloud over them and it's evident in the amendment that they have put forward. It's the reason why I stand against the amendment from the opposition members and I stand proudly in my place to support the budget that has been prevented . . . presented to this Assembly for the year of 2002.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege to enter the budget debate this afternoon. And, Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin my remarks on the budget with a bit of a focus on its impact on my constituency of Swift Current and speak to the local impact of our community.

Mr. Speaker, the major economic players — the economic foundations of Swift Current — are agriculture as well as oil and gas. And certainly in Swift Current we're fortunate in the city itself to have a bit of a diversified economy. And so we also have some significant large manufacturers that were able to locate there, for the most part in the late 1970s and in the 1980s. And so these are the three underpinnings, if you will, of the economy of Swift Current.

And I think it's important if we're going to do a . . . have a look at the budget, we should do so in terms of its impact on those sectors and of course on the most important factor of Swift Current, the most important element of our community — the people, the residents of the city of Swift Current and of the surrounding area to the north and the south that make up the constituents of Swift Current.

Well firstly, Mr. Speaker, how does this budget impact on the agriculture sector around Swift Current? And it's a mixed sector around the city of Swift Current, featuring of course both farming and ranching to a very significant extent. And how does this budget and the early weeks of this session and of the Throne Speech, how do they impact on the agriculture sector of Swift Current and area?

Well negatively, Mr. Speaker, not to put too fine a point on it. But in this budget there's absolutely nothing in the way of hope for producers — for farmers or for those in the ranching industry.

In fact, quite the contrary, Mr. Speaker, quite the contrary. We have seen the government gut the crop insurance program, one

of the most fundamental programs that farmers rely on, and it certainly is important to the ranching industry as well. We have seen on every count, in terms of crop insurance, we've seen this government gut the crop insurance program. We know, and the critic for Agriculture raised concerns, some specific cases in this legislature, of premiums increasing up to 200 per cent for farmers. And certainly farmers in the Swift Current area are going to be among those that face significant increases.

Certainly there are those in the Swift Current area who raise forage crops, that will be completely perplexed by the rainfall roulette crop insurance that the hon. members opposite have introduced, Mr. Speaker. And they knew going into the budget that the crop insurance program would be gutted by the NDP, so I'm sure they were looking for some hope. I'm sure they were looking for some indication from the government that it would either fix what it had ruined in crop insurance or that it would provide some other measure for agriculture producers in Swift Current and area and across the province.

And so they would have looked through the pages of the budget, Mr. Speaker, for some sign that the government cared about agriculture or that the government understood about agriculture, about farming and about ranching. But they would have been sadly disappointed because there is no indication in the budget that the government has that understanding and that the government understands it needs to be there for Saskatchewan producers coming out of a drought year and potentially — hopefully not — but potentially heading into another one.

Well what about the oil and gas industry, Mr. Speaker? That's also an important industry to our community, to the constituency of Swift Current, and the many young friends who actually work directly in the industry.

It was a chance for the government to take some decisive action to reward capital investment in that particular sector of our economy, a sector so important to the city of Swift Current. It was their chance to do that. And to be fair, Mr. Speaker, they took a very small step in the right direction when they raised the cap with respect to the capital tax, with respect to the level of investment that corporations can invest in the province before being subjected to the capital tax. They raised it, I believe, from \$10 million to \$15 million in the budget. And certainly it is a small step in the right direction.

Because a capital tax, Mr. Speaker, is among the most insidious kinds of taxes. It really does prevent economic development. It's one of those barriers to venture capital that we've talked about, Mr. Speaker, because it tax a company based for the most part on how much they have invested in a jurisdiction.

That's why progressive jurisdictions have done away with things like the corporate capital tax completely. Those jurisdictions that are interested in fostering a private sector and a tax base to be able to support publicly funded health care and social services and excellent education systems — those jurisdictions have eliminated that capital tax or they have significantly reduced the rate.

Now the NDP have taken . . . have listened to the Saskatchewan Party and they've taken a very small step in the right direction

by raising the cap. But the corporate capital tax rate that companies will pay in the province of Saskatchewan still remains among the highest — I think the second highest and maybe the highest now — but certainly it was the second highest only to Quebec in all of Canada.

And so when corporations are looking to make large-scale investments in some jurisdiction in Canada, given the fact that we offer them either the second highest or the highest capital tax rate or tax on investment, it's not hard to see where they're going to choose.

