

The Assembly met at 13:30.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRESENTING PETITIONS

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

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

And the signatures on this petition, Mr. Speaker, are from the communities of Humboldt and St. Gregor.

I so present.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to stand again today to present a petition from people who are concerned about the long-term care services in this province.

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to immediately reconsider the exorbitant fee increases for long-term care services in Saskatchewan.

The people who signed this petition are from Wadena and Rose Valley.

Mr. Gantefoer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise this afternoon on behalf of citizens concerned about the increases to the costs of prescription drugs. The prayer reads as follows:

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

The signatures on this petition, Mr. Speaker, are from the communities of Saint-Front, Melfort, Wynyard, and Star City.

I so present.

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

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to immediately reconsider the exorbitant fee increase for long-term care services in Saskatchewan.

The signatures, Mr. Speaker, are from the communities of Lintlaw, Wadena, and Okla.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As well to present a petition. Reading the prayer:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to immediately reconsider the exorbitant fee increases for long-term care services in Saskatchewan.

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

And, Mr. Speaker, the petition I present is signed by people from the good community of Wadena.

Mr. Stewart: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to present a petition signed by citizens concerned with the province's tobacco legislation. And the prayer reads:

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

And is duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

Mr. Speaker, this petition is signed by individuals from the communities of Moose Jaw and Regina.

Ms. Eagles: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present a petition on behalf of Saskatchewan citizens who are deeply concerned about the huge fee increases in the long-term care services. And the prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to immediately reconsider the exorbitant fee increases for long-term care services in Saskatchewan.

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

And this is signed by citizens of Humboldt and St. Gregor.

I so present.

Mr. McMorris: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too have a petition to present on behalf of citizens regarding the long-term care situation in our province. The prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to immediately reconsider the exorbitant fee increase on long-term care services in Saskatchewan.

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

Mr. Speaker, this petition is signed by many, many people from the Yorkton area.

I so present.

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too rise on behalf of people concerned with this government's intention to jack up long-term care fees. And the prayer of the petition reads as

follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to immediately reconsider the exorbitant fee increases for long-term care services in Saskatchewan.

And the petitioners today, Mr. Speaker, are from Kelvington and Saskatoon.

I so present.

Mr. Brkich: — Mr. Speaker, I have a petition here also:

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

As in duty bound, your petitioner will pray.

Signed by good citizens from Craik and Findlater, Whitewood, Watrous, Disley, Bethune, and Regina.

I so present.

Mr. Wiberg: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This afternoon I also have a petition from people who are concerned about the outrageous increases that are being proposed by the government for long-term care homes. And the prayer reads as follows, Mr. Speaker:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to immediately reconsider the exorbitant fee increases for long-term care services in Saskatchewan.

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

And, Mr. Speaker, this petition has been signed by many of the good people from Kelvington.

I so present.

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also rise today to present a petition from residents concerned about long-term care home fees. The prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to immediately reconsider the exorbitant fee increases for long-term care services in Saskatchewan.

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

Signed by the good citizens of Lintlaw.

I so present.

Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition

about citizens concerned about the horrible state of Highway No. 15, and the prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to use a portion of its Highway budget to address the concerns of the serious conditions of Highway 15 for the Saskatchewan residents.

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

And again, the signatures demonstrate how well used this highway is because they are from Imperial, Watrous, Young, Simpson, Regina, Saskatoon, Calgary, Alberta, and Brandon, Manitoba.

I so present.

Mr. Hart: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to present a petition on behalf of citizens concerned with the massive increase in long-term care fees that this government has planned. The prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to immediately reconsider the exorbitant fee increases for long-term care services in Saskatchewan.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

Signatures to this petition, Mr. Speaker, come from the communities of Markinch and Cupar.

I so present.

Mr. Allchurch: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I also rise in the Assembly today to bring forth a petition regarding our natural resources to the people in the North. And the prayer reads as follows:

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

And the signatures on this petition, Mr. Speaker, are from Canwood, from Prince Albert, from Albertville, Spruce Home, and Shellbrook.

I so present.

Mr. Peters: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition from citizens that are concerned about the long-term care homes and the price increases. And the prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to immediately reconsider the exorbitant fee increases for long-term care services in Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, the petition is signed from people from Lintlaw

and Wadena.

I so present.

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I also rise with a petition from citizens of Saskatchewan who are outraged at the cost of the long-term care increase. And the prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to immediately reconsider the exorbitant fee increases for long-term care services in Saskatchewan.

