

The Assembly met at 13:30.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

READING AND RECEIVING PETITIONS

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

A petition asking for a reinstatement of reasonable annual deductibles to the Prescription Drug Plan;

A petition concerning the serious conditions of Highway 15; and

Addendums to previously tabled petitions, being sessional paper no. 7, 8, 11, and 18.

NOTICES OF MOTIONS AND QUESTIONS

Mr. Hillson: — Mr. Speaker, I give notice that I shall on day no. 19 ask the government the following question:

To the Minister responsible for the Saskatchewan Water Corporation: (1) what qualifications does Kathy Langlois hold in the field of water safety and water quality management to justify her being hired as a special advisor to the North Battleford Water Inquiry; (2) was the salary of Kathy Langlois charged against the cost of the North Battleford Water Inquiry; (3) how much was spent on the travel of Kathy Langlois in 2001; (4) to what account was the travel cost of Kathy Langlois charged; (5) did Kathy Langlois ever talk to the mayor or any resident of the city of North Battleford in the course of her duties as special advisor to the North Battleford Water Inquiry; and (6) if so, what are the names of the persons she spoke to and the dates of those meetings?

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, to you and through you to the Assembly, I would like to introduce, behind the bar on the opposition side, a visitor from Manitoba, Peter George Dyck, who is the MLA (Member of the Legislative Assembly) for Pembina and the caucus chairman for the PC (Progressive Conservative) caucus in Manitoba.

I would like to ask all members to welcome Mr. Dyck here today.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Hagel: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to join the hon. member opposite in welcoming Mr. Dyck to the . . . back, welcoming him back to the Saskatchewan Assembly. I know that he's been here before and has, as part of the participation in Commonwealth Parliamentary Association events, been involved in rigorous debates right in the floor of this very Chamber. So from the government side, we'd like to welcome him back to Saskatchewan.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To you and through you, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to introduce to you a gentleman in your gallery, Mr. Jerry Ehalt. Jerry has been a former candidate for the Saskatchewan Party in Saskatoon Northwest and he's been a tireless worker for his community. And I hope Jerry enjoys the proceedings this afternoon and please join me in welcoming Jerry to the legislature.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Law Student to Clerk with the Supreme Court

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again, I stand today in proud support of many Aboriginal people that have accomplished many great things. We talk about Ted Nolan being the coach of the year in the NHL (National Hockey League) and we talk about the Saskatchewan person, Matthew Dunn, being a role model for Saskatchewan, for the entire nation.

And now, Mr. Speaker, a member of the English River First Nation has been chosen to serve as a research assistant with the Supreme Court of Canada. Sacha Paul, the son of Ralph and Yvonne MacDonald-Paul, will begin a one-year term as a Clerk with the Supreme Court beginning in May 2003. Hundreds of law students apply every year for these few opportunities, Mr. Speaker, and Paul says he was not expecting to get this opportunity. Quote:

“Talking shop with Supreme Court Justices was a bit intimidating and I thought my interviews went well, but not great,” he says. “To be honest, I almost fainted when I found out I had been chosen. It was really quite shocking.”

Paul will graduate from law school in April and plans to article with the Winnipeg law firm of Thompson, Dorfman and Sweatman. He hopes to be called to the bar in June 2003.

Mr. Speaker, I am very, very proud of this individual, and I ask all members of the Assembly to stand with me and recognize the great work of Sacha Paul.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Battleford-Cut Knife Constituents' Son to Join Troops in Afghanistan

Mr. Peters: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Another family in the Battleford-Cut Knife constituency feels the impact of the war in Afghanistan.

Grant Eidem, the only son of Donna and Bob Abel of Unity, Saskatchewan was scheduled to fly out last Thursday. He has been on standby since November as part of the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry out of Winnipeg, Manitoba. Grant and his colleagues have been on a leave of absence to prepare for their mission since hearing about their departure only a few days earlier. There will be 130 people in Grant's

company leaving to join 750 Canadians already there.

I wish that all members of the legislature pray for Grant's safety during his time in Afghanistan. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Grand Opening of Joint-Use Facility in Weyburn

Mr. McCall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I would like to draw attention to a grand opening ceremony in Weyburn. This morning I was on hand to represent the government at the event which marked the opening of the joint-use facility for Southeast Regional College and Weyburn Comprehensive High School. The joint-use facility highlights a new vision for learning in this province. Learning during one's life does not only take place during formative and school-aged years, but rather it is a lifelong pursuit of self-improvement.

The willingness of the community in Weyburn to work co-operatively with the Department of Education and Post-Secondary Education and Skills Training, now the Department of Learning, and also with one another on this project illustrates that community's commitment to lifelong learning, Mr. Speaker.

This two-phased project had several goals in mind. First, renovations had to be completed to create space for the high school students and regional college, and also to bring the complex up to existing fire codes.

Another goal was increasing students' access to technology, and to accomplish this a shared computer lab was added. A new band room was also created to meet students' needs to be both intellectually and artistically stimulated.

Phase 1 was completed in 1999 and phase 2 saw its completion in 2001. Being there this morning, Mr. Speaker, it's looking great.

This project clearly demonstrates the recognition of Saskatchewan residents that co-operation is the best way to accomplish goals. The project aptly provides needed space and facilities for students both young and old. The vision of the school board and the college and the community partners is to be truly commended.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

North Battleford Water Inquiry

Mr. Hillson: — Mr. Speaker, if I hadn't already resigned from this government, I certainly would today. My constituents are angry.

The North Battleford Water Inquiry has been in the hands of the government for one week. So far no one else, including the mayor, has been allowed to see it. This high-handed treatment of the people of North Battleford by this government reached new lows today as it was revealed that the special advisor to the North Battleford Water Inquiry, who is being paid \$111,000,

never went to North Battleford. She was too busy attending conferences in places like Namibia.

The minister says her attendance wasn't necessary because the government had tons of people at the inquiry. And what were those tons of people doing, Mr. Speaker? They were trying to convince the commission that water problems in North Battleford and other communities are strictly the problem of municipalities and the government of this province has no responsibility. The provincial budget offered no help to any of the 50 communities with boil-water advisories and no help to North Battleford.

The government is faced with a full-blown crisis. What is their response? To spend millions of dollars on an inquiry, fly people all over the world, and then plead poverty when they're asked to help.

Accomplishments of Campbell Collegiate Student

Hon. Mr. Wartman: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the member from Saskatoon Fairview stood before you to speak about the academic accomplishments of one of his constituents. Today, Mr. Speaker, I rise to acknowledge the athletic success of a young woman named Heather Brooks.

Heather is a grade 12 student at Campbell Collegiate in Regina who is heavily involved in her two favourite sports — basketball and volleyball. Make no mistake, Mr. Speaker, this upstanding young woman is not only an athlete, she's also a straight A student, placing her on the honour roll at Campbell Collegiate.

Ms. Brooks recently accepted a scholarship to play volleyball at High Point University, an NCAA (National Collegiate Athletic Association) division 1 school located in North Carolina. The chance to play competitive sport at the next level is a dream that few athletes get to live, Mr. Speaker. And soon Heather Brooks will be living that dream.

Heather's sporting resume also includes a trip to the 2001 Canada Summer Games in London, Ontario and a silver medal in women's rowing from the Canada Cup.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate Heather on her accomplishments in both academics and sport. She sets an example of hard work, dedication, and vision that all members should admire.

We hope that Heather will follow her father's footsteps and do as Dr. Harvey Brooks, deputy minister for Highways and Transportation, has done and bring her many gifts and abilities back to Saskatchewan after her graduation to help build this wonderful province.

Again, Mr. Speaker, I would like all members to join with me in congratulating Ms. Heather Brooks. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Grow Saskatchewan Meeting in Northern Saskatchewan

Mr. Wiberg: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure

today to announce to this honoured Assembly good news in regards to northern Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, last evening, April 3, people from the Lac La Ronge district attended a Grow Saskatchewan meeting in the town of Lac La Ronge to hear the good news of hope for northern Saskatchewan.

Led by our leader from Rosetown-Biggar, Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan Party MLAs were met with open arms by the citizens from the Lac La Ronge district, eager to meet and greet the next premier of Saskatchewan, the before-mentioned MLA from Rosetown-Biggar.

The Saskatchewan Party members who attended were from all across Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker. And they were amazed and pleased that there is not the despair about economic possibilities that could be happening in northern Saskatchewan. Too often, in this House, Mr. Speaker, the members opposite paint a picture of doom and gloom of a segment of Saskatchewan that is incapable of managing their own affairs.

Well, Mr. Speaker, even though the NDP (New Democratic Party) members opposite will continue to paint a picture of hopelessness for northern Saskatchewan, members on this side of the House know that opportunity abounds in northern Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, last night's meeting — attended, I might add, by 500 per cent more people than attended the member from Regina Centre's meeting in Lac La Ronge — again reaffirmed the intestinal fortitude that prevails throughout Saskatchewan.

On behalf of the official opposition, I would like to thank all those people who made last night's meeting an overwhelming success.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Saskatchewan First Call

Mr. Goulet: — Mr. Speaker, a new toll free pipeline location hotline service known as Saskatchewan First Call will be in place this fall. The service will provide contractors planning to dig or excavate anywhere in the province a convenient way of completing a number of line location inquiries with a single call.

This service will be developed with the Saskatchewan pipeline community, SaskEnergy, and its subsidiary, TransGas, and will reduce damage associated to underground facilities. This will be a valuable service to pipeline companies that have infrastructure but limited resources to notify their customers on a regular basis about existing facilities.

This is another example of the people of Saskatchewan's public industry serving the public good and helping to encourage more investment and expansion in our province.

Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan First Call is therefore also an example of listening and positively responding to industry needs in this province.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Accomplishments of Angus Robert Campbell Noted

Mr. Gantefer: — Mr. Speaker, and members please join me today in honouring the accomplishments of the late Angus Robert Campbell. Mr. Campbell was born in Swift Current, Saskatchewan in 1917. In 1925 he and his family moved to Kinistino where he continued his education. He resided in Kinistino until 1940 working on several farms. Winter months were spent logging in northern Saskatchewan.

In 1940 Angus moved to British Columbia where he was employed at the Vancouver Shipyards and the Hedley gold mine. He returned to Saskatchewan to farm after the war.

In 1955, Mr. Campbell made history. He was the first employee of the Saskatchewan Bureau on Alcoholism. Mr. Campbell went on to serve as the director of community service for the Saskatchewan Alcohol Commission.

He received wide recognition for his tireless efforts of helping families and individuals struggling with addictions. Among his many awards are the Saskatchewan Order of Merit and the Order of Canada.

Mr. Speaker, it is my privilege to rise today and honour the late Angus Campbell. He not only served the people of my constituency, he served the people of this province. May his memory live on.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(13:45)

ORAL QUESTIONS

Duties of Government Official

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Premier and I would ask the Premier to clarify the situation with Kathy Langlois, the former president of the Saskatchewan Liquor and Gaming Authority. What position does Kathy Langlois hold in the Premier's office and what is her salary?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Speaker, the member opposite will know — I assume he will know — from widely distributed press reports today that Ms. Langlois works in the cabinet planning unit, not in the Premier's office. And through freedom of information publication brought to the attention of the media and the public, Ms. Langlois's salary — I'm reading right from the freedom of information information — \$110,976.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well so now we do know that she was hired by the Premier; that she is being paid \$110,000 a year. We also understand from the government's own documents that she was hired specifically to handle the North Battleford Water Inquiry. And she gets the

\$110,000 for doing this.

Mr. Speaker, will the Premier tell us how many days Kathy Langlois spent in North Battleford while the water inquiry was being conducted?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Speaker, to be clear — and I can understand why the member opposite would not have this knowledge — but to be clear, senior public servants in this government, and I expect most governments, are put in place by the senior public servant of the province, that being deputy minister to the Premier. The deputy minister to the Premier will make decisions about hiring, roles, and responsibilities. Those decisions are then reported to me as Premier, particularly if they affect cabinet planning or Executive Council.

In this case, Mr. Speaker, I am 100 per cent supportive of the deputy minister to the Premier and his decisions, and I am supportive in particular of Ms. Langlois's work in this government.

Now the question about Ms. Langlois's role.

The Speaker: — Order, please. Order.

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Now the question, Mr. Speaker, about Ms. Langlois's role — deputy to the Premier, cabinet planning, assigned to Ms. Langlois the important responsibility of coordinating this government's work and response and involvement with the North Battleford inquiry. And if the member wishes to read the freedom of information request he will see that clearly a part of her responsibility is to put together a strategy to move this province forward in dealing with the significant water issues.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — So there you have it, Mr. Speaker. An individual hired at \$110,000 per year specifically to be in charge of the North Battleford Water Inquiry but, but spending . . .

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

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — But according to the government's own documents, Mr. Speaker, we now know that Ms. Langlois spent zero days in North Battleford. Mr. Speaker, it makes you wonder what Ms. Langlois was doing in her capacity as the special adviser of the North Battleford Water Inquiry.

Well as it turns out, in the year since Kathy Langlois was appointed to advise the Premier, she's been busy. She's been travelling — to Toronto, Ottawa, Newfoundland. But she didn't travel to North Battleford once.

Mr. Speaker, what matters relating to the North Battleford Water Inquiry did Ms. Langlois attend while she was travelling to Toronto, Ottawa, and Newfoundland?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — . . . in this House for 15 years and this is about as cheap an attack on a public servant that I have heard since I came here.

Mr. Speaker, the member opposite, the member opposite seems to have the ability to stand in this House . . .

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

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Speaker, the member opposite seems to have all the capacity in the world to read those prepared questions. No matter what the answer, he'll get up and read the next prepared question — mark my words.

Well I suggest that he take some time and read the information provided under freedom of information regarding Ms. Langlois's responsibilities not only to this water file but to international work being taken on by Canada under the auspices of the federal government in Namibia. She's representing our province and doing an excellent job.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Mr. Speaker, will the Premier then explain why in their own documents she is listed as the special adviser on the North Battleford Water Inquiry? Will he then explain why she wasn't able to spend a single day in North Battleford? Will he then explain why, instead of being in North Battleford at least on a single occasion, she had all this time to travel all across the country, all across North America, but not one day to spend in North Battleford?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Speaker, there will be many qualified individuals within the public service of Saskatchewan who carry more than one responsibility or the responsibility for more than one file.

Ms. Langlois's responsibility surrounding the North Battleford inquiry, as I have just said, was to coordinate the efforts of government, to coordinate the response of government, and more importantly, to begin to build the strategy to take us forward in this province.

Now that role, Mr. Speaker, is not a legal role; it's not a role that she should be sitting in the inquiry. We had the provincial lawyer there. It's not a technical role. Ms. Langlois is not a technical expert. She is a managerial expert who can bring together strategy within government from Municipal Government, from Health, from Sask Water, from Environment.

And on Friday of this week the people of Saskatchewan and members opposite will see the strategy that has been developed, much through the good work of Ms. Langlois.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Well once again I would ask, I would ask the Premier how it is that he expects that his special adviser on the North Battleford Water Inquiry could stay connected to what was happening in North Battleford while she was

travelling all over North America — not only all over North America, Mr. Speaker, but she was travelling to Namibia in Africa as well.