So they certainly could have sent a stronger signal, as the Saskatchewan Party has, to the oil and gas industry and to the service sector around Swift Current. They didn't do that.

And it's much the same for large manufacturing, Mr. Speaker. Certainly there was nothing substantive in the way of good news for the larger manufacturers in the city of Swift Current.

There is one other very, very important issue in Swift Current that people were asking about in the wake of the budget. In fact, I think it was the Deputy Premier who came to . . . he came to the city of Swift Current the day after the budget and he had a bit of a luncheon, and he went through a presentation on the budget and then he opened the floor up to questions. And the predominant question being asked of the Deputy Premier was what about our hospital — what about the Swift Current Regional Hospital?

The situation in Swift Current with our hospital is this: it was built in, I believe, the late 1940s, and it has . . . it saw its last capital improvement in 1971 when I was six years old. That is the last significant capital improvement that was made to the Swift Current Hospital — 1971.

And so last session, Mr. Speaker, you'll know well, and in the session before that, I've been trying to raise that concern, raise the concerns that we have in Swift Current over our hospital. I've tried to give the issue as much profile as I could from this side of the Assembly to let the government know that a new hospital for our city, and for the entire region, for Swift Current and area, it isn't simply a want, Mr. Speaker — it's a need. We need a new regional facility, a new regional hospital in Swift Current. The community will not stop working to that end, and certainly, Mr. Speaker, I intend to do my level best, and very best, to continue to press that issue with this government.

And so we looked to this budget to find some good news — some indication that the hospital was a potential for the city of Swift Current, because there's one issue standing in the way. You know, the city of Swift Current, the people there and the people in the area and the region, they have no problem, they have no qualms about raising their share to put towards a new hospital in Swift Current.

They have a concern, however, that this government's funding formula is unfair. They have a concern that this government's funding formula which is 65 per cent/35 per cent — 65 per cent of the capital funding coming from the provincial government and 35 per cent coming from the locality — they have a belief that that is not fair. And the Saskatchewan Party agrees with them.

In 1999, we campaigned on a funding formula of 85/15. And, Mr. Speaker, that is why the city of Swift Current, that is why different . . . I think the health care foundation there and the health district have made a focused and concerted presentation to the government that says look, if you just change the funding formula, we will be able to build that new hospital in Swift Current. We don't mind paying our share, but the NDP have to pay theirs; we'll put up our money, but the NDP have to put up theirs. That is the position of the city, of the community of Swift Current and area, and certainly that is the message that I have tried to deliver about our hospital in Swift Current.

And there is rationale for the argument, you see, because the NDP themselves have reorganized health care in the province. They've set up these new regions and Swift Current is to be the regional centre for its particular region. Swift Current is to provide the regional hospital for its particular region.

Well you know what, Mr. Speaker? In order for Swift Current to provide that regional hospital it needs to have a regional hospital. It needs to have a new health care facility, one that warrants the title of regional hospital, one that would provide the sorts of services that not just Swift Current, but the entire region of southwest Saskatchewan need. And so we'll continue to make the case.

The community of Swift Current and area have said look, since it's serving the entire region, since this new hospital, if we ever get it, is serving the entire region, it's fair that the government's funding formula recognizes the fact that it's playing a role in the provincial system.

The government recognizes that fact when it's looking at its tertiary facility, tertiary capital funding in Regina and Saskatoon. This government pays for 100 per cent of those capital facilities in Regina and Saskatoon.

And so, if you're a regional centre and you're providing a regional hospital for an entire part of the provincial network, I think it's fair for them to say look, I think the government share on those particular projects has to be a little bigger than 65 per cent. The NDP have to be there to a greater extent than 65 per cent for the hospital in Swift Current.

That's the case we're going to continue to make — the case that Swift Current deserves a new regional hospital and that we need one.

And so the budget is silent on the funding formula, and we can only hope that in the days and in the weeks ahead that the minister will . . . the Minister of Health will come forward and indicate that indeed there is an interest on the part of this government to do the right thing with respect to that regional capital funding formula. There's no indication that that's the case as of yet.

And so we are left then to look at another very important segment of Swift Current to try to evaluate this budget, and that very, very important segment is a group of people, Mr. Speaker, that built the community of Swift Current. That very, very important segment is a group of people that really are the foundation for everything that we treasure in our community of Swift Current, and those are our senior citizens, our pioneers,

Mr. Speaker.