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

And, Mr. Speaker, this petition is signed by the good citizens of Lintlaw.

I so present.

READING AND RECEIVING PETITIONS

Deputy Clerk: — According to order the following petitions have been reviewed and hereby read and received as addendums to previously tabled petitions being sessional papers nos. 18 and 31.

NOTICES OF MOTIONS AND QUESTIONS

Mr. Brkich: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I give notice that I shall on day no. 32 ask the government the following question:

To the Minister of CIC: what is the current cost to SaskPower for generation of electricity from each of the following methods: hydro, coal, natural gas, wind, and cogeneration?

Mr. Wiberg: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I give notice that I shall on day no. 32 ask the government the following question:

To the Government of Saskatchewan: what is the total land area in Saskatchewan south of the northern administrative boundary line, and what percentage of that land is owned by the Crown; what is the total land area in Saskatchewan, north of the northern administrative boundary line, and what percentage of that land area is owned by the Crown?

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Ms. Atkinson: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, in the west gallery this afternoon we have 56 grade 7 and 8 students from Buena Vista School located in the heart of our constituency of Saskatoon Nutana. They are accompanied by two teachers, Mr. Lloyd Howey and Mrs. Lisa Dyck.

I'd also point out to the Assembly that I also have a special person in my life that's joined the grade 7 and 8 students and his name is Ryan Atkinson.

This class, Mr. Speaker, is involved in all kinds of activities, sporting activities — basketball, soccer, baseball, hockey, volleyball — and many other things. These are students that

have had great Remembrance Day services in their school.

And I would join all my colleagues in welcoming this very fine group of young people to the Legislative Assembly this afternoon.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Van Mulligen: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I should like to introduce to you and through you to the members a group of students who are seated in your gallery. This is a group of about 23 grade 5 students from Wilfrid Walker School from Regina Victoria constituency.

They're accompanied by their teacher, Janis Capewell, chaperones Ron Taylor, Wilson Klotz, Laurie Dunne, Dawn Hastings.

Mr. Speaker, they're here to observe the question period, tour the building, and I'm looking forward to an opportunity to have a question and answer session with them later.

I would ask all the members to join me in making them feel welcome here today, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Women of Today Awards

Ms. Eagles: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, another very successful Women of Today Awards luncheon was held in Estevan yesterday.

The funds raised through this went to two very worthwhile projects, namely the violence intervention program, which is a non-profit, community-based organization that provides services and support to persons affected by family violence, and to the placement of free field FM (frequency modulation) hearing systems in Estevan schools. These systems amplify the teacher's voice through the speaker . . . through speakers to allow children to hear more clearly.

Mr. Speaker, while all of those nominated were winners, the award recipients are as follows: the Ida Petterson Memorial Award for outstanding entrepreneur went to Melodye Pierson; the SaskPower award for outstanding contributions to the workplace went to Carol Cundall; and the Shirley Orsted Memorial Award for young woman of today went to Jamie Suchan.

All those in attendance enjoyed guest speaker Senator Raynell Andreychuk.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all members to join me in congratulating all nominees and award recipients, and also to thank SaskPower and Quota International of Estevan for their sponsorship.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(13:45)

Canada Book Day and International Book Day

Mr. Van Mulligen: — Mr. Speaker, once a year we urge Saskatchewan people to indulge themselves by doing what we hope they do year round. That is, Mr. Speaker, to read Canadian books by Canadian authors, of which there is a great and impressive number.

Mr. Speaker, today is Canada Book Day and International Book Day, a day for us to recognize and appreciate the distinctively universal contribution our writers make to our national culture and to our national economy. Thousands of Canadians are involved in the bookmaking and bookselling business. Good books are good business as well as good intellectual nourishment.

And in a gentle kind of special pleading on this day, we suggest our readers get involved with Saskatchewan books by Saskatchewan authors, of which I am proud to say there is a great and impressive number. With 4 per cent of the population in Canada, we can claim a disproportionate number of worthy scribes.

The member for Cypress has his favourite author; the member for Lakeview has his stable of writers. To the names mentioned in this Assembly before, let me quickly suggest a visit to the works of Trevor Herriot, Sandra Birdsell, Deanna Christensen, Tim Lilburn, Byrna Barclay, Lois Simmie, and a host of others.

Mr. Speaker, to borrow from today's *Globe and Mail* which borrowed from the 18th century's Richard Steele:

“Reading is to the mind what exercise is to the body.” In a word, it is essential.