Mr. Speaker, will the Premier tell us what matters relating to the North Battleford Water Inquiry Kathy Langlois was attending in Namibia, Africa?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — As I have indicated there will be a number of public servants in this province who have the ability and the capacity to work on a number of important public issues in the province. When Ms. Langlois is in Namibia under the auspices of CIDA (Canadian International Development Agency), paid for by the federal government, is representing our province, our nation, in developing that important part of the world, Africa.

Mr. Speaker, I know what's going on here. There is no mystery about what's going on here. It is the penchant of that party to take . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. Order. Order.

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Speaker, they take on public servants when they have no issues of their own to bring forward — public servants who have no mechanism of being able to defend themselves, Mr. Speaker. What . . .

The Speaker: — Let's try again.

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — You see, Mr. Speaker, when they know they have no case, they shout — they shout, Mr. Speaker.

Let me say again, Mr. Speaker, it is the intention of this opposition, if ever to occupy the benches of government, and we know it from their own quotes and I'll be glad to share them with the House — I'll be glad to share them — we know it's the intention of this group of men and women, if they should occupy the benches of government ever, to attack the public service of Saskatchewan just as they are doing today.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, can the Premier tell us if his special adviser on the North Battleford Water Inquiry will be in North Battleford tomorrow when the North Battleford inquiry report is released?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Speaker, Ms. Langlois's task, as I have outlined now I think on three occasions during this question period, was to work to coordinate the efforts of government and to work to help us in framing a water strategy for the people of Saskatchewan.

That water strategy will be released as part of our response in North Battleford tomorrow, and Ms. Langlois will be there.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Health District Finances

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

this province are beginning the process of amalgamating into the new health service delivery regions as set out by the province.

There will be many decisions that have to be made surrounding the logistics of bringing districts together, but one question that comes up repeatedly is how district deficits and accumulated debt will be handled. We know there are several existing districts that are running deficits in the last fiscal year. And there are districts in the past who have had to borrow to meet the needs of the health services in the district and are carrying long-term debt.

Mr. Speaker, to the minister: what is the total deficit for the last fiscal year of all provincial health districts, and what is the total accumulated debt of these districts?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, the districts are completing their books for this year. The year-end was about three or four days ago. We're gathering this information.

I asked this very specific question this morning about how soon we could get that information, and it's coming along very quickly because we have asked the districts in the past year to be very careful in managing the money in light of all of the financial difficulties that we've had in this particular year, and specifically as we prepared the budgets for next year. So what we are doing is working with the districts, working with the people to have all of the information available.

What we've also said is that we are in a position to make sure that we have ongoing funding for this next year as set out in our budget. The whole issue of some of the district debt as comes forward in the amalgamated regional health authorities is an ongoing issue that we will be working with the people about.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Gantefoer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, in a recent post-budget meeting in Yorkton, the Deputy Premier was asked how the debt and deficits of health districts would be handled in the amalgamation process.

He said, and I quote:

Their deficit will be part of the overall debt of the province we'll need to consolidate over time.

So, Mr. Speaker, will the NDP be taking over the overall deficit and accumulated debt of the health districts? If so, is the NDP just planning to absorb it into their fudge-it budget as part of the overall provincial debt, or will they use the increase in the health budget to cover it? What kind of jiggery-pokery are the NDP planning to play to hide this debt as well?

Mr. Speaker, will the minister specifically explain to this House what the NDP intends to do with the accumulated debt and last year's deficits of the health districts? Will it be eaten up in this year's budget increase or it will be added to the provincial growing debt?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Well, Mr. Speaker, if the members opposite don't know that the debts of the health districts are accounted for by the Provincial Auditor in the summary financial statements already, then there isn't much that we can say to help the members opposite.

I want to say, Mr. Speaker, that the Provincial Auditor has to look at the debts of the health districts and those are taken into account as part of the public debt. If the members don't know that, they should know that, Mr. Speaker.

But I want to say, because the members opposite like to talk about financial accountability, we should look at the record of this government and we should look at their record when their cousins were in office, Mr. Speaker. Because what this government has done, Mr. Speaker, is to produce timely public accounts earlier and earlier each year — summary financial statements which were brought in by this government, mid-year financial reports, and now quarterly financial reports, Mr. Speaker.

We can contrast the record of this government on debt management with those people who one year, Mr. Speaker, never even produced a budget if you can believe that.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(14:00)

Mr. Gantefoer: — Mr. Speaker, the question on the minds of many health district CEOs (chief executive officer) and board members as the amalgamation process takes place: these districts have worked hard to stay within the confines of their existing budgets, and they're concerned that after the amalgamation process their financial picture may be drastically changed by the debt load of other districts who have also struggled to meet the demands of the health services.

So the NDP may well say, we'll retire all the debt after this year and we'll all start at zero. But then what about next year, Mr. Speaker? Year after year this NDP government has paid off the deficits of some health districts that they have found carrying and the message to other health districts is that it doesn't really matter if you continue to carry or run up debt; it'll all get wiped clean at the end of the day after all.

Mr. Speaker, how do the CEOs of those districts who have worked so hard to balance their budgets reconcile to their front-line office people, their front-line health professionals, their front-line workers, the inconsistency of this government's policy on wiping out the debt?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Mr. Speaker, I think what the people of the province are aware of is that when it comes to running up debt, the largest debt in the history of our province was run up by those people over there, Mr. Speaker.

But I want to say this to the members opposite, that they talk a lot about debt. Debt comes in many forms. Sometimes there is

debt to build hospitals, which may be amortized over time, or to buy equipment, which may be amortized over time. Sometimes there is debt that is operating debt, Mr. Speaker.

The health districts are doing a good job, Mr. Speaker, to provide health services to the people of Saskatchewan. The government has reduced the amount of the public debt from 41 per cent of the gross domestic product down to 23.

And the important fact to note, Mr. Speaker, is we have gone from being one of the worst provinces in Canada when it comes to debt to being one of the best. I repeat, Mr. Speaker, we are now one of the best — no thanks to the members opposite.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Negotiation of New Gaming Agreement

Ms. Bakken: — Mr. Speaker, my question is to the minister of Liquor and Gaming. Yesterday the minister refused to provide answers to our questions about the new gaming agreement being negotiated. By avoiding the issue, the minister has done nothing to raise public confidence that the new deal will be good for the First Nations people or for the taxpayers of Saskatchewan.

This is the same government that mishandled the gaming issue when the SIGA (Saskatchewan Indian Gaming Authority) scandal was revealed two years ago. They let things get totally out of control before taking any action. Now we hear the NDP is negotiating a new 25-year agreement.

Mr. Speaker, why should the public now trust the NDP to negotiate a new deal when they've mismanaged gaming in the past and they refuse to answer questions about negotiations now?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again I guess I should . . . I can't understand why the opposition continues to attack our First Nations community with whom we are negotiating. Negotiations are underway; we have confidence in our negotiations and our negotiating team.

And, Mr. Speaker, when that agreement is arrived at, everybody will see what kind of an arrangement we have reached with our partners, the First Nations community.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Bakken: — This is not an attack on First Nations. This is safeguarding the dollars that are supposed to go to First Nations but . . .

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

Ms. Bakken: — Mr. Speaker, there are still many questions about the police investigation into the activities of former SIGA members. There are questions about the Liquor and Gaming Authority's role in the events as well.

Mr. Speaker, will the minister assure the public of

Saskatchewan that no one negotiating this agreement for SIGA or the FSIN (Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations), and no one negotiating on behalf of the provincial government is or was in any way involved with the RCMP (Royal Canadian Mounted Police) investigation into the SIGA scandal.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well again I would like to just remind this House, and the public that's listening, and our partners, what occurred in early 2000 when the province was involved in negotiations with the FSIN to renew an agreement.

When irregularities came to light in the SIGA issue, this government acted swiftly to suspend those negotiations — to suspend those negotiations — and supported the Provincial Auditor's request for a formal investigation into SIGA. Mr. Speaker, this was carried out. Everything was above-board.

When the auditor reported his findings, this government laid out specific progress benchmarks for SIGA in November 2000, and stated we would not go back to the table until those high benchmarks were met.

Well I'm happy to say, Mr. Speaker, they were met. We have confidence in our negotiating teams, we have confidence in our partners, and I still can't believe that the opposition, after the leader . . . after the leader is saying gaming will certainly play an important role in . . .

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

North Battleford Water Inquiry

Mr. Hillson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government has had the North Battleford Water Inquiry report for a full week. No one else will be allowed to see it until tomorrow. The city of North Battleford didn't even know about the person hired as special adviser to the inquiry. And it's no wonder. She never went to North Battleford. She was too busy in Africa.

My question to the minister: what expertise does Ms. Langlois have in the area of water treatment to justify her being hired for this position? Has she ever spoken to the mayor of North Battleford or anyone else in North Battleford about the water crisis? Will she be attending the meeting this afternoon with the council of the city of North Battleford? Is she willing to finally face the people of North Battleford who lived through the tainted water crisis and who are paying her \$111,000 salary?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — This, Mr. Speaker, is the height of hypocrisy. There is the member, there is the one member of this House who said we should not have an inquiry in North Battleford, who maintains to this day that position — we should not have an inquiry; we should not get to the root of what happened in North Battleford; we should not learn from what happened in North Battleford for the benefit of all Saskatchewan people and all communities.

No. He said, don't have an inquiry — and now the hypocrisy and the gall to stand in this House and make accusations against a valuable public servant in this province when he didn't even

want the inquiry in the first place.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hillson: — Mr. Speaker, what I said was if the people of North Battleford had their choice of spending millions of dollars on an inquiry and nothing to fix their water treatment plant or millions of dollars on their water treatment and not an inquiry, they would choose to fix the problem. That's what I said.

The height of hypocrisy is a government prepared to spend millions of dollars on an inquiry, millions of dollars on a special adviser to North Battleford who never goes to North Battleford and then — and then — when they ask for help to fix the problem say, oh I'm sorry, we've got no cash.

In view of the nearly 50 communities in this province with boil-water advisories, my question for the Premier: when is he going to start taking the water crisis seriously? When is he going to accept that this problem is not going to be solved by bureaucratic desk shuffling, by inquiries, by flying people around the world? It's going to be solved by giving municipalities the tools to correct water treatment deficiencies.

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — I sometimes, you know, think that we should put that member in charge of revenues here — they expand by the moment in his comments. Now we've spent millions on the inquiry and we've spent millions on the staff.

Mr. Speaker, the inquiry, to my understanding, will cost about \$1.8 million. A lot of money, Mr. Speaker, a lot of money, but money well spent because through this work of Justice Laing, and I hope he's not . . . and I hope now he's not attacking Justice Laing and his work.

What is being accomplished through this work and through the money spent is to get a thorough understanding of what transpired in North Battleford — a clear picture of those issues which face us as a province. I am convinced that all will share some cause for concern here — municipal, provincial, federal.

That money, in my view, Mr. Speaker, and the staff that's taken to do this work is money well spent for the long-term future of drinking water in this province. And I don't much care what the member from North Battleford says.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hillson: — If the 2 million spent on inquiry actually leads to some action besides bureaucratic desk shuffling, then yes, it will have some value. But if it's not going to lead to anything more than giving somebody a job fresh from the Dosenberger scandal, then I say it has not accomplished what needs to be done to correct the water problems of North Battleford and the 50 other communities of this province.

I ask the Premier: why has he sat on this report for a week? Why will the city of North Battleford and the mayor not see this report until tomorrow?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Now I am confused. For a man who didn't want the inquiry, now he wonders why I'm sitting on it. Now I think though, in this question period alone, we've convinced him of the worth of it.

What I guess I have not convinced him of is this absolutely inappropriate attack on a public servant again we heard in his last question. I did not know that member had joined the philosophy of the large opposition over there.

And while I'm on the question of the large opposition over there, the Leader of the Opposition may want to explain, may want to explain his comments about the public servants of Saskatchewan where he said, and I quote, Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition said:

Before I agreed to run for the leadership, I asked the MLAs, (the other ones over there), do you know who . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. There ought to be some relevance to the question in the answer. I rule the Premier out of order . . .

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Boyd: — Before orders of the day, Mr. Speaker, for a personal statement.

Leave granted.

STATEMENT BY A MEMBER

Resignation of the Member of the Legislative Assembly for Kindersley

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I can't help but notice, outside today it's cool but spring is close at hand and with spring comes renewal and change. And over the last number of weeks, I've had to reconsider my future, Mr. Speaker.

With the support of my family and my colleagues, I've decided to step down as MLA for Kindersley. It's been a pleasure to have represented the people of the Kindersley constituency for the last number of years.

My decision is strictly a personal one, and as one of the first Sask Party members I continue to wholeheartedly support the Sask Party and, in particular, the Leader of the Official Opposition. I think the Sask Party and the Leader of the Official Opposition will make a great premier and a great and long-lasting government for the people of our province. My departure should not be interpreted in any other fashion and I would urge civility with respect to that. I'm a committed Sask Party member and always will be. Our leader has asked if I would stay on with respect to the party's election readiness team and I've accepted that invitation.

Mr. Speaker, as you know, politics at times can be a bit of a rough-and-tumble sport and can wear on you, as all members here would know. I certainly would want to thank many people

here, this afternoon: my family for their continued support, my caucus, my leader, my constituency.

And I would certainly appeal to the Premier opposite to call a by-election, or I guess a general election, soon so that the people of the good constituency of Kindersley can be represented as soon as possible. I would hope that the Premier would agree with me that that constituency certainly deserves representation as soon as we can arrange for that to happen.

Mr. Speaker, the good folks of the Sask Party and the constituency of Kindersley nominated a young man last night with my full support, a young man by the name of Jason Dearborn, and I believe he will make a great representative for us in the by-election.

Mr. Speaker, it's been my honour and my pleasure to have been here over the years and I wish to thank everyone in the Assembly. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(14:15)

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With leave, to respond to the member's personal statement.

Leave granted.

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise in the House today with regret over the fact that we are losing a very esteemed MLA.

During the nearly five years of existence of the Saskatchewan Party this is the first time we've seen the departure of a colleague. And, of course, it's a time when we have a deep sense of loss, but also a deep sense of appreciation for a member who has served, not just his party and his colleagues well, but has served the province of Saskatchewan extremely well.

I want to particularly thank the hon. member for Kindersley for the service that he has provided in so many areas, beginning with his service to the residents of Kindersley who I know, having also served that area federally for quite some time, felt they were well represented by their MLA.

I want to thank the member for the 11 years that he has given to the province of Saskatchewan. It is not easy to make a commitment of 11 years out of your life to serve in such a public way, and the member has done that splendidly.

I want to thank the member for being a driving force behind the creation of the Saskatchewan Party. There would not be 26 of us sitting here on this side of the House had it not been for the work of the hon. member for Kindersley.

I want to thank him for being an effective MLA regardless of his responsibility, and he has held many responsibilities, and he has done an excellent job at everything that he has endeavoured or embarked upon. And I also want to thank the hon. member for being such an advocate of agriculture, the current role that he is playing and has fulfilled with excellence.

I also want to thank the member for being a family minded man. I want to thank his family, his wife, Lynn, and his children, Regan and Shari, for allowing him to serve for so many years. Those of us who have families know the sacrifices that are made and the support that is required of family, and we particularly appreciate the member's family and the support that they have been to him.