And if we're going to look at the situation of how our seniors in Swift Current feel about the provincial budget, you only need to know this, Mr. Speaker, that they're already calling our office because seniors, of course, follow public affairs very closely, and they probably even endured most of the Minister of Finance's budget speech.

And they probably understood sooner than anyone else, sooner than anyone else what the NDP had set out to do to seniors; what they had set out to do in this budget to those people that built our communities, those people that founded places like Swift Current. Through two different measures — not one, Mr. Speaker, not one attack on seniors — but through two different measures, the NDP attacked seniors on the front of long-term care fees where they increased exponentially, and on some fundamental changes, some fundamental changes to the drug plan, Mr. Speaker. And . . .

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

Mr. Goulet: — Leave to introduce visitors.

Leave granted.

(16:45)

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Mr. Goulet: — Mr. Speaker, over on your gallery we have three special visitors to the legislature. There we have Henry Desjarlais. Mr. Speaker, Henry has been working . . . is working right now on the Aboriginal Affairs, and dealing with the public in SERM for many years — of course, now the Department of Environment. But he's also well known to have played goal in hockey in La Ronge and with the . . . So he's been involved in many other things.

And he's with his daughter, who has worked in the forestry industry on the model forest sites. Her name is Sharon.

And of course we have as well, the mother-in-law Hedvig Coxen, and she's . . . and of course, Henry's married to her daughter, Bette, who happens to work in our library.

So I'd like all members to please give them a warm Ta wow, and welcome to the House.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

SPECIAL ORDER

ADJOURNED DEBATES

MOTION FOR COMMITTEE OF FINANCE (BUDGET DEBATE)

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Cline that the Assembly resolve itself into the Committee of Finance, and the proposed amendment thereto moved by Mr. Krawetz.

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was talking a little about the impact of this budget on seniors in Swift Current, and it's coincidental because at about the same time, my colleague and friend, the member for Rosthern, was trying to assist perhaps a little bit with a speech. And that's a little bit ironic because I was talking about seniors in the city of Swift Current, and as it turns out, Mr. Speaker, the member for Rosthern spent a good deal of time in our community — in Swift Current, where he taught.

And so I can understand why he would want to intervene in my speech about seniors in the city of Swift Current. And should he ever come back to our community, I'm sure those that remember him will also want to discuss that.

Mr. Speaker, it is a very serious matter though, what the government has done to long-term care fees in our community and to the seniors that rely on the care that they receive in those long-term facilities . . . long-term care facilities.

You know the change is really quite shocking. The old fee structure worked out such that the first . . . on the minimum fee side of things, Mr. Speaker, they looked at about an \$828 per month fee plus 50 per cent of their income over \$994.

And under the new system — shockingly so — under the regime, the new regime introduced by the NDP, those seniors in Swift Current are now looking at \$828, plus 90 per cent of their income over \$994.

You know, Mr. Speaker, I know there will be many, many seniors in my community who feel let down by this government. They have already begun to phone our office concerned about this change, the change to long-term care fees, and concerned as well about the significant changes to the Saskatchewan prescription drug plan.

You see, Mr. Speaker, the same seniors who are hurt by the increase in long-term care fees all too often rely on the drug plan; all too often have heavy bills in terms of the prescription medicines that they need to ensure their quality of life. And this government has attacked them on both fronts in this budget.

And so the seniors in the city of Swift Current and area I think are going to be very disappointed with the budget of this NDP government.

You know, Mr. Speaker, I have a number of other concerns with respect to the impact of this budget on the city of Swift Current and the surrounding area, the constituency of Swift Current, as well as some general comments on how this government has changed its budgeting processes.

But what I would want to do now, Mr. Speaker, is to adjourn debate.

Debate adjourned.

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Speaker, I'd like to ask for leave of the Assembly to move a motion regarding leave of absence to certain members.

Leave granted.

MOTIONS**Leave of Absence of Members**

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the member from Cannington:

That leave of absence be granted to the members for Estevan, Saskatoon Idylwyld, Shellbrook-Spiritwood for Monday, April 8, 2002 and Tuesday, April 9, 2002 to attend the Midwest Legislative Exchange in Lincoln, Nebraska.

On behalf of the Assembly, I so move.

Motion agreed to.

The Assembly adjourned at 16:51.