To which I would add, and fun.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Volunteer Week

Ms. Hamilton: — Mr. Speaker, this is Volunteer Week and I recognize and acknowledge all of the work that goes into an event that will have the participation of 4,000 volunteers.

On Sunday, April 21 the Regina Multicultural Council, RMC, launched this year's Mosaic with the theme, “Seeds of Understanding.” RMC announced that the honorary ambassadors for this event are the Minister of Culture, Youth and Recreation, and Mayor Pat Fiacco.

The RMC is hosting the 35th annual Mosaic multicultural festival on June 6, 7, and 8. The council's mission through Mosaic is to promote co-operation and mutual understanding and respect among all cultural and ethnic groups; to promote the concept of multiculturalism; and to further develop and promote the cultures and folk arts of all cultural and ethnic groups.

There are 18 pavilions featuring music, performances, and of course ethnic cuisine.

The Minister of Culture, Youth and Recreation was in attendance and was happy to take part in the launch of Mosaic and accept her appointment as the honorary volunteer.

Mr. Speaker, Mosaic and its 4,000 volunteers demonstrate why Saskatchewan is a centre of volunteer activity.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Canadian Improv Games Winners

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, they're the best at making it up as they go along. And no, Mr. Speaker, I'm not talking about the NDP (New Democratic Party) or its latest budget. What I'm talking about, Mr. Speaker, is seven very talented students from LeBoldus High School in Regina who took top honours April 13 at the national finals of the Canadian Improv Games in Ottawa.

Mr. Speaker, in the wild and frantic — but always fun — atmosphere of improvisation, this energetic group beat out 18 other high school teams who were competing from across the country.

Mr. Speaker, these local improv champs could no doubt teach us a thing or two when it comes to thinking fast on our feet. In fact, one of the team members was quoted as saying, “You rely on each other and everyone's creativity.” And not unlike politics, Mr. Speaker, participants were also judged on plot, storyline, and how well they interpret a suggestion.

2002 was a special year for all those involved at the Canadian Improv Games, as this year marked the games 25th anniversary.

Congratulations go out to the seven members of the LeBoldus team and their coach, Dan Macdonald. Just goes to show you, Mr. Speaker, what energy, talent, creativity, and enthusiasm can accomplish when it's given the opportunity. As all members on this side of the House know, Mr. Speaker, young people are key to growing this province. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Book Launch Coincides with Canada Book Day

Ms. Atkinson: — Thank you. How's this for synchronicity, Mr. Speaker? On Canada Book Day, I'm happy to bring to the attention of the Assembly an event taking place this evening in my constituency.

The member for Regina Victoria has just promoted Saskatchewan books. In a few hours we will have one more Saskatchewan title to add to our must-read list.

Suzanne North will be launching the third mystery in her series which features the exploits of TV cameraperson, Phoebe Fairfax. I hasten to point out to our own press that Phoebe Fairfax is a journalist who solves problems rather than creating them.

The new book is called *Bones to Pick*, published by McClelland & Stewart. Appropriately it's set in and around the Royal Tyrrell Museum of Palaeontology in Drumheller.

And I think I have my information correct, Mr. Speaker — this is a murder mystery without a murder. Only a Saskatchewan writer could pull that off. As well this book is funny, as are Suzanne's previous two: *Healthy, Wealthy and Dead* and *Seeing is Deceiving*.

Mr. Speaker, Suzanne lives just a block or so off Broadway, the cultural and creative centre of Saskatoon. She's a good addition to the mix that makes the Broadway area such an enjoyment to represent.

I invite all of you who can make it to head to Amigos Cantina at 7:30 tonight, have some refreshments, and buy a good Saskatchewan book on Canada Book Day. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Proposal for North-South Corridor

Mr. Hillson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The North American Free Trade Agreement, the growth of the central North American trade corridor, and the vastly expanding wealth of the Northwest Territories due to the new diamond mines and the Mackenzie Valley pipeline, all mean that Saskatchewan has a strategic opportunity.

The shortest distance from the American Midwest to the Alaska North Slope and the Mackenzie Delta is through Saskatchewan. According to a report published in *The Globe and Mail* on April 8:

Northern expansion will add as much as \$77 billion to the Canadian economy.

Most of this new wealth is projected to go through Alberta. The next largest beneficiary is Ontario. Saskatchewan is not mentioned.

If we build a highway connecting our Athabasca region with Fort Smith, NWT (Northwest Territories), this province would become the natural corridor from Chicago to the Beaufort Sea. The tourist and mineral potential of the Athabasca region could finally be developed.