We thank him for being a business minded representative of the legislature, and also being community minded as I know his community of Eston appreciates. There are many characteristics that you would associate with my colleague and friend. Of course we're all called hon. members, and certainly honourable is a suiting adjective to describe the member. But you can add integrity, you can add ability, versatility, determination, and a doer, not just a talker.

Speaking of talking, we all know that he's an excellent and has been an excellent orator. His verbal gymnastics are of Olympian proportion. And as the members opposite have witnessed many times, they've seen many gold medal performances by the hon. member for Kindersley over the years.

I know I've but scratched the surface and I won't speak longer but I also want to say that I personally want to thank the member as a colleague and a personal friend, for the support he has provided me as a new leader. His experience has been invaluable to me. I have felt he has not only been a colleague in the legislature but a personal supporter, and for that I am deeply appreciative and thankful, and I know that he will continue to work with us in a non-elected role.

So if I might, Mr. Speaker, just bend the rules a little bit, I would like to thank the hon. member from Kindersley, Mr. Bill Boyd, for his excellent career in politics in Saskatchewan, his service as a MLA to the people of Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to say a few words on behalf of the . . .

The Speaker: — Just . . . I know that . . . with leave is . . . Leave granted. Thank you. I just didn't want to get called on it, Mr. House Leader.

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — I'm going to start again, Mr. Speaker. This is very much a place of emotion. Some days laughter and some days sadness. And I have to say that for me this is a day of sadness.

The member from Kindersley has served this place with integrity and ability, and I think no one can question that. I haven't always agreed with the positions he has taken, but I have always been very much aware of his abilities to put forth a very strong case. My colleague had indicated sometimes not only a strong case, but done in a sort of a marathon. His speeches can get somewhat lengthy here.

I want to thank the member from Kindersley for his service to this province and to his constituents. I know that his goal here was to make Saskatchewan a better place, and I think he has

done that, in that critique of government's positions is always important because I do think it strengthens public policy.

And I want to say just upon a personal note that, Bill, we're going to miss you. You've added colour and, as I've said, ability and integrity. This place will not be the same without you. And I will always remember, as my colleagues will, the hours that we spent together trying to build a stronger province.

So, Bill, thank you very much.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Krawetz: — Mr. Speaker, with leave to also add to the comments.

Leave granted.

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it's an honour to rise on behalf of the 25 other members on this side of the House to add to the comments of the Leader of the Opposition and the House Leader of the government.

I do want to make some comments on behalf of five people within this caucus — the member for Humboldt, the member for Kelvington-Wadena, the member for Saltcoats, the member for Melfort-Tisdale, and myself.

We were that group of elected officials back in 1995 for the first time appearing in this Legislative Assembly as members of the Liberal Party. And we quickly recognized the skills that the member for Kindersley had. Not only the skills as the member for Rosetown-Biggan has indicated, strong orator skills, strong leadership skills, strong ability to see, to see the big picture, to understand the issues, the controversial issues that were facing our caucus and to be able to look at the big picture, and I want to thank him for that type of leadership that he showed to us.

As we moved through 1996 and 1997, it became obvious that we were going to form together to form a body that represented what we believe the majority of people in Saskatchewan . . . as a party that would represent non-socialist opinions and would move forward.

And I want to thank the member for setting aside that leadership role that he had played within the Progressive Conservative Party to say that for the success of the Saskatchewan Party there had to be someone different than the Leader of the Progressive Conservative Party or the Leader of the Liberal Party. And that's a tribute to him.

I also want to say, Mr. Speaker, that all of us, all of us will leave this Legislative Assembly at one time or another and we can all hope that the legacy that we would leave behind is the kind of legacy that the member for Kindersley is so proud of, and that we are so proud of the legacy that he has left behind in this Legislative Assembly. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hillson: — By leave to respond, Mr. Speaker.

Leave granted.

Mr. Hillson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I consider myself privileged to be able also to join in the tributes to a member I think we all recognize as talented and skilled and, yes, entertaining.

The legislature, as the Leader of the Opposition has noticed, has also lost its premier advocate for prairie agriculture. And that is a position that is going to be sorely missed, as we know that the member for Kindersley could be counted first and foremost among our membership to speak for the needs of western farmers no matter what their political stripe.

His political skill, I think, also will go down in the history of our province. In 1995, by all the rules of the game, they should have disappeared. And I think it was largely due to his talent and his skill that what appeared to be an irrevocable verdict against him was turned on its head. And for that he will enter the history books of the political history of Saskatchewan.

He was a formidable adversary, and I know that all Liberals in this province would want me to wish him well as I do, to wish him bon voyage. As the member for Canora-Pelly said, we all must leave here at some time. And may we, like him, leave with our honour and integrity intact and with the support of our constituents very much intact as I know he does.

I wish him well. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Elhard: — With leave, to comment on the resignation announcement of the member from Kindersley.

Leave granted.

Mr. Elhard: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I stand in my spot today to comment on the member's resignation announcement on behalf of the number of Sask Party MLAs that were first elected in the 1999 general election.

The member from Kindersley, frankly, stunned us today when he informed us of his decision. For the first time in my legislative career I was speechless. And I guess that was why I was given the opportunity to comment in the House today.

Mr. Speaker, we have come to count on the member from Kindersley as a capable speaker and an insightful political mind. We counted on him for his experience, much of it gained through the school of hard political knocks. We as rookies counted on him for his honesty and integrity to guide us through uncharted political waters. We counted on his good humour and storytelling ability to bring levity to almost any gathering. We counted on him to bring his considerable influence to bear in favour of the Saskatchewan Party team. And we also counted on him to eviscerate our arguments when they couldn't stand up to scrutiny.

Today we are counting on him to have made the right decision for himself and his family, no matter how difficult the decision was or how uncomprehending of it we may be today.

(14:30)

The member from Kindersley played a role in my own personal decision to enter the political realm. He didn't know that until just a few hours ago. How did he influence my decision, Mr. Speaker?

I watched the member struggle against insurmountable odds to salvage almost single-handedly a party that was on the edge of dissemination in the 1995 election. I admired from afar the decisive and honest way he handled subsequent bad news and political adversity. I was encouraged by his presence to consider the political realm as one where honour could be restored, and I was propelled into action politically when I witnessed him unwillingly put his leadership aside for a greater political purpose — the establishment of the Saskatchewan Party as a new and promising entity.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I've only actually known the member from Kindersley for a short time and I've only ever questioned his judgment once — and that's when he supported somebody else in a nomination process. But we got over that and established a very firm and, I believe, lasting friendship.

We campaigned together briefly in the northern part of my constituency, which borders the constituency of Kindersley, and where I knew the member's reputation would stand me in good stead, and I took advantage of his willingness to help me at that point.

Informally around here the member from Kindersley became the leader of what we jokingly refer to as the southwest Saskatchewan caucus.

Today we say farewell to the member from Kindersley. We say farewell to an outstanding member of the Saskatchewan Party team. We say farewell to a man that is the example of what conviction and determination can accomplish. We say farewell to him as a colleague of incomparable capability. But most significantly, Mr. Speaker, we say farewell to him as our friend.

On behalf of my colleagues, we wish him well. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With leave to respond.

Leave granted.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As we've already heard there comes a time when you kind of sit back and you think and you look over your team, and you start to begin to look forward to another election and you wonder will the team be together or will some team members have chosen a different path. Sometimes those choices aren't easy.

Mr. Speaker, as one of the members who was elected prior to 1991 — I guess the longest serving on this side of the Assembly at this time — I had the privilege of meeting the member from Kindersley when he was sent to my office, and I was supposed to encourage him to seek a nomination, and let him know how good it was to be a member in public life.

And I think I was frank enough to indicate that yes, there's a lot of positive and joyful experiences, but there's some difficulties, and some of those arise when we think of young families.

And the member from Kindersley let his name stand with a very young family at that time, as I did at the moment that I entered politics.

And, Mr. Speaker, there isn't anyone in this Assembly who does not appreciate what members give up. I think . . . I look around. It doesn't matter what your political stripe is, there's some of the things you miss.

The member from Kindersley missed Shari's hockey games, missed Regan's sports activities, and many activities at school, like we all do. But as well, the member from Kindersley also realized that he had . . . and we saw in him an individual who had the ability to play an integral role in the development of our province.

In 1991 the member from Kindersley was elected the MLA for Kindersley. In 1994 he accepted the leadership of the PC Party of Saskatchewan, and I'm sure at that time had he known what was coming down the road, he probably would have walked away — or he'd have run away.

In 1995 he went into a general election, as we've referred to already, I would have to say almost as . . . the vision would be of the dark days of World War II. The PC Party was facing a real struggle.

But I'm reminded of the words of a great leader of the British nation, Winston Churchill, when he said, never, never give up. And the member from Kindersley exemplified . . . he didn't give up.

Through adversity, he moved forward. He brought a team behind him — a team that worked with him. And as a result of that team, and as a result of the election of 1995, and then the political process in 1997, the formation of a clear alternative in this province to what the NDP offered — a clear alternative on the right, centre right, of the political spectrum — in the formation of the Saskatchewan Party.

Mr. Speaker, there's no doubt that we will miss the wit and the humour of the member from Kindersley. I know we will miss it in our caucus, and I don't question the fact that there isn't a member in this Assembly that will not miss that wit and humour.

But on behalf of my colleagues, on behalf of all members, we want to wish the member well.

Mr. Speaker, if I could — Bill, we pray God's blessing on you, on your wife, Lynn, your daughter, Shari, your son, Regan, and on all the future decisions and the changes you make at this time. And you know we will be there to support you. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ORDERS OF THE DAY

WRITTEN QUESTIONS

Mr. Yates: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. By leave, I request permission to table responses to written questions no. 36 through 42.

The Speaker: — The responses to questions 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, and 42 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. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday I was speaking from the perspective of my constituents with respect to the provincial budget, and certainly there are more remarks that could be made in that regard on behalf of the people of Swift Current in respect to the budget.

I had the occasion actually to talk to a senior, for example, just yesterday on the way home, who was concerned about the impact of the budget on her and her husband vis-à-vis the drug plan and the increase in long-term care fees that they face. She was, for example, concerned that she would now be unable to afford her car and supporting that car which she used to visit her husband in the long-term care facility, the Palliser Regional Care Centre, in Swift Current.

And I was also going to go into some . . . a good deal of concern that we have on this side about the sustainability of the budget and the fact that clearly this is a deficit budget and a major departure from what we have seen from the governments of Mr. Romanow.

But you know, Mr. Speaker, there is . . . It's beyond my ability to add or detract, frankly, to the words that were spoken in support of the amendment currently before the Assembly by my very good friend, the member for Kindersley, ironically enough. And so, I just would like to say that it's with his example in mind and his friendship in mind that I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, it will be an unqualified honour to support the amendment put forward by the opposition and seconded by the member for Kindersley.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hillson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to address some of my comments this afternoon concerning The Balanced Budget Act. This Balanced Budget Act, Mr. Speaker, was passed in 1995 and I believe the then-premier, Roy Romanow, and Finance minister Janice MacKinnon would say it was the most important legacy of their government and their administration.

And it was designed and intended to ensure that we would

never again fall into the trap we fell into in the '80s of spiralling deficits — deficits not properly accounted for, deficits using money shifting willy-nilly between the Crowns and General Revenue Fund, with no rhyme nor reason except to cover up the true state of the province's finances.

And we recall that in the 1980s the Crown corporations sometimes paid dividends to the General Revenue Fund which were financed by debt, in other words money that wasn't there.

Well unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, this year we see record transfers from the Crown corporations to the General Revenue Fund, which negates the sale of the Cameco shares that were supposed to be used to pay down debt but in effect have been used into the General Revenue Fund.

The Balanced Budget Act was to have been the legacy of the government which took over a desperate financial situation in this province in 1991, and they were determined after it was corrected that it would never happen again.

What a bitter irony, Mr. Speaker, it must be for the members of that administration to now see that that legacy has been undone, and that legacy has been undone not by some resurrected Tory Party, not by some recycled Devine politician, it has been sabotaged by the New Democratic Party. And I think that must be a matter of extreme sorrow to those who brought this in.

It is also a tragic irony for the people of Saskatchewan who tried to deal with the debt situation at considerable sacrifice. We all know about the 52 closed hospitals. We all know about the declining state of our public roads and the whole of the public infrastructure of this province. We know that the deficit of this province was dealt with through a great sacrifice of all of the residents of this province and not just of our government. We had hoped that we had turned the corner.

Well if we look at the balanced budget legislation, Mr. Speaker, what we find is, first of all, if there is an unforeseen circumstance — an unanticipated event as the Act says — which means that the budget tips into deficit, the Minister of Finance is to tell us what that event is and to lay a plan on the table for dealing with it.

Well this last several months, Mr. Speaker, we have been treated to several talks from the Minister of Finance and of others identifying September 11 as that unanticipated event. September 11 was, to be sure, a tragedy and unanticipated. However I would respectfully submit that its impact on the finances of the province of Saskatchewan was minimal. In any event, the government cannot have it both ways.

If it is saying that the softwood lumber dispute and September 11 have adversely affected the province's finances and tipped us into deficit, then the Minister of Finance is required to lay a report on the table identifying that situation and what he will do about it.

And if he is not saying that this is a circumstance which could . . . twisted us into deficit and into debt, then why are they continually bringing up those excuses? The same applies to the drought situation on the farm last year.

The Act, Mr. Speaker, goes on to say that for purposes of determining whether or not we are in a deficit, it is necessary to use the existing accounting rules. And should those accounting rules be changed, the Minister of Finance is required to use the previous rules in order to report to the legislature whether or not we are in deficit.

Now what does that mean, Mr. Speaker? Well specifically regarding the 90 million of capital expenditure for schools, that is required to be shown on this year's balance sheet. If the Minister of Finance chooses to take it out of the financial statements, so be it. But he must include it in this year's statements for the purpose of reporting whether or not we are in deficit. That's what this legislation says. And the government is not following its own legislation, its own legacy, when it ignores that.

(14:45)

The Minister of Finance has tried to frame the debate around the issue of whether or not building schools is a good thing. And course, he says, building schools is a good thing. I doubt anyone would disagree with him.

However all of government is a question of balance, is a question of what the province can afford over what the province wants in terms of services. We want certain services; we have only so much tax base.

And what we know, Mr. Speaker, is that because our tax base has been shrinking because there has been so little economic development in this province, that our capacity to keep a modern infrastructure has been severely compromised.

But in The Balanced Budget Act, the Minister of Finance, if he wants to change the accounting rules, he can do so. But he has to use the existing rules when he reports to the legislature.

We also know, Mr. Speaker, the desperate need this province has for a summary financial statement, one that encapsulates the entire financial situation of our province in terms of public finances, both the General Revenue Fund and the Crown corporations. We know that many times in the past money has shifted back and forth as a sort of shell game. And I respectfully submit that is what is happening this year.

Only when we have a financial statement which integrates the total public finances of the province into one coherent statement, can we see at a glance exactly where the government and province of Saskatchewan stands. This the Minister of Finance refuses to do. And we will not have open and transparent accounting until we get that.