George McNevin, a Saskatoon and Yukon businessman, has been a prime advocate of an Athabasca highway. He is also working to establish air service linking Saskatoon with Yellowknife and Inuvik.

It is imperative to our economic future that we become the link between the North and the American Midwest. I hope and urge all members to support this initiative to build a major north-south route through Saskatchewan — a route that, a route that will open up our Athabasca region and at the same time ensure the wealth of a developing North will flow through this province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Scholarship Winners

Mr. Trew: — Mr. Speaker, it is a joy to share with you and members in the legislature some of the achievements of a couple of young people today.

Two Saskatchewan high school students have received scholarships to attend the world-renowned international baccalaureate program at Lester B. Pearson United World College in British Columbia.

Kelsey Rose from O'Neill High School in my constituency received the annual provincial scholarship worth \$55,000 this year, sponsored by the Pearson College and by Saskatchewan Learning.

Ashley Dubnick from Churchill Composite High School in La Ronge received the biannual northern district Lester B. Pearson College scholarship, also worth \$55,000 and sponsored by Cameco Corporation, Cogema Resources Inc., Mudjadik Thyssen Mining, and Northern Resources Trucking.

Rose and Dubnick will begin their two-year studies at the college in September, Mr. Speaker. Last year's provincial scholarship winner, Nigel Francis from Carpenter High School in Meadow Lake, will be returning to the college this fall to complete his final year.

I'm sure that all members in this House share the pride that myself and the member from Cumberland have in these two fine scholars. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and congratulations to both scholarship recipients.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ORAL QUESTIONS

Increase in Long-Term Care Fees

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, under the NDP's new long-term care hike, Saskatchewan seniors will be forced to pay 90 per cent of their income for long-term care.

According to the Department of Health officials, the income amount used in this calculation is your total income on line 150 of your income tax return. Mr. Speaker, your total income includes income from all sources, including income from dividends.

Will the Minister of Health confirm that long-term care rates are based on an individual's total income which includes income from dividends.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Yes.

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, many seniors have savings invested in dividend funds because these funds provide a regular monthly income. But

here's the problem: for income tax purposes, dividend income must be grossed up 25 per cent. Your total income and your long-term care fees are then based on this grossed up amount.

That means, Mr. Speaker, if you have \$10,000 a year of dividend income, you actually have to claim this as \$12,500. Your long-term care fees are then based on 90 per cent of this amount. That's \$11,250 or \$1,250 more than you actually earned.

Mr. Speaker, why are seniors with dividend income being charged more than they actually earn?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, if the member opposite had asked the next question, he would have found that when you look at income, if there's a disparity between the income amount that he's identified and the bottom line income by more than 1 per cent, then the matter is reviewed to look at that person's individual circumstances to deal with exactly the problem that we've talking about.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Krawetz: — Mr. Speaker, the general income tax guide, Mr. Speaker, states on page 17, it says you have to claim 125 per cent of dividend income. According to Saskatchewan Health your long-term care fees are then based on that amount. Ninety per cent of one hundred and twenty-five per cent is one hundred and twelve and a half per cent.

That means if you have dividend income the NDP is going to take one hundred and twelve and a half per cent of this income for long-term care fees. Mr. Speaker, once again we are not talking about wealthy people. We are talking about seniors who have put away a modest amount of savings and are now using that savings to provide them with a steady income of a few hundred dollars a month.

And how are they being rewarded by the NDP? The NDP is actually going to take more than they are earning — one hundred and twelve and a half per cent. Mr. Speaker, this is crazy. Will the Premier admit he made a mistake and cancel this attack on Saskatchewan seniors.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, it's unfortunate that the member opposite didn't listen to my answer and just went right into reading his question that basically didn't deal with this at all. This is once again an example — as I pointed out last week — of the members opposite not getting proper advice from people to help them write and deal with their questions.

This is a basic point of . . .

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

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, this system is set up in a way to deal with individual circumstances. And when there are types of idiosyncrasies in a person's income or how it's dealt

with, those things are responded to because that's why this system is set up in that way. What we are doing here in this particular policy is asking for some of the people who have a bit more money to contribute.

Saskatchewan taxpayers — and I emphasize Saskatchewan taxpayers — paid \$337 million. That's only from Saskatchewan people. We don't get federal money in this area.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(14:00)

Mr. Krawetz: — The minister has suggested in the last couple of days that people should phone him and he provided phone numbers. Today he's trying to tell people that now you must appeal your case on an individual basis. And maybe we'll look at that, Mr. Speaker. You know, some people might say, why don't they just take their money out of the dividend fund and put it somewhere else?