Mr. Speaker, most provinces in Canada already have that — it's seven of the ten — only three do not. And it is particularly noticeable that one of the provinces that does not have it, namely our own, is a province in which approximately 40 per cent of the activity of the public sector is done by the Crown corporations. So that is close to half then of the total of government activity is outside of the budget, outside of the financial statements.

Now this year we have taken the construction of schools outside

the financial statements.

So the financial statements simply do not give us a full and complete picture. Until we have that, the people of Saskatchewan will be unable to make reasoned, fully informed decisions as to what expenditures they want from their government and how much our tax base can afford.

Mr. Speaker, this has been called for by the Provincial Auditor. It is accepted by seven of our sister provinces; there is simply no good reason why it should not be accepted here.

I said before that I consider it tragic that The Balanced Budget Act — perhaps the single greatest legacy of the Romanow administration — has been undone by his own party, but I wonder how members of the opposition feel as they consider the prospect that they may someday be government.

Mr. Speaker, The Balanced Budget Act was put in place so that if some future government wanted to play jiggery-pokery with the books, they would be prevented from so doing by this Act.

Now the Saskatchewan Party need not be concerned about The Balanced Budget Act should they form the government of this province. The Act has been effectively sabotaged. Effectively it does not exist, because we now have a government of Saskatchewan which simply ignores the Act and pretends it isn't there.

And when the Minister of Finance has said . . . is asked why don't you account for school construction according to the rules laid down in The Balanced Budget Act, he says what's your problem, are you against building schools.

Well, we all know, Mr. Speaker, the real problem, the real problem is that we have failed to grow our tax base.

The government has pointed out to us on many occasions that the reason we have lost so many working people in this province is because of the decline in the ag sector in these past years of great challenge on the farm. They are correct in that. They are also correct when they point out that the decline in the number of persons working in the farm sector has occurred in other provinces and states.

However, tragically the big difference between ourselves and other provinces and states is that in other provinces as the farm sector has been able to employ fewer people, other sectors of the economy have sufficiently grown to take up this slack.

Tragically as our farm sector has contracted by 12 or 13 per cent, there has been no other alternate economy for those people to go to within the province and they have been forced to seek opportunities elsewhere.

Mr. Speaker, when I was a member of the government, it was decided to bring in a 25 per cent rebate on education tax on farmland. This was to in some small way recognize that in this province, farmers pay a disproportionate cost of education as compared with any other province.

Farmland, or land generally, pays a higher percentage of school tax, the cost of education, than in any other province of this

country. So because we use the land tax base to fund education more here than anywhere else, this means that education falls disproportionately on our farm population.

Well we were going to try and deal with that in some small way. And I'm sorry to see that the government has removed that this time. It would seem to be a clear indication that there is no strategy for the government to try to win back farm support, that they have simply written off that vote for the next election.

I think that we need to move away from the property tax base for the funding of education. Property tax is outmoded and unfair. We need to move to a fairer system of taxation to fund our education system.

And one of the reasons we need to do that, Mr. Speaker, is that the property tax base is turning some of our rural population against education because as they see a higher and higher property tax bill to fund education at a time when in the rural areas there are fewer and fewer students and fewer and fewer schools, they become angry about the very real needs of education. And I understand their feelings. However, ultimately we all know that the future of our province, the future of our young people depends on a strong education system. But that education system can no longer continue to be funded solely on the backs of property owners.

I said that what is ultimately needed is to grow our tax base, Mr. Speaker. What we need are plans. For instance, what about a north-south corridor? We know that Alberta is developing a north-south corridor. We know that 6 to 700 kilometres can be cut off the Mackenzie Highway by routing it through Saskatchewan. We know we have untold riches and tremendous beauty in our Athabasca region which could be opened to tourism and other development.

We all know that the Northwest Territories, especially because of diamonds and North Slope oil and Mackenzie Valley pipeline, is rapidly expanding. Are we going to allow all of that wealth to be funnelled through the province of Alberta? Or are we in Saskatchewan going to say we are the natural conduit from Chicago and the American Midwest up through the Athabasca and linking our communities of Stony Rapids or Fond-du-Lac and on into Fort Smith in the Northwest Territories and the Mackenzie Highway?

That could even be, Mr. Speaker, a toll road because unlike most of the province, you could build a toll road in that area and that would open up this province to enormous wealth for us to capture some of that wealth.

Mr. Speaker, I've already said that I'm pleased with the ethanol announcement last week by the minister of mines and energy. It is more suggestions, more initiatives like that . . . As you know, Mr. Speaker, I have spoken out very strongly against investing \$160 million in Australia when the government itself admits no jobs will be created. The ethanol announcement has the potential to build wealth and build jobs here at home. That is what we need.

And by building wealth here, we will expand our tax base. And when we expand our tax base, then we will be able to remove the crippling burden on farmland that we have presently placed

the cost of education on, and we will be able to give opportunities for our young people to remain in Saskatchewan.

But I want to say, Mr. Speaker, the other issues I have dealt with in another times speaking, and I know that other hon. members will want to participate in debate, but I find it unfortunate that The Balanced Budget Act is today effectively dead. And its murderer is, ironically, its creator.

Why this government chose to go the route of ignoring and sabotaging its greatest legacy is beyond me. Why the sacrifices we made throughout the '90s to get our province back into solvency, to get a good credit rating for our province, why, why these efforts are being thrown to the four winds is something I simply cannot understand. But The Balanced Budget Act deserved to be respected, and now we are in the situation where any future government of this province can effectively ignore its existence because this government has. And for that reason, I will not be supporting this budget. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to join into the budget debate. And before I begin my remarks, I would like to just make a few comments related to my constituency and to some of my colleagues here in the legislature today.

I would like to say that I wasn't able to partake in the budget debate last year, or in the Throne Speech, and was not able to publicly thank the good constituents of Meadow Lake who have seen it fit to elect me to this legislature for three terms now. And I want to say how honoured and privileged and humbled I am to be able to represent them. Truly.

I know we all think we represent the best constituencies in the province, and I know that I'm right about that, Mr. Speaker. It's a wonderful area to represent.

I'd like to also take the opportunity to congratulate you, Mr. Speaker, for, I think, doing a very good job in the past short while that you've been in that chair. As a former seatmate of mine, I know I was . . . I regret having lost you, but you do a great job up there, Mr. Speaker.

I want to congratulate and welcome the new member as well from Saskatoon Idylwyld. The member was a resident actually of the Meadow Lake constituency for quite some number of years. He and his wife lived up there, and he was actually, believe it or not, instrumental in convincing me to run in the election and to seek the nomination. And so I saw it only fitting to go back and re-convince him that he should run once he moved to Saskatoon. And we've both been, fortunately, successful in our challenges to each other.

I want to also welcome back a colleague of all of ours, but I think a colleague as well, I guess, from northwest Saskatchewan, the member from Battleford-Cut Knife. I can't imagine how difficult a time he and his family have gone through and I really want to personally wish that member and his family the very best of luck into the future.

And when I made notes to myself I did not think I would be making comments about the member from Kindersley. But I do want to say on a personal note as well that having been elected

at the same time as he was in 1991, I can only echo the sentiments from many of the members of the legislature here today around that member's abilities in this legislature, and I know I too personally will miss what he has offered in this legislature and what he has provided for his constituents and the people of Saskatchewan.

(15:00)

I want to also take the opportunity to thank the staff that support me, Mr. Speaker, in my cabinet office, Don, Kirk, Jennie, Brenda, and Jody, and in my constituency office back in Meadow Lake, to Susan and Adriane who are really my eyes and ears and who do an amazing job in representing me when I'm away, which is a fair bit as a minister of the Crown. Without these people we know that we would all not do nearly as good a job as we do.

Lastly, Mr. Speaker, I want to take the opportunity to thank my family. We all know that without the support of our families it would be an almost and a virtual impossible task without their support. And to Virginia and to my son, Mayson, and to the new addition that's to arrive shortly, I say thank you very much for your support. I really do appreciate it.

I want to just parenthetically say, just as a little aside here, I had a phone call from my mother just several weeks ago, as I know we often get calls from our families, who indicated to me that her and my father saw me in a TV clip fairly recently and thought that I looked awfully tired and it was probably time to be getting out of politics. And I said to my mother, Mom, it's not the politics, why didn't you tell me about raising kids? That's what's making me look tired, Mr. Speaker.

So anyway to all of my family, both Virginia and Mayson, and to my parents and brothers and sisters who have supported me all through this I say thank you very much.

Mr. Speaker, I want to if I could add my voice to those of my colleagues who have congratulated the Minister of Finance on bringing down the ninth consecutive balanced budget, truly a remarkable record.

2001 was a very tough year for all provincial governments in economic downturns and reduced revenues right across Canada. Yet we were able to stay the course in Saskatchewan with funding to health care and education continuing to go up and income taxes continuing to come down. We did it without the gutting of public services and massive layoffs taking place in BC (British Columbia) and without the huge tax bite taken by Premier Klein in Alberta.

And, Mr. Speaker, Crown corporations have played a major role in putting our province back on its feet over the last decade. They have helped restore Saskatchewan's fiscal position to the point where we can weather a bad year, substantially increase funding on the priorities of Saskatchewan people, cut income taxes, and still, Mr. Speaker, balance the budget.

Since 1995, the Crown sector has put \$1 billion back in dividends and equity repayments into the General Revenue Fund. At the same time, Mr. Speaker, Crowns have paid off \$2.3 billion in debt. That's the kind of performance that gets the

attention of bond raters. Improved Crown performance has been sighted by bond rating agencies as a key factor, Mr. Speaker, in the string of double and triple A's Saskatchewan has been getting on its credit report cards in recent years.

I want to say a bit more about the billion dollars paid to the General Revenue Fund by the Crowns over the last few years because we are already at the point where the members opposite seem to be getting confused, Mr. Speaker. They're always talking about taxpayers' money going to the Crowns. The last time that that happened, Mr. Speaker, I say to you and I say to the members in this legislature, was 10 years ago when the Devine government left the Crowns on the verge of fiscal collapse and an equity injection was required from the General Revenue Fund, Mr. Speaker — from the General Revenue Fund to Crown corporations.

Those members and former colleagues of the members opposite crippled the Crowns by stripping equity and forcing them to borrow to pay dividends. It's obvious they have learned nothing from that experience, Mr. Speaker.

Since then, the flow of money has been one way, Mr. Speaker — \$1 billion from the Crowns to the General Revenue Fund. The money is paid to the Crowns in return for a service. Some people say SaskTel for cellular service . . . Some people, I should say, pay SaskTel for cellular service and some pay TELUS and Rogers AT&T. The customer is paying a user fee in every single case whether it's provided by a Crown or a private company from outside of the province.

Like any business, the Crowns invest some of their earnings in improving services and paying their debt down. The rest goes to the General Revenue Fund to help pay for public services by paying user fees for power, natural gas, telephones, and insurance to the publicly owned Saskatchewan companies.

Our citizens are \$1 billion to the good since 1995, both as taxpayers and as shareholders. They also benefit as customers for the lowest overall rates, Mr. Speaker, in Canada. I repeat, the lowest overall rates in all of Canada, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Mr. Speaker, there are plenty of examples of the benefits of public ownership to taxpayers, shareholders, and customers in the budget now before us.

The Crown dividend to the General Revenue Fund is \$300 million for this fiscal year coming up, Mr. Speaker. This is the entire budget of the Department of Highways, Mr. Speaker.

By paying our companies for utilities and keeping that money in the province, Saskatchewan people generate a dividend that pays for more than 700 kilometres of paving and reconstruction of our highways. A dividend, Mr. Speaker, that amounts to nearly 20 per cent return on our investment in the Crowns. That is something, Mr. Speaker, that I think that we should be proud of, not something that we should criticize and be embarrassed about, Mr. Speaker.

Just to connect the dots, Mr. Speaker, one more time for the members opposite. That dividend comes from the fees that

Saskatchewan people would be paying — I say would be paying — big utility companies from outside of the province if we had not built our Crowns. Those companies would take the profits and dividends outside of the province, Mr. Speaker, outside of the province. Because we pay utility user fees to our own Crown companies, we are able to generate a \$300 million dividend that benefits Saskatchewan people as taxpayers.

Every dollar earned by the Crowns that is surplus to their reinvestment and debt-servicing needs is a dividend dollar. Every Crown dividend dollar that helps pay for public services is a dollar less that has to come from income and sales taxes, Mr. Speaker. A dollar less that has to come from income tax and sales taxes. I can't make it any plainer than that, Mr. Speaker.

Anyone over there who still doesn't get it, just doesn't want to, Mr. Speaker. I wouldn't be the first time that their ideology got in the way of their common sense, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the argument that the Crowns use taxpayers' money holds no water with me and, I think, the general public. Nor does the related argument we often hear from the opposite . . . from members opposite that the government is taxing Saskatchewan people through the Crowns.

There might be some truth to that argument if we had sky-high utility rates in Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, but the facts are that we have the lowest overall utility rates in all of Canada. And in the gas sector, Mr. Speaker, four out of the last five years we had lowest rates in North America, Mr. Speaker.

The budget provides examples of just how much that means in reduced living costs to Saskatchewan utility customers. Under the intercity comparisons of taxes and household charges for a family of four with a \$50,000 income, we see the following total annual charges for home heating, electricity, telephone, and auto insurance. In Vancouver that charge would be \$4,714, Mr. Speaker; in Calgary, \$4,256, Mr. Speaker; in Winnipeg, \$3,459, Mr. Speaker; in Toronto, \$5,060, in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, \$3,455, Mr. Speaker. Saskatoon has the lowest overall utility rate costs on that list, and it would still have the lowest costs if I had taken the time to give you the numbers from cities from the other five provinces.

Saskatchewan utility customers are paying less than anyone else in the country. Anyone, Mr. Speaker, who argues that they are being taxed through the Crowns, is playing fast and loose with the truth. Mr. Speaker, our citizens get the lowest overall rates in Canada as Crown customers and big dividends as shareholders and as taxpayers.

But there are still those who just won't accept the fact that publicly owned Saskatchewan companies perform so well. They will claim that if Crowns are accomplishing all this it must be running up their debt. Okay, Mr. Speaker, let's look at the budget once again to see if there is any truth in that argument.

Total Crown corporation debt in 2003 is estimated to be virtually unchanged — unchanged, I repeat — from 2002. In other words, Crown debt will be stable; dividends will be paid out of earnings; investments in improved services as well as

growth and diversification will continue; and overall Crown debt will not, not go up, Mr. Speaker.

It was the hard work of many thousands of Saskatchewan men and women who put the Crowns back on their feet in the 1990s. We will not repeat the mistakes of the Devine years where Crowns were either sold for a song or used as just another way for the government to borrow money for its day-to-day operations.

Mr. Speaker, the budget lays out a sound plan for the continued growth and development of Saskatchewan's economy. We are investing in health and education, in renewing infrastructure, in research and technology, in personal and small-business tax cuts, and in safe and healthy communities.

Our public enterprise sector in partnership with a private sector and co-operative sectors play an important role in growing our economy. Crown corporations employ over 9,000 Saskatchewan people — about half in head offices and half in towns and cities throughout our province. Those employees put annual earnings of more than half a billion dollars, Mr. Speaker, into their local economies.

Crowns invest over \$400 million every year in Saskatchewan to expand and improve their services, creating thousands of construction jobs each and every year. Those numbers add up to Crowns being some of the biggest businesses in Saskatchewan. Because they are big, they are . . . and are good at what they do, the members opposite claim that they crowd out the private sector. Once again, it's a claim that gives a wide berth, Mr. Speaker, to the truth.

When we look at the facts, we see thousands of successful, private businesses which are partners or suppliers to Crown corporations. Crowns partner, Crowns partner with about 600 local dealers and brokers to provide telecommunications, natural gas, and insurance services. All Crowns have buy in Saskatchewan policies and do most of their purchasing in our province, Mr. Speaker. Crowns spend over a billion dollars a year close to home making them key customers for nearly 12,000 — I repeat, 12,000 Saskatchewan businesses.

Mr. Speaker, three weeks ago I announced in this legislature that SaskTel is taking high-speed Internet services to another 191 communities in Saskatchewan. SaskTel is a world leader, Mr. Speaker, in providing the latest telecommunications services such as high-speed Internet and digital cellular to rural areas. No other jurisdiction is even close to us in this area.

There are critical services . . . these, I should say, are critical services to give residents of rural Saskatchewan an opportunity to participate in the global economy, Mr. Speaker.

When I made this announcement, the member for Swift Current recognized the benefits of what he called connectivity for rural Saskatchewan. But he expressed his disappointment that SaskTel was not leaving it to the private sector to do this.

Mr. Speaker, I'm going to connect the dots for him one last time. As he well knows, SaskTel has been in full competition with some of the biggest companies in the world for many years. Private companies like Rogers, AT&T, and Bell with

billions of dollars at their disposal could — I repeat, could — have invested hundreds of . . . could have invested the hundreds of millions required to provide these services for rural Saskatchewan anytime they chose. They haven't, and they won't, Mr. Speaker, because they can't make enough money at it.

We have high-speed Internet and will soon have digital cellular services in Meadow Lake because we own SaskTel. If we didn't, we would never see these services in northwest Saskatchewan.

The cellular coverage maps for SaskTel and its competitors, Mr. Speaker, tell the story. If you look at SaskTel's map, you can just . . . and you see just about the whole southern half of the province covered, Mr. Speaker, and with most areas having digital services in the next couple of years.

If you look at the maps of Rogers, AT&T, and TELUS, and you see coverage . . . what you will see, I should say, is coverage for Regina and Saskatoon as well as corridors along the TransCanada and the Yellowhead Highways. And, Mr. Speaker, that's about it.

Private companies won't go outside of the heavier populated areas because there's no money in it, Mr. Speaker, and I don't blame them for that. You would think that members opposite, who represent rural ridings, would be able to figure that out. But they obviously can't, Mr. Speaker.

(15:15)

SaskTel provides these modern services in rural areas because it is a Crown corporation which has an obligation to provide them those services throughout the province. That takes us back to the very, very reason that Crowns were created in the very first place. That is to provide services to all, including many areas where private companies simply would not go; to keep the fees we pay for utility services in the province; to help grow our economy, Mr. Speaker; and to keep the rates absolutely as low as possible.

Our Crown corporations have done a good job of delivering these . . . those objectives over the century of public enterprises in our province. And I say century, Mr. Speaker. Many people don't know that our very first Crown was actually created in 1901. They have been with us for over 100 years now, Mr. Speaker, and have served us very well. And they will continue to play a key role in providing province-wide services and building a modern economy.

Mr. Speaker, my constituency of Meadow Lake provides a good example of the kind of economic activity we have in rural areas because we own our utility companies. The four major Crowns all have substantial operations in Meadow Lake. SGI (Saskatchewan Government Insurance) has a claim centre and SaskTel, SaskPower, and SaskEnergy have regional offices. Together they employ 47 people with an annual payroll of \$2 million. They spend millions of dollars every year on maintenance and improvements to their systems, creating hundreds of construction jobs. None of that would be happening in Meadow Lake if these companies were not owned by the people of Saskatchewan.

We can break those numbers down further by looking at the activities of just one Crown corporation. Mr. Speaker, SaskPower alone employs 20 people and serves nearly 7,000 customers in the Meadow Lake region. In 2001 SaskPower purchased over \$800,000 — 800,000 — in trucking, electrical, trenching, and manufacturing goods and services from Meadow Lake businesses. Last year SaskPower did nearly \$2 million worth of maintenance and construction work in our area. This year it will spend nearly 5 million on a transmission line and upgrades to the Meadow Lake switching station.

That's a big contribution to the local economy. It's a contribution that only a publicly owned Saskatchewan company with a mandate to serve the whole province would logically make.

Mr. Speaker, in the interests of balance, openness, and accountability in this legislature, I'm going to provide numbers for Crown activity in Swift Current, Mr. Speaker.

In his haste to criticize everything the Crowns do, I doubt that the member from that constituency has ever stopped to think about the impact on Swift Current's economy if his party got its way and the Crowns were sold.

The four major Crowns account for a lot of economic activity in Swift Current, Mr. Speaker. They employ 140 people in six administrative and maintenance offices and claim centres — I repeat, 140 people in six administrative and maintenance offices.

Those Crown employees spend most of their \$6.6 million annual payroll at Swift Current businesses, Mr. Speaker. Crowns spent over \$5 million maintaining and upgrading their systems last year, providing a lot of construction jobs in the Swift Current area. They purchased over \$7 million in goods and services from hundreds of local businesses.

Crowns partnered with 19 local businesses including cell, Internet, and SecurTek dealers; insurance brokers; and plumbing and heating contractors. If the Crowns were sold, as the member for Swift Current and his party would do, a big bite would be taken out of that city's economy. There would be some activity by the companies that took their place but it would be nothing near — nothing near, Mr. Speaker — the boost that Swift Current receives from its Crown corporations.

Mr. Speaker, I've talked about the contributions of Crown corporations in meeting the challenges outlined in this budget. And Saskatchewan people in my estimation benefit as customers from low rates, as shareholders from dividends, and as taxpayers from keeping the user fees they pay for utilities in this province.

Their local, regional, and provincial economies also benefit from being our utility companies owned here and operated here, Mr. Speaker. Those . . . all of those benefits I should say, Mr. Speaker, would have been lost if the members opposite ever got turned loose on the Saskatchewan economy.

Their policy as stated by their leader is to sell the Crowns, Mr. Speaker. They have been trying to soft pedal that policy with weasel words about conducting a review, Mr. Speaker, before

they start the fire sale. They do that, Mr. Speaker, because they know most Saskatchewan people don't support the Crowns, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, they do not support selling those Crowns, Mr. Speaker. The public simply does not support that and that was revealed in a very recent poll, Mr. Speaker, where nearly 67 per cent supported, Mr. Speaker, the Crown corporations.

Once you break through, Mr. Speaker, the fuzzification they have tried to put around their policy on Crowns, you find the same old triumph over . . . of ideology over common sense, a hostility to public enterprise that goes back through generations of Conservative politicians. And that's why, Mr. Speaker, they oppose every initiative of Crowns like SaskTel to expand and improve their services to Saskatchewan people.

Somehow it's good for Access Communications to partner with Rogers AT&T, to compete with SaskTel for cellular phone service, but it's bad, Mr. Speaker, for SaskTel to offer its customers an alternative to the Access monopoly in the cable business.

It's good, Mr. Speaker, for Saskatchewan security firms to partner with American-based companies and have call centres and monitoring done in Dallas but, Mr. Speaker, it's apparently bad for them to partner with SaskTel's SecurTek, and have the call centre and monitoring done in Yorkton, where it has created nearly 55 jobs. And that number will grow, Mr. Speaker.

When you dig just a little bit deeper into this attitude, the complaint from the members opposite boils down to this one single thing, Mr. Speaker — Crowns are doing too . . . are too good at what they do. They want to restrict SaskTel from competing in the wide-open telecommunications market, and clear the way for huge transnational companies like AT&T, who will take their profits outside of Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker.

The opposition also opposes every initiative that SaskTel takes to invest outside of our province and bring revenues back into Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker. Never mind that SaskTel is \$157 million to the good so far on its diversification investments. They are opposed to any growth and diversification by Crowns no matter how successful it has been.

Where they would get the hundreds of millions it takes to provide high-speed Internet and digital cellular service throughout Saskatchewan, they don't say, Mr. Speaker.

Instead of being proud of these Saskatchewan success stories, they want to sell them. And I think that's a real shame, Mr. Speaker.

I've got news, Mr. Speaker, for the members opposite — Maggie Thatcher and Ronald Reagan are over. The people of this province have already been for a stroll down that path with Grant Devine, Mr. Speaker. They don't like what happened then and they won't — and don't — want to go back for seconds, Mr. Speaker.

The choice is clear. Despite the attempts of the Saskatchewan

Party to cover up their policy on Crowns, our government wants to grow and diversify so they can continue to provide low rates, good service, and economic benefits to the people of Saskatchewan. It's as simple as that.

The Saskatchewan Party wants to shrink the Crowns now and sell them later if they ever got a chance to, Mr. Speaker.

Since we are talking about the fiscal position of the province in this budget debate, I want to deal with one last bogus argument, Mr. Speaker, from the members opposite, regarding the Crown corporations — the one that says we should sell them, take the gain to pay down the debt, and reduce annual interest costs.

Let's leave aside for a moment that we would lose most of the benefits of publicly owned Saskatchewan-based utilities that I have been talking about. How would we do on the province's balance sheet if in fact we did sell the Crowns, Mr. Speaker? The Crowns' dividend to the General Revenue Fund is \$300 million this coming year. If Crowns were sold and applied the proceeds to the government debt . . . would yield interest savings of about, Mr. Speaker, \$240 million. Another \$60 million would have to be added to the utility rates because the Crowns . . . because of the Crowns' exemption from paying federal tax would now be gone.

Let me see if I can sum up the math on this Saskatchewan Party plan. We throw away a bunch of head and regional offices and lose 6 or 7,000 jobs as well as seven . . . several billion dollars of economic activity.

Mr. Speaker, we would throw away good service at low rates, not just in the cities but throughout the province. We would throw away an annual dividend that will be \$300 million this year. We throw away a federal tax exemption that saves utility customers over \$60 million a year. And in return we get \$240 million in interest savings.

I don't think anyone except for the members opposite will have a . . . will have trouble doing the math on that one, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, as I said earlier, Crown corporations are a great Saskatchewan success story that we should all be extremely proud of. It's a story, Mr. Speaker, about Saskatchewan people having the courage and the foresight to build these companies for themselves. It's about Crowns moving into competitive markets and successfully taking on some of the world's biggest companies, Mr. Speaker. It's about the knowledge and skills of Saskatchewan men and women who work in our Crowns, being in demand around the globe. It's about keeping the money that we spend on utilities at home to boost our economy. It's about building modern infrastructure to support growth and partnering with . . . and partnering with the private sector, Mr. Speaker, to invest in our economy and in our future. Most of all, most of all, Mr. Speaker, it's about nearly a century of good service to people in all parts of our province.

Mr. Speaker, I am proud of the contribution that Saskatchewan public enterprise has made to improving services, cutting taxes, and balancing the books despite a worldwide economic slump. And I will be joining my colleagues in supporting this very excellent budget which was presented by our Minister of Finance. Thank you very much.

Mr. Elhard: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker, thank you. Mr. Speaker, I'm certainly glad it was my opportunity to speak on the budget today because that allowed me the opportunity to be here for the best part of the previous member's speech. And frankly I learned more about Saskatchewan Party policy listening to him than I've ever learned in my own caucus. And I appreciate that opportunity.

You know the reality is, Mr. Speaker, that members opposite make all kinds of assertions, make all kinds of comments. Whether or not they're based on fact seems to be irrelevant. We were accused by the previous member, Mr. Speaker, of being ideologically bound to selling the Crowns. He can't produce one shred of evidence that there's any veracity to that accusation.

But I guess what I find more important than that is that when those kind of statements are made, it doubles my resolve, Mr. Speaker, to be very conscientious and careful about what I do espouse as a member of the official opposition and what policy positions I do take. Because it's important to be accurate; it's important to be informed; and it's important to be consistent in putting out your policies on behalf of a political party in anticipation of seeking the public's support at the next election. And what I hear from the members opposite, quite frankly, is a distortion of anything that I have ever assumed to be the policy of the Saskatchewan Party.

I guess in the role of debate, you can say almost anything you want. And I guess we will excuse the minister for having made those comments in light of that freedom that we're given to say anything that comes to mind.

You know I stood accused — or we stood accused, as the official opposition — of holding a certain point of view based on ideology. And yet what I heard was quite a lengthy enunciation of an ideology of its own and all the substantiation and justification for an ideology that is entrenched in the minds of the government. You know you can . . . you must be careful when you're calling the pot black, Mr. Speaker. And I find that when we are accused of ideology, the argument set to us or used against us, frankly, is equally based in ideology.

Let's get back to the business at hand, Mr. Speaker. You know I'm quite pleased to have this opportunity to enter the debate on the presentation of the government's budget a week or so ago. But I'm a whole lot less pleased with the budget document itself and the direction taken by the NDP government through that document. I would have been a whole lot more pleased, Mr. Speaker, if the budget had contained any item of good news for the people of Cypress Hills. The sad reality, Mr. Speaker, is that the budget provided quite the contrary. It is, frankly, filled with bad news for the people of my constituency and, I believe, for the people of this province as a whole.

(15:30)

Sadly, this budget is a hatchet job on the people of Saskatchewan. And I say that quite readily, frankly, because I looked through some of the provisions of the budget and I asked myself, as we looked at the various details, who's going to pay, who's going to pay as a result of these changes in direction, who's going to pay as a result of these increased levies?

I came to the conclusion very quickly that the people who will pay the most are the elderly, the sick, the weak, the vulnerable, through a whole series of new fees. The people who will pay will include both urban and rural communities because of shortchanging of revenue sharing. The people who will pay include property owners everywhere in this province. It includes farmers and ranchers, especially since education taxes are once again going to be forced significantly higher. There just was not enough money put into education to help alleviate that prospect.

And finally, Mr. Speaker, the 11,000 or more families in this province whose drug costs are going to go higher because of cuts to the provincial drug plan. Those are the people who are going to pay.

Unfortunately, the budget provides no real incentives to any individual in this province to encourage him or her to stay in the province of Saskatchewan.

Political rhetoric aside, Mr. Speaker, let me tell you a real life story. I was in the community of Leader just shortly after the new year. I was to meet an individual later in the afternoon. I had some time to kill and attended a restaurant about 1 o'clock in the afternoon. The main rush had already dissipated and there were very few of us left in the restaurant.

While I was sitting there looking at the menu and just waiting awhile until the owner came around to take my order for the meal, I noticed in particular a lady who was sitting at a table a few feet away from me, and she was looking at ads in a newspaper. And I recognized the newspaper as being the *Medicine Hat News*. And I was kind of curious as to why this lady in a restaurant in the small town of Leader would be perusing the want ads in the *Medicine Hat News*.

While I was kind of thinking of that, the owner of the restaurant, who was a new immigrant to this country and obviously the new owner of that particular establishment, came to my table and introduced herself, and I engaged her in conversation. I found out a little bit about her. I found out that she and her husband had just recently bought the restaurant there; they'd relocated from Saskatoon where they had been engaged in some training as new immigrants — English as a second language course and so forth. I found out that she was quite excited about being the new proprietor of the restaurant in the community of Leader and that she had anticipated good things for the business decision that she and her husband had made.