It's not that easy, Mr. Speaker. In most cases this would trigger a capital gain which would be taxable income. And the NDP would still end up taking 90 per cent of it, all in one year.

So these people are trapped, Mr. Speaker. They thought they were investing wisely and putting away some money for their retirement, but now the NDP is taking one hundred and twelve and a half per cent of their income, and there's no way out, Mr. Speaker. This is grossly unfair.

Will the Premier cancel this attack on Saskatchewan seniors.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, the member is wrong on that particular point around taking more than a person earns. That's not how the system works. It's based . . . this is going to work with the practical realities of an individual's income and that's why people need to work together with the people in the system.

Now one of the things that we do . . .

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

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, last fall when the Leader of the Opposition brought forward some kind of a . . .

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

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, last fall when the Leader of the Opposition brought some sort of, brought forward some sort of economic policy he quoted this, and I quote:

Premier Campbell expects to save millions of taxpayers' dollars through his review, money that will be used to finance his aggressive agenda of personal and business tax cuts and balance the budget.

A Saskatchewan Party government will launch a similar core services review in this province within 30 days of taking office.

Mr. Speaker, I ask the members opposite: is that what they're going to do? Are they going to do what's happening in British Columbia today?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, many seniors have savings in RRSPs (Registered Retirement Savings Plan). After all, all Canadian are encouraged to save for their retirement by contributing to RRSPs.

And now what's happening to that money? The NDP is taking 90 per cent of it. The NDP keep saying they are not touching people's savings, but that's not true.

When you turn 69, you are required by law to start withdrawing money from your RRSP. All of the money withdrawn, both the principal and the interest, is then counted as income. And then the NDP takes 90 per cent of it.

So, Mr. Speaker, the NDP is taking seniors' savings. They are taking 90 per cent of their RRSP income. And this includes not only the interest but also the original investment.

Mr. Speaker, why is the NDP attacking Saskatchewan seniors by going after their life savings?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, if the member opposite has a problem with the federal Income Tax Act and how income is calculated and how dividends are treated under that particular legislation, then he should maybe talk to some of his Alliance Party friends and have them raise that question in the House of Commons.

What I'm saying here is that we look at the income that a party has to calculate the . . .

The Speaker: — Order, please.

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, here in Saskatchewan we use, as a method of shorthand if you wanted to say it that way, the kind of amounts that people record in their income tax return. And if that number is 1 per cent or greater different than the bottom line on their income tax return, that means that there may be some other adjustments that are necessary and that will be dealt with at the first . . . it doesn't involve a review or something like that. This is how the original fee is calculated.

So the member opposite needs to do his homework and make sure that he understands the Income Tax Act of Canada before he asks these questions.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Krawetz: — For the Minister of Health's benefit, let's do a quick review. They are going . . . the NDP are going to take 90 per cent of the RRSP income. That means 90 per cent of the interest; that means 90 per cent of the principal. If the minister doesn't understand this, maybe he should get some additional advisers on his side.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Krawetz: — Mr. Speaker, maybe the minister should talk to an accountant. We have. We have talked to an accountant and this is the way it works. The NDP is going to take one hundred and twelve and a half per cent of dividend income. They are taking 90 per cent of RRSP income. That means they are going after people's savings.

All their lives these people did what they were supposed to do — they saved for their retirement — and now they are being punished for it. Mr. Speaker, why is the NDP punishing seniors by going after their life savings?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, there was a letter in the newspaper today that talked about this particular issue. And I won't read the whole letter, but it was a letter by Kay Antrobus to the editor. And basically she talks about the fact that for her relative, they had all of their expenses covered except for about \$150 a month for some drugs and for a haircut, and that basically all of their financial needs were covered in that particular situation. And the net effect for her was that the savings in that family were not touched at all.

But what I guess all of us have to recognize is that these kinds of savings that people have do provide them with income and they can be dealt with in different ways. What we are asking for is those people who have a little bit more income to contribute more. Taxpayers of Saskatchewan are putting in \$337 million.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, once again there's no way around this problem. Seniors with RRSPs can't just give their money to their children because first they have to take it out of an RRSP. It immediately becomes income. And then the NDP comes and takes 90 per cent of it. The NDP has invented the perfect system for getting people's life savings, especially people who did what they were supposed to do and put their money into RRSPs.