After leaving my table, the owner of the restaurant wandered over to the lady I referred to earlier — the lady who was looking at the *Medicine Hat News* — and went through the same dialogue with her, introduced herself as the new owner, wanted to know this lady's name, where she lived, you know, what she did in the community. Just establishing the most rudimentary elements of communication and going through this process individually with people in the restaurant.

After having discovered the customer's name, the restaurant owner made some reference to her as a regular customer: would she be coming back, would she see her again? And the lady with the newspaper said, I'm afraid not. Oh, was the response,

and why not? Well, the lady with the newspaper said, my children and I are going to be relocating to the city of Medicine Hat. And we will be selling our house shortly and moving there.

And you know, that particular instance represented to me what is clearly wrong and troublesome in this province. Because we had an individual who represented the hope and the future of this province — a new immigrant who came to this area, who invested their money and was prepared to work hard to create a success for themselves in a small community — juxtapositioned with an individual who already lived here and who was making the decision to leave the province and go to another centre in another province.

That particular contradiction of expectations was so poignant and spoke so clearly to me to the challenges and the problems that we are facing in this province. There is wonderful opportunity here, but there is a whole segment of our population — especially in rural areas and especially in areas so close to the Alberta border, as I've referred to many times in this House — where individuals there feel that the loss in opportunity and the unavailable nature of opportunity compels them to go elsewhere.

It's a sad contradiction and one that affects our constituencies in many, many parts of rural Saskatchewan, and is now to a greater extent starting to infect — as well as affect — the urban areas of this province.

I tell that story for a number of reasons. And I think that, you know, the contrast is certainly one of the reasons. But what I thought about when I read this budget was that scenario, which has been repeated in my mind many times since I was a witness to it back in January.

What I wanted to know when I looked through this budget was this: what hope, what opportunity, what provision did this budget create to minimize situations like I have just described? What was within this budget, what was contained within this budget that would reduce the number of people who wanted to leave this province, or who felt compelled to leave the province? What was contained in this budget to create enthusiasm for business development in communities throughout this province, no matter how large or how small?

Sadly, Mr. Speaker, I didn't see anything in the budget that would answer any of those questions in a positive, assertive way.

The community of Leader has gone through difficult times. In the last half dozen months or so, since late last summer, the community of Leader, which is only a town of about 800 people, has lost 70 individuals. In six or seven months a community has lost almost 10 per cent of its population. Why?

And what, Mr. Speaker, will stop that kind of hemorrhaging from happening in small-town Saskatchewan, especially in small-town southwestern Saskatchewan? What has the budget provided to impact the community of Leader in a positive sense?

Mr. Speaker, as hard as I looked, I couldn't find a single item.

What we did get, Mr. Speaker, was significantly higher fees for senior citizens in nursing homes. The community of Leader has one of those nursing homes. Those increases that were announced in the budget will affect every single person in care in communities just like Leader, except those who already are living below the poverty line.

You know, we've heard from the Minister of Health, when he was asked about this, that these fee increases are going to affect a very small number of people. Only 120 people at the very top of the income spectrum will be affected. Only the very rich living in these senior citizen homes, these extended care homes, will be affected.

You know, Mr. Speaker, that answer might be technically correct, but it does a disservice in its inaccuracy to the rest of the people who are going to be affected.

Mr. Speaker, my mother lived in the nursing home under those kinds of circumstances. I saw the impact of ever escalating costs. I saw what little money she was left with; what bare necessities cost these days and how little money she had to access those bare necessities. I saw the impact of drug costs on my mother and on other people who lived in that nursing home. I saw the despair in the eyes of old people who didn't know from month to month whether they would be able to survive financially.

And now what we've got, Mr. Speaker, is a situation where fees are going to go up significantly. A hundred and twenty people at the highest level might be technically accurate. But what about the other literally hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of people who are going to see their fees go up in a proportionate amount?

I have with me today a fax sheet on the increase in long-term care fees, and I was just looking through this, Mr. Speaker, and I think that the record needs to show exactly what these changes will mean to individuals.

Under the old fee structure, the minimum fee was \$828. Under the new fee schedule that does not change. But here's where the change becomes significant. Any income that a senior citizen gets over and above the \$828 minimum will now have 90 per cent of any of that excess income go to the cost of their care. That is going to apply in an extrapolated manner and a proportionate manner to every senior citizen living in a nursing home and having income over \$828 a month.

Now \$828 a month, I understand, is only a fraction of what the overall cost of a nursing home fee would be. Or if you were recovering all of the cost of a nursing home, they would be significantly higher. But \$828 a month for an individual person, if you take that out over the length of a year, puts that person not just — not just in a poverty position but in an extreme poverty position.

So if a person's now making 900 or 1,000 or \$1,200 a month in income, they're not in any sense of reality wealthy. They're not a whole lot better off. And under this particular formula, they're going to be significantly impacted by the new cost. Ninety per cent of any income that they have over \$828 will now go to their care and leaving them basically a minimum disposable

income of \$166. I don't know what you can buy for \$166 a month, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but I know that that is absolutely marginal and most people are going to feel the impact of that in a very significant way.

I just want to quote from the Saskatchewan Party's position in response to those fee increases, for the record today, Mr. Deputy Speaker:

"These fees affect elderly people on fixed incomes who, in many cases, have no other option but to go into long-term care . . . The fact that the NDP government can just arbitrarily add 40% to their care fees is nothing short of highway robbery."

"These people have worked hard all of their lives. They've saved and managed their money so they could afford care in their golden years and so that their spouse and (or their) families would be taken care of. They did not do it (they weren't prudent with their money; they weren't careful with their money) so that the government could have it" . . .

Long-term care residents pay a minimum fee of \$828. Under the old fee structure, if a resident's income was over \$994 per month, they paid the minimum fee plus 50% of their monthly income. Under the new fee structure, which begins October 1 . . . (of this year), residents will pay the minimum fee plus 90% of their monthly income.

(Now) "Whether their monthly income is \$1,100 per month or \$3,000 per month, the NDP government will be taking 90% of a long-term care resident's income . . . The other 10% will be all that's left to cover a resident's prescription drug costs, incidental charges by the care home and personal care items like clothing and hair care."

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I have had a number of people come to my office in person or call with their concerns about this change. And the response of family members has been heartbreaking in many instances, but the response of the individuals, the old folks who are going to be personally affected by these changes has been very, very hard to take.

I understand completely the uncertainty that this has created for them. I understand the turmoil it puts them in. And they don't want to be a burden on anybody. They want to manage their affairs as best they can, and yet we have a government increase fees to such a significant point that it has left many of these people very, very concerned about their future and their own welfare.

I just alluded to the increase in drug costs because of changes to the Saskatchewan drug plan. Now the government has minimized this change by saying, well, only 11,000 families or so will be affected by this. But I think that again minimizes the impact of this kind of a change. There are going to be many seniors affected by it. There are going to be many individuals affected by it. And I think that we're going to see a great deal of concern generated by this change that will only come to the forefront as people are impacted when they go to buy their drugs, when they see their deductible affected for their long-term drug costs increase as a result of these changes.

I noticed also, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as a result of a freedom of information demand or some other effort by maybe the media, I believe, to get some details on this that the Department of Health said, generally the elimination of the deductible means that families with incomes of less than 50,000 will not have to pay more. But \$50,000 sounds like a lot of money, but you know in today's world that's two working individuals in one family earning \$25,000 a year. And after taxes and so forth, you know that \$25,000 a year income is not a significant amount of money.

So really the impact will be felt by a lot larger number of people in this province than anyone was led to believe as a result of the information that was put out by the Department of Health.

The other thing I found quite interesting, looking through some of the disclosure related to the fee increases, were a selected number of provincial fees that are going to be altered as a result of the budget, with very little fanfare. And I suppose the argument would be made by the government that there's not a lot of money involved so it doesn't really matter; we don't need to make a big deal of it.

But I just want to, I just want to highlight two or three or maybe four of the fee increases or new fees that are going to come into being as a result of this budget. I mentioned earlier, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that vulnerable people would be affected by this, this budget. And let me just indicate what they are.

There's going to be new fees introduced by the Department of Justice that are going to amount to not very much money — \$10 for individuals. Who are these individuals? There's a \$10 charge for individuals seeking to resolve disputes involving child custody, interim child support, interim spousal support, and interim possession of the matrimonial home. Isn't that interesting?

We're now going to be charging fees of people who are going through various levels of personal and matrimonial distress. And I think that that's unconscionable, frankly.

We're going to implement a new \$100 per hour fee for providing legal services on behalf of clients of the Public Trustee. Now isn't that interesting? Most people who are clients of the Public Trustee are these very old and incapable senior citizens living in nursing homes who have lost the ability to look after their own affairs. And now we're going to charge them a \$100 per hour fee for providing legal services to these incompetent people.

We're also going to see increases in the fee for the commencement of a proceeding pursuant to the Divorce Act. We talked about vulnerable people being affected by this budget. Here's another example. Anybody who's going to commence a proceeding pursuant to the Divorce Act will now be charged a \$100 fee, an increase from the previous fee that existed.

And we're going to see an increase in the minimum fee for administering a deceased person's estate from 300 to \$600 to recover the Public Trustee's cost. We don't have inheritance taxes, I don't believe. I'm not sure if that's true any more, but now it has just become more expensive to die in this province.

It's going to cost you double to get the benefit of the Public Trustee.

Those are just a few of the items that I picked out of the budget of smaller amounts that are going to affect people. But there are some other areas that the budget did not address that I felt really needed attention.

There's no indication in the budget that there would be any increased assistance for farmers and ranchers affected by drought. That particular issue has real significance for my constituents because the drought has moved into the Southwest in a very dramatic way over the last couple of years. While much of the province affected last year by one year of drought, we saw drought for two and, in some instances, three years in areas of the Cypress Hills in some unique areas, and specifically, in the deep Southwest and right along the Alberta border.

When we came to the government for a proposal to help with water initiatives last year, we worked rather diligently with the Minister of Agriculture and asked for some assistance. He took the proposal to the federal minister, and there was at that time a \$3 million program put together in partnership between the provincial government and the federal government.

And that was so desperately needed that the money apportioned to that particular program disappeared very, very quickly. As a matter of fact by, I believe, January 24 all the money was gone. There were a number of projects in limbo as a result of that, but nevertheless having said that, that project came into being. It was put to good use and we were looking forward to a similar program this year. And what we got was nothing. No mention of it in the budget; no mention of it, period.

And I think that given the extent of the drought in the deep Southwest, the impact it has had on water and water sourcing and water supply, it's incumbent on the provincial government to take some leadership in that particular area, and do something for additional water development projects, whether or not the federal government comes onside.

You know, it's important to have the federal government as a player. I accept that. But, you know, it's really hard to say to the federal government, you need to participate, if the provincial government does not take the lead. And I thought in the budget, at the very least, the provincial government could have shown some leadership and said, we will do this provided the need is there. We will take the initiative. We will take responsibility. These are our ranchers; these are our people who need assistance in these very dry years and we will take responsibility.

But I didn't hear that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I'm seriously disappointed by that omission from this year's budget.

What was the other bad news we got in terms of agriculture, through this budget? Well we saw changes to The Crop Insurance Act. We saw the loss of spot loss hail coverage, which was a very attractive option at a very reasonable rate. We saw the elimination of that.

We saw the elimination of the variable rate coverage —

although frankly we had enough dispute with that particular option and the way it was handled last year that we're not sure that the loss of that is a tragedy, but it certainly isn't going to help the situation for farmers this year.

We saw rates go up, crop insurance rates go up. And we saw the introduction of a type of roulette in the coverage of grasslands, grazing land, in this year's crop insurance package.

I think I'm going to have to avoid repeating verbatim what several of my constituents said to me when they looked at that program. I think the general . . . the nuance was, you know, if the government really wanted to make us mad, they found a way of doing it. And I think there is a great deal of criticism that is going to come the government's way as a result of those particular changes to crop insurance.

Jack up the rates when times are tough, when the need is the greatest. Introduce a program that nobody understands, and which amounts to nothing more than a game of roulette in terms of coverage for your grazing land.

What else did we see in the budget? Well let's put it another way. Maybe I should rephrase it. What didn't we see in the budget? We didn't see enough education funding, frankly, Mr. Deputy Speaker. There was a small increase in education, I'll grant you that. But you know what the implications are for the people of southwest Saskatchewan, especially in the Cypress Hills? The implications for the people of Cypress Hills are nil, or worse.

The foundation grant formula does not apply in the Southwest. Virtually no provincial government money comes to the school districts of the Southwest. So any monies that go into the budget have not impacted us in a positive sense.

But what has happened, what has happened, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is that with increases that are going to be incurred by the school districts in terms of support staff and teacher salary increases, in terms of maintaining existing programs and teacher/pupil ratios — given those kinds of costs that are going to be incurred, with no money coming to my constituency and the school districts in my constituency, we are going to see, we're going to see an increase in property taxes: another increase in property taxes for the ranchers and farmers of the Southwest as a direct result of the implications arising from this budget.

And I believe, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that under the current conditions affecting agriculture, under the implications of increased costs for crop insurance, as a result of so many other cost increases that are being experienced, the last people . . . I mean, sorry, the last thing that the people of Cypress Hills needed was another cost increase related to school taxes. And I think that we're going to be, we're going to be seeing a lot of fallout from that particular issue.

I cannot substantiate this just yet, but I understand that there are people looking at the results of these changes that are going to produce increases of up to 30 per cent in school taxes on some rural property. And if that's the case I think we're pushing, we're pushing people far too hard financially for them not to respond in a very bitter way, frankly, to the way their needs are

being addressed — or maybe I should say to the way their situation is being recognized by this provincial government.

You know, you can only . . . you can only go to the well so many times before the well runs dry. And given the experiences that we've had in the Southwest lately, that analogy has become much truer than we would like it to.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, why won't I be supporting this budget? For the following reasons: it clearly does not address the needs of my constituents in the Cypress Hills, nor I believe the people of the province generally.

I think it employs dubious accounting measures, where there was a change in midstream to hide the financial realities facing the province. That's especially true, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as it concerns the Crown corporation established to fund educational facilities.

I don't think there's anybody who has a gripe with that long-term financing approach. But you know when you change your accounting principles in midstream to take into consideration these changes or to implement these changes, it distorts the entire picture. And I think that people get a little dubious about what's happening when those kind of changes are made midstream. And I think the government needs to be very, very concerned about the implications of that kind of change. I think it poses a real potential pitfall for the government and I think that somebody on the government side needs to take that concern seriously and address it.

I won't be supporting the budget because it imposes financial obligations on the Crown corporations at an unprecedented level. We recognize through the documents related to the budget that the government has traditionally depended on monies from the Crown corporations to help balance the budget. We understand that that's the purpose of Crown corporations these days. They've gone from being a service provider, which was their original mandate, to a revenue generator for the government. And it's not uncommon that the government would take revenues from the Crown corporations to help balance their books.

But this year we got an unprecedented level of money moved from the Crown corporations to the government to balance their books. And that's all happening at a time when rates are going up, coincidentally. Isn't that ironic? When rates are going up for provincial consumers for all of the utilities provided by the Crown corporations, the provincial government is taking more money out of the Crown corporations to help them balance their books.

I won't support this budget because it relies on the Fiscal Stabilization Fund, which most people now realize has no money in it, and coincidentally never has had any money in it. Now when has the Fiscal Stabilization Fund had money in it?

You know, we unfortunately took the word of the Minister of Finance when the Fiscal Stabilization Fund was, when the Fiscal Stabilization Fund was developed . . .

The Deputy Speaker: — Order, order. I'm trying to hear the member for Cypress Hills. Many people will have a chance to

enter into this debate, but we'll have to do that after the member for Cypress Hills concludes.

Mr. Elhard: — Well thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. You know, I think I hit a nerve because I didn't hear much comment from the other side until we talked about the Fiscal Stabilization Fund.

When that fund, Mr. Deputy Speaker, when that fund was established on paper, we were told that money from the Liquor and Gaming Fund was going to be going in there as well as some other excess revenues that had been made available because of good economic times. We were going to have a fund there that would help us through rainy day situations that might arise in the future. I mean that fund was sold to us and to the public as a true savings account, a true savings account that actually had real money in it.

(16:00)

And it's only in the last six months or so that we've found out, having consulted with the Provincial Auditor, having talked to a variety of people who are familiar with the way this kind of accounting is done, that the fund doesn't actually have real money in it. So I find it hard to understand, Mr. Deputy Speaker, how you can transfer money from a fund that doesn't really have any money to balance a budget that really isn't in a deficit.

You know, what is the rationale here? What is the logic here? You know, you can't sell a budget as balanced if you have a deficit; and the Minister of Finance admitted, technically speaking, in a cash balance scenario, we're in a deficit.

Now what is it —is it a deficit or is it a balanced budget? Is there money in the Fiscal Stabilization Fund or isn't there? What is the truth? The fact of the matter has become that nobody understands what the truth is any more.

And it hasn't really helped the cause by having the minister say that we've got a balanced budget but, well, on a cash basis we're looking at a deficit. That hasn't helped clarify the situation at all, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

You know, a paper fund sounds vaguely familiar. I think we've heard references to those types of accounting procedures in some pretty significant collapses, financial collapses, lately, and I wonder if we might not be seeing the same type of thing starting to unfold with this particular government's budget.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I won't be supporting this budget because it brings into question the credibility of each one of us elected to serve the province with honesty and integrity. That's one of the reasons that I am troubled mostly by this budget.

There's too much fudging going on. There's too much inexplicable stuff happening. There's too much questionable transfers of money from one entity to another, whether it exists or not. There's too much movement of monies from the Crowns and back to the government, and from . . . Mr. Deputy Speaker, there's just no accounting for a lot of the movement of this money.

It really calls into question the credibility, not just of the government but of each one of us who were elected by the people of this province to serve with honesty and integrity.

Mr. Speaker, I cannot support this budget on a political plane; I most certainly can't support it on the basis of principle.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I will be voting in favour of the amendment and against the budget. Thank you very much.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Atkinson: — . . . Mr. Speaker. Before I get into the text of my remarks I want to welcome the new member of the legislature from Saskatoon Idylwyld. I did not speak during the Throne Speech when many of our colleagues from the legislature welcomed him to this Assembly. I think that he did a wonderful job of articulating the government's response to the Throne Speech when he moved the Speech from the Throne.

As people know the member is an educator by profession, a vice-principal of a school that has spent a lot of time working with young people in his professional career. As well, he's a person that has had a lot of experience volunteering in his community and is a person who lives in the constituency of Saskatoon Idylwyld and I think will serve the people of Saskatoon Idylwyld with great distinction.

I also want to thank the member from Saskatoon Greystone, who seconded the Speech from the Throne. The member from Greystone has served in this Assembly over . . . in the 1970s, the 1980s, into the 1990s, and now in the new millennium. He is a man of incredible integrity. His credentials when it comes to the environment are impeccable. And I think he too serves the constituents of Saskatoon Greystone with great distinction.

Mr. Speaker, I want to talk a little bit about my constituency of Saskatoon Nutana and talk about the people that I represent. I want to pay tribute to the woman who is my constituency assistant, Judy Gossen. She's been my constituency assistant for some time and while I served as a member of the cabinet, she spent a lot of time dealing with constituents and their various issues and problems. And she has done an incredible job of looking after citizens' concerns in the constituency of Saskatoon Nutana and I want to thank her for that.

Mr. Speaker, I represent the east side of the city of Saskatoon where the boundaries surround the University of Saskatchewan, the Broadway business district, as well as along the river of Saskatoon into the exhibition area.

My constituents come from a wide variety of backgrounds. I have many constituents who are students at the University of Saskatchewan, teach and work at the University of Saskatchewan. I have constituents that are doctors, lawyers, accountants, teachers, nurses, work in the health and education field, as well as the . . . (inaudible) . . . field. And I have many constituents who are business people in our city.

I can say this about my constituents, that they contribute professionally to the city of Saskatoon and they also contribute on a volunteer basis. I suspect that we have more citizens that volunteer from the constituency of Saskatoon Nutana than most

places in the province of Saskatchewan. And they volunteer on boards of Big Sisters, Big Brothers, the YWCA (Young Women's Christian Association), the YMCA (Young Men's Christian Association), the chamber of commerce, as well as many, many other community organizations. These are people that bring huge skills to the volunteer sector and I want to pay tribute to them in the work that they do on behalf of people in our province.

As well, I want to say something about the merchants along the street of Saskatoon, Broadway. And in fact I was flying home on the weekend from Vancouver and the *enRoute* magazine looked at cities and where there were places to be. And I have to say that one of the cities that was acknowledged was the city of Saskatoon and the street that was acknowledged as a happening place to be was Broadway.

And I think that that has a great deal to do with the people who have their businesses along that street. These are small-business people. They are not large box chains or international chains. These are people that live and work in our community and they too contribute to the quality of life in our community by the work that they do. And I want to pay tribute to them for creating a vital street that has now been acknowledged in various national magazines as a good place to work and a good place to live.

Mr. Speaker, our Throne Speech that was delivered in the House by Her Honour outlined four pillars of what this government has done and intends to do when it comes to the province of Saskatchewan. We talked about economic development and the environment, through a sustainable environment. We talked about infrastructure and how infrastructure can support economic and social development in our province. We talked about health care and our commitment to health care. And we talked about education.

Then the Minister of Finance stood up in this House last Wednesday and delivered his budget. And I want to pay tribute to the Minister of Finance. He is the longest-serving Minister of Finance in this province since Clarence Fines. And once again, he delivered a budget that is a true tribute to his remarkable achievements as Minister of Finance for the province. I want to thank him for his service.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Atkinson: — Mr. Speaker, I wanted to put this budget in context. I notice that the members opposite are chirping away, but I wanted to put this budget in context. The context of this budget is that we are a province that has seen declining revenues from oil and gas. We are a province that . . . where 60 per cent of our geography has been affected by drought. We are a province that relies heavily on agriculture and we are . . . our farmers are faced with huge international subsidies in the United States and the European Economic Community.

It's impossible for our farming community to compete with those international subsidies, particularly within the context of a drought. And there's no question that this has had a dramatic impact upon the jobs in our province and the revenues of our province.

At the same time, Mr. Speaker, while we are the fourth wealthiest province in the country, we are still a province that is reliant upon equalization payments from the federal government. And equalization payments are paid to provinces in order that all provinces in this great federation of Canada can have a similar standard of services and living regardless of where you . . . where one lives.

And when the federal government decided to cap equalization, it means that if a province like British Columbia goes into a downturn, then they too are eligible for equalization, and I understand they will be in this last fiscal year. And that will have an impact on what happens to those provinces that rely upon equalization in order to provide services to their citizens.

Within all of this context there's no question that there has been an economic slowdown in Canada and we see that in terms of the budgets that have been delivered in British Columbia, where they are estimating an over \$4 billion deficit, and many, many cuts to human services and economic services in that province.

As well we see what the economic impact of the slowdown has had in Alberta, where there have been dramatic cuts in services to their citizens. Over 1,000, as I understand it, or close to 500 employees have been laid off. As well there have been dramatic increases in their premiums that their citizens pay for health services.

There is no question, Mr. Speaker, that this budget is a restraint budget and we need to acknowledge that.

Now what's in our budget? Well I can say to the citizens of Saskatchewan regardless of what the members opposite want to say, is that our budget is balanced. It is not a deficit budget. The budget is balanced.

It is true, Mr. Speaker, that we are spending more money than we are taking in, but we are able to balance our budget with the use of the Fiscal Stabilization Fund, a fund that the members opposite would have had us spend in 2000 . . . the 2000 budget year and the 2001 budget year.

And I've had an opportunity, Mr. Speaker, to go through many, many, many clippings where I've seen what the members opposite had to say.

I want to talk about the Fiscal Stabilization Fund. It was a fund that came about as a result of not taking all of the excess windfall revenues that came from oil and gas and spending it on one . . . on tax cuts as the opposition had proposed. They were talking about further income tax cuts. They were talking about further small-business and corporate capital tax cuts, and they were talking about putting this money into ongoing operating expenditures.

And our minister of the day said at the time that this fund was going to be used in order to smooth the situation when times were rough. And, Mr. Speaker, times have been rough in this province in the past two budget years and the Fiscal Stabilization Fund has been drawn upon to ensure that we don't go back to the days of deficit financing in our province.

This is also a budget, Mr. Speaker, that did not increase the

personal sales tax. It's also a budget that continued the Finance minister's decision to begin to reduce income taxes in our province. And those income tax reductions will be put in place by January 1 of 2003. And this is also a budget, Mr. Speaker, that did not introduce a health-care premium.

Now I want to take those four pillars that I discussed and were discussed in the Throne Speech and I want to put them in the context of this budget.

Now the first pillar is on economic development, and in this budget we saw the continuation of our ethanol strategy where the fuel tax on ethanol produced in our province and sold in our province will not be paid.

As well, Mr. Speaker, there were initiatives in this budget for oil and gas recovery. There is a reduction of the corporate capital tax. As well, the manufacturing and processing tax was reduced to electrical producers.

As well, there was a commitment of \$500,000 for the synchrotron in the city of Saskatoon, and that is absolutely essentially in order to attract research and development to our province. And the synchrotron certainly will . . . and the money that's coming from the province is certainly going to add to economic development and research and development in our province.

(16:15)

As well there is an ongoing commitment to tourism and ecotourism, and I know from my travels across the globe that there are citizens in other countries that are extremely interested in what ecotourism has to offer them, particularly in our province.

We are seen as a province that has pristine lakes, particularly in northern Saskatchewan, and that we have a forest growth that is of interest to people who have never seen clean water and trees. And I think that there are initiatives that continue the development of tourism. As well, as I said earlier, personal tax reductions are of interest to people, particularly when it comes to economic development.

The other initiative or pillar of our budget is in the area of infrastructure. And, Mr. Speaker, I was so pleased last year when we announced our CommunityNet where we had over 530 educational institutions available for high-speed Internet as well as 120 health facilities and 106 government offices. And this year we will add another 460 facilities in the province that will have access to high-speed Internet. And this too is of great use to business attraction and economic development because we know that businesses want to have access to high-speed Internet.

And SaskTel, that Crown corporation that the members opposite love to criticize, has been instrumental in bringing high-speed Internet to parts of the province where private business would not be prepared to go to.

I can also say that at the end of this process of CommunityNet we will have over 366 communities. We will be the most Netted province in the country in terms of accessibility to

high-speed Internet, and that will of course be helpful to businesses that want to locate or start in our province.

As well, Mr. Speaker, we have an ongoing commitment, and it was a commitment that we made last year to our highway system. We will spend over \$300 million for 700 kilometres of highways projects in our province. And that certainly will be helpful given all of the economic development activity that's taking place across Saskatchewan and the need to ensure, given that we are an export province, the ability to transport those exports to market.

In this budget we will see 150 kilometres of thin membrane surface roads that will be paved to a standard that allows for heavy loads. As well there will be 370 kilometres of resurfacing done and that certainly will add to the condition of our highways.

We're going to complete the twinning of another 24 kilometres on Highway 1 and there will be a complete twinning of Highway 1 west of Regina by the fall of 2004. I think we're on track to meet our 10-year commitment of \$2.5 billion and that's important.

Also contained in this budget, Mr. Speaker, is a \$1.2 billion commitment to education. And education is absolutely key to the future of this province. And if you look at nations across the globe that are developing their economies and have highly developed economies, it's absolutely essential that we have highly educated and highly skilled citizens in order to meet those new and growing opportunities. And in this budget you will see a 7.2 per cent increase or \$78.6 million more on spending when it comes to education in our province.

And I might remind the members opposite who like to talk about the NDP's election promises in 1999, their promise was to freeze spending in education and health. And certainly if those members opposite had have been the government during this budget process, we would not have seen a 7.2 per cent increase in education spending in our province for the K to 12 system, SIAST (Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology), regional colleges, Aboriginal institutions, and so on.

As well, the members opposite like to criticize the government for spending \$90 million in new capital construction in our K to 12 and post-secondary institutions. And I can tell the members opposite that for too long, because we've been so concerned about getting our books in order and our fiscal house in order, that we have not spent the kind of money that was necessary in order to renew our educational facilities. And the capital spending and the new Crown corporation will give schools and post-secondary institutions across the province the opportunity to really begin the renewal process of facilities in the province. And that too will contribute to economic development because it will mean jobs for our trades and construction sector as well as our goods and services sector.

Mr. Speaker, in this budget, which is the fourth pillar of our plan, we're spending \$2.3 billion on health care and that's a 5.8 per cent increase in health spending. What I'm really, really proud of, Mr. Speaker, is that we're increasing health research in the province from 5.2 million to \$9.2 million. And I'm not at

all sure if the members opposite were in power that we'd see that kind of increase in health research in the province. Do I think it's enough, Mr. Speaker? No I don't. I think we need to spend more but it certainly is a good beginning.

And what I can say to the people of the province who might be listening, about three years ago we increased health research by \$1 million and as a result of that there was a change in the federal government's view of how grants were given out, particularly to smaller colleges of medicine in this country.

And we have seen a tremendous increase in the number of research grants going to our scholars in the College of Medicine and also the University of Regina. And in fact they are dominating the awarding of those research dollars in this new partnership program with the federal government. And I think it's been a huge success in terms of recruiting and retaining health scholars to our province.

And with this added research money that's coming from the Department of Health of over \$4 million, all I can say is congratulations to the Minister of Health and his visionary approach to research and development in our province.

As well, Mr. Speaker, there's \$10 million for medical equipment, equipment that is certainly needed in our province in order that our citizens can have access to some of the new technology. And there will be \$24 million for capital improvements.

What I'm particularly pleased to see in this budget is an emphasis on primary health teams where we have a team approach to the delivery of health services to our citizens, and I think that much progress will be made on that front in this year.

As well, a 24-hour, toll-free line for health advice. And these lines have been set up in other parts of the country and it's had the effect of reducing people's visits to the emergency rooms in our hospitals. And I think this will be helpful.

As well there's more training spaces for health workers and in return those young people who are going into those training spaces are asked to return service to the province. And I think it's only fair, Mr. Speaker, that when young people are given opportunities to train and there's public money expended to train them, that they should return that service to the citizens of our province because it is taxpayers' dollars that are being used for that training.

What I'm particularly pleased about, Mr. Speaker, is the decision to put money into upgrading 240 emergency medical service personnel to EMT (emergency medical technician) standards over the next three years. And that's highly crucial because we know that training is absolutely imperative when it comes to those people that are responding to car accidents, strokes, heart attacks, and so on. And we will have a hugely trained emergency medical service in our province once the three years have passed.

Now I just wanted to say this. I've had the opportunity to listen very carefully over the last two and a half weeks to what members of the opposition have been saying about our government's Throne Speech and our government's budget.

Mr. Speaker, I think that we all know that we are coming closer and closer to a provincial election. And we know that as you become . . . as you get closer to a provincial election the opposition wants to do everything it can to put a poor light on the government, and of course the government wants to do everything it can to put a poor light on members of the opposition.

So I want to say this about our government and the kinds of services that we've been able to provide to our citizens in the last 10 years. Mr. Speaker, when I look at . . . And I've studied government and various forms of government and governors. What I can say this about what I consider to be the more conservative people that are governing in this country . . . and I'm not really sure that they believe in government.

And when I look at the Sask Party's plan to grow the province, I want to point this out to our citizens. The Sask Party says that they want to review government services; they want to put a microscope on government services, and anything that does not contribute to economic development, they would do away with; all of the government services are going to be looked upon as how do we grow the province of Saskatchewan.

And what I want to say to the members opposite and to the citizens is this, that there are many government services that are provided to our citizens that don't have a lot to do with growing our province. And let me give you some examples.

We know that there are services that are provided to the most vulnerable people amongst us. And let me use this example of the child action plan. I'm extremely proud that this government has been recognized internationally for the kinds of works that we've done to support children in our province. Our former premier, Premier Romanow, was honoured by the Child Welfare League of this country acknowledging that our government was at the forefront of reducing child poverty in this country and providing services so that young people could grow up to be valuable citizens.

Now I suspect that if the members opposite were to shed a light on the kinds of work that's being delivered by front-line workers in this province, they would say that's not really growing Saskatchewan, and we'd have to get rid of that. That's what I suspect.

The second point I want to make is that time after time we have spent money on community schools in the province in order that young people have access to a public education. And what I'm extremely proud of, Mr. Speaker, is that our government, when you look at the test results, we have the smallest differential between low-income young people and high-income young people. We have the smallest gap in the country.

And what that really does say is that we have an egalitarian society here in the province of Saskatchewan, and I would say that through public policy we have gone a long ways towards reducing the gap between lower-income citizens and higher-income citizens. And we've been able to do that through a public education system that has been supported by curricula, has been supported by good teachers and good teaching, and has been supported by support services that have been put into our community schools.

The other thing that I'm extremely proud of, Mr. Speaker, is our early childhood development strategy which has just been moved from Health to Education. We know . . . We know — all of the research is evident — that a child's development takes place, fundamentally, between the ages of prenatal to five. And what happens to that child basically determines their outcomes.

We know that that child's mother's education is one of the predetermining factors of what's going to happen to those young people. And we put an incredible amount of resources — public servants have worked on this, community people have worked on this, government programs have worked on this — in order that we have children that are school ready.

What I'm extremely proud of is that we are putting resources into identifying at-risk mothers prenatally, to identify those mothers that are at risk of drinking or doing drugs during the pregnancy.

Now does that contribute to economic development? The Sask Party has not been clear about that. In the long term, Mr. Speaker, it does. But if growing Saskatchewan is just about deregulating, reducing taxes, and getting rid of Crown corporations, then we don't want to have anything to do with that, Mr. Speaker. And that's what the opposition is about . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Well you know what, you people won't . . .

(16:30)

The Speaker: — Order. Order, order. Order. The member must remember to address all . . . direct all of her remarks through the Chair.

Ms. Atkinson: — . . . Mr. Speaker. But when the members opposite are chirping away, I just have this to say about them . . .

The Speaker: — The ruling of the Speaker stands. It does not need equivocation or any responses. The member may proceed.

Ms. Atkinson: — Anyway, Mr. Speaker, of course I will accept your ruling with some . . . whatever.

Anyway, Mr. Speaker, what I want to say to the members opposite is that if you look at the kinds of programs that this government has been able to develop, will those members opposite say it's part of economic development?

Now, Mr. Speaker, I watch very carefully to what the British Columbians are doing. And the Leader of the Opposition and of course the member from Lloydminster has said that they are going to follow the lead of what's happening in BC.

Well let me tell you what's happening in BC. In British Columbia, the lawyers in that province are charged a tax I guess of 7 per cent, which is now 7.5 per cent, compliments to the right-wing government out there. And that money was used to provide legal services to low-income people that had difficulties, whether it was civilly or criminally. And what the Government of British Columbia has done is they still continue to tax. They've increased the tax, but they've cut legal aid or legal services in half. That, of course, wouldn't contribute to

economic development.

And we have a legal aid system in our province. We have a Human Rights Commission in this province which allows people in our province to have access to human rights and to go to the Human Rights Commission if they feel as though their rights have been violated, either by government, private employers, religious institutions, and other institutions. Would a Human Rights Commission contribute to economic development? I suspect not.

We provide, Mr. Speaker, a grant to people in this province to provide services to gays and lesbians in the city of Saskatoon. And they provide hundreds of hours of services, health services to a population that has not been treated well historically throughout the times. Now I wonder whether that particular program would be cut because it doesn't contribute to economic development.

It has to do with how they see economic development, and they need to lay that plan out to the people of our province. We have — and I'm very, very proud of this — we have contributed to the renewal of the 20th Street in Saskatoon where we have young Aboriginal people . . . And this was a huge feather in the hat for the member from Eastview, the former associate minister of Health, where she worked diligently to get funding in place to provide the Core City Centre for Aboriginal youth. Now they receive ongoing operating funding. Does this contribute to economic development?

Then we have the Community Service Village in Saskatoon where groups of people have been brought together to provide services to vulnerable women and children. Would this be seen as promoting economic development?

So my message to the opposition and to the citizens of this province is that when you listen carefully to their core review of services, let's understand what these people are talking about. Are they talking about straight economic development or are they talking about other things?

Because I suspect if you look at what they've done in British Columbia, they have cut service after service after service to people on the ground who are providing services to people who are vulnerable, who are poor, who are low-income, and who need skills enhancement. And those are the people that have been hit hard by the Liberals, the right-wing party in British Columbia.

So, Mr. Speaker, when these people talk about growing Saskatchewan — 100,000 people in the next 10 years — and they're going to do it by reviewing government services, I suspect what we're talking about is eliminating government.

When they talk about cutting taxes . . . And if you're going to cut taxes and balance the budget and you're not going to have any Crown revenues, then I don't know how you're going to provide these services. And I know who will get hammered because we saw it in the 1980s. The people that got hammered were the people who did not support the members opposite. They were the people in the cities and the towns and the villages. They were the people that got hammered.

And so we'll see because we're going to make sure that they put, they put their position on the public record. And I noticed that the member from Kindersley when he was speaking in Kindersley and was asked about this: what services are you talking about; what civil servants are you talking about? According to the newspaper reports, he avoided the question. He avoided the question.

And I don't think they'll be able to avoid the question in the next provincial election because citizens in this province are going to want to know, where do you stand, members of the opposition, and where does the government stand?

And we have a record, we have a record . . . We have a record of service to this province. We have a record of providing funds to community organizations. We have a record of reducing taxes appropriately that are fiscally sustainable. We have a record of economic development and the highest economic growth rate in this country between 1992 and 2000 — and it is a public record.

We have a record of having the best books when it comes to transparency . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . oh yes we do. And you can laugh all you want. Yes we do.

You ask any auditor in this country whether Saskatchewan has a good record. In fact ask the Provincial Auditor and he will tell you that we have substantially — substantially — improved the transparency of our province's finances. And in fact, if the member cared to be a member of the Public Accounts Committee she would have learned that in January, instead of the member from Humboldt giggling from her seat.

Now, Mr. Speaker, there is no question that this is a good budget, given the fiscal context. It's a budget that will be supported by members of the government and it's a budget that I believe will be supported by the citizens of our province. And I can assure the House that I will be supporting this budget when we vote on it later this week.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Bakken: — Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak on behalf of the constituents of Weyburn-Big Muddy and to reply to the budget.

Mr. Speaker, I represent a great constituency. The people are hard-working, salt of the earth people. And just last night I had the privilege of attending a ratepayers meeting in . . . for the RM (rural municipality) of Brokenshell in the hall in Trossachs.

It was great to have the opportunity to talk to real, down to earth people who are going about making a living, looking after their families, and helping to keep their communities alive. But it also brought home to me the reality that this government has done everything in its power to destroy this way of life and to destroy rural Saskatchewan.

In the constituency of Weyburn-Big Muddy, Mr. Speaker, we have many enterprising people who have started new businesses and ventures. They've created jobs and helped to keep Weyburn and area viable. They have accomplished this, Mr. Speaker, in spite of this government, not because of it.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to speak about a few . . . give you a few examples of such enterprising people. And one prime example in Weyburn, and that is known actually throughout all of Canada and probably throughout North America, is the Weyburn Inland Terminal.

This is one of the largest, most successful inland terminals. This past year, Mr. Speaker, they celebrated their 25th anniversary. And Deana Driver of Regina published a book about the terminal and about their successes. And she called it *Just A Bunch of Farmers*. The book celebrates their efforts, their innovations, and their determination on their way to improving Canada's grain handling system.

But the most remarkable thing, Mr. Speaker, about the Weyburn Inland Terminal is that it is totally 100 per cent farmer owned.

Mr. Speaker, another success story in Weyburn-Big Muddy is TWC, one of the largest financial firms in Western Canada. TWC administers over 3.5 billion in assets and it recently combined with Altara Securities of Vancouver to form a new, broader-based company called TWC Altara. The company will continue to operate in Radville and Altara will continue to operate in Vancouver.

This, Mr. Speaker, is a shining example of how business can be run from anywhere with today's technology. The Calibaba family of Radville had a dream and made it happen here. They didn't have to go to Atlanta, Georgia to make it happen, and they didn't need government involvement either.

Mr. Speaker, there are far too numerous number of success stories in Weyburn-Big Muddy to name them all, but I would just like to name a few more.

Another one is Precision Ag which was started by three young farmers at Griffen. There's . . . (inaudible) . . . Manufacturing at Ogema; Ceylon Pulses Plus; Country Green at Radville; Paradise Herbs in Weyburn, which is now expanding not only their own business but creating an outlet for additional individuals who want to start a new business. We have Red Coat Road and Rail out of Pangman and Ogema. We've had various elevator conversions where farmers have taken it upon themselves to buy the elevator and turn it into a worthwhile enterprise.

Mr. Speaker, we have PanCanadian Resources. PanCanadian has been and continues to be one of the main engines of the economy in Weyburn. They have . . . they provide excellent employment opportunities for many people in Weyburn and in the surrounding area. At a time when farming is on the downturn we can always count on the oil industry in our area to pick up the slack and to provide jobs and needed income.

It is also known for its support of community, giving thousands of dollars in donations to support culture and sports. With the CO₂ expansion, Mr. Speaker, and now the merger with Alberta Energy, PanCanadian has a bright future and that is good news for Weyburn.

Mr. Speaker, Access Communications is another successful company that provides valuable community services. Now

government, this government, Mr. Speaker, the NDP, have decided to compete directly with Access Communications. This is a prime example of direct competition by this government with existing businesses in Saskatchewan. They take their tax dollars and then they turn right around and use those tax dollars to compete with them. And then the NDP wonder why everywhere we go people are asking us, when is the next election?

Mr. Speaker, good things happen in this province in spite of the NDP, in spite of the NDP's policy of building a public empire and chasing away our good, young entrepreneurs. The NDP are competing directly with private business and they are competing outside of Saskatchewan with our tax dollars; they're taking our tax dollars, investing them outside of Saskatchewan.

What this government should be doing is to creating an infrastructure so business can grow and flourish within the province of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, one prime example of the NDP's failure to grow this economy and to add the necessary infrastructure is the deplorable state . . . state of our highways. And nowhere is this more evident than in the constituency of Weyburn-Big Muddy. Our highways are a disgrace and they are unsafe.

And, Mr. Speaker, I would like to read to you at this time excerpts from an article that was written. It's called, "Canadian Bacon," by Roland Hoag and it was published in a motorcycle magazine, speaking about our highways, and I quote:

Over the past years I've received votes on the best roads in Canada and there was little competition, leaving Alberta and Highway 93 from Banff to Jasper the winner. With every bit of good news, there is evil lurking in the background. When there is a best, there is a worst.

My travels this year found the legend of the road from hell, or should I say roads from hell, collected in one province. All the provinces have some bad roads, but no other province can beat Saskatchewan for having a compilation of highways from hell.

Motorcyclists beware. The back highways of Saskatchewan are dangerous and should be avoided. Saskatchewan is known for wheat, grain elevators, and now for having Lucifer on staff at the Department of Highways.

What a sad commentary about our highway system in this province.

Mr. Speaker, the NDP are all talk when it comes to supporting rural Saskatchewan. There have been several efforts in my constituency by people who would like to start a pasta plant. The NDP do not support this. They will not stand up for the farmers in Saskatchewan and try to obtain an exemption from the Canadian Wheat Board so that this venture can proceed.

What is the NDP's answer to agriculture, Mr. Speaker? The NDP's answer in this budget is higher premiums and less coverage for crop . . . excuse me . . . for crop insurance. They again have promised us in the Throne Speech that there would

be a long-term safety net program. This has been promised since the NDP tore up GRIP (gross revenue insurance program) 10 years ago. Do we see any dollars in the budget for GRIP? None. Do we see any dollars in the budget for some other kind of long-term safety net program? Not a dime.

(16:45)

But what this government has done is taken less; they are contributing less dollars for education. They are going to drive up property taxes again in rural Saskatchewan. They are not only driving up the cost, but they are also removing the \$25 million education tax rebate that has been in place for the last two years.

Mr. Speaker, they also sent back seventeen and a half million dollars to Ottawa when they cancelled the spot loss hail in the crop insurance program. There has been absolutely no recognition of the hardship that agriculture is facing because of the drought, not only with the agriculture producers, the grain producers, but also on behalf of livestock. The ranchers of this province are concerned about where they are going to get water to feed their cattle and how they are going to grow a hay crop.

Mr. Speaker, the list goes on about how the NDP have failed rural Saskatchewan. Another way that they have failed rural Saskatchewan is by their failure to address the problems with water treatment in rural Saskatchewan.

In my constituency, the RM of Norton, the village of Pangman, and now Radville have all applied to this government for help to change . . . to improve their water treatment and their landfill. And to date, not one of them have received a dime from this government.

And yet we see in this budget they are not increasing the amount of dollars spent, but they are taking \$1 million out of the fund. How is this going to improve water treatment in rural Saskatchewan?

Mr. Speaker, I see that the time has passed 4:45, and at this time I would move that we adjourn debate.

Debate adjourned.

The Assembly adjourned at 16:48.