Mr. Speaker, a lot of seniors in this province thought they were saving for their retirement. Maybe they thought they were saving for their children. It turns out, Mr. Speaker, they were saving the money for the NDP.

Mr. Speaker, is that fair? Why is the NDP attacking Saskatchewan seniors by going after their life savings?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, if the member opposite is saying that the method of calculating is different than it was before, then he's wrong. Because we were . . . Basically we were . . . basically before . . .

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

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, I think the clear point here is the calculation is the same. If the member's only point is that the rate of that income that's from the higher levels goes . . .

The Speaker: — Once again I ask for order so the minister can complete his response.

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, I'd just like to read the last couple of paragraphs of Kay Antrobus's letter. She says:

In our case it (the amount of extra costs) amounted to about \$150 per month for drugs and a haircut. These residents do not have mortgage costs, car payments or entertainment expenses.

Even clothing costs are minor. \$500 per month income left over after paying the fees would more than cover any extra expenses. Income was determined from the tax form of the previous year.

When our loved one passed away, his life savings were still intact. I was talking to friends in Manitoba at that time whose loved one was paying twice as much.

Please check out what fees are in other provinces. I think you will find that Saskatchewan treats its seniors fairly.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since the NDP budget came down which changed the long-term care residents' fee structure from 50 per cent up to 90 per cent, their family members and they have slowly been realizing how the NDP's increase is going to affect them.

They are astounded, Mr. Speaker, that the NDP would suggest that \$166 a month is enough left over to cover all other expenses after a person has paid their long-term health care fees. They are shocked that a person whose annual income is just above the poverty line is described as wealthy by the Premier. Spouses of long-term care residents are describing themselves as devastated by the NDP's tax grab that will force them to sell assets to pay their spouse's drug cost or to maintain their own independent living.

Mr. Speaker, once again I ask the Premier, will he reconsider his decision to increase long-term care fees for Saskatchewan residents of long-term care facilities? Will he please change his mind.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, the \$166 referred to by the member opposite, that hasn't changed. That's the same amount as it was before. And it goes up based on a cost of living amount that relates to the amounts that people receive on their old age security and other special supplements.

Now, Mr. Speaker, what I would ask the member opposite, the Leader of the Opposition, is if he's changed his position on the core services review that he's promoting after their election. The initial reports from Vancouver talk about reducing the number of long-term care beds in British Columbia by between 6,000 and 8,000 . . .

The Speaker: — Order, please.

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You bet we're going to look at the way this government is run. They can play money . . . play with taxpayers' monies on the Australian stock market and they do it at the expense of seniors whose income they are gouging to a level of 90 per cent.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hermanson: — You bet we're going to look at what that government's doing.

Mr. Speaker, children of long-term care residents who look after their parents' interests are outraged that their mother may be only left with \$20 a month after all of her expenses are considered and she has paid the NDP government.

Mr. Speaker, other seniors are not going to put up with this. They are already making plans to move to Alberta where many of their grown children already live. Mr. Speaker, it's a tragedy that the NDP are chasing jobs and young people out of the province of Saskatchewan. It is a grievous tragedy that this government is now forcing our seniors out of the province of Saskatchewan because they can't afford the gouging that the NDP is charging them for long-term care.

Mr. Speaker, why does the Premier insist on attacking the most vulnerable members of Saskatchewan's population? Why is he attacking the seniors of this province?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, the taxpayers of this province, and this province alone, pay \$337 million for long-term care — that's \$10 million more than last year. It covers 74 per cent of the cost. What do the members opposite suggest that we pay for long-term care? Is it \$400 million? Is it \$445 million which is the total cost?

Mr. Speaker, I would like to know where Mr. Truscott and the Canadian Taxpayers Federation is right now. He's been totally silent on this issue and this relates directly to the kind of positions these people take. Where are they going to come up with the money to deal with this?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Crown Investments Corporation Dividends

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the minister responsible for the Crown Investments Corporation.

Mr. Speaker, once again we're finding out that the NDP's budget doesn't add up. Crown Investments chief executive officer, Frank Hart, is now admitting in a *Leader-Post* article today that the Crowns only made \$130 million last year. However, the Minister of Finance took a \$200 million dividend from CIC last year. So they're \$70 million short, Mr. Speaker. That's another big hole in the NDP fudge-it budget.

Mr. Speaker, how did CIC pay a \$200 million dividend when it only made \$130 million?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(14:15)

Hon. Mr. Cline: — You know, Mr. Speaker, that's a very strange question coming from that opposition because as it says in *The Leader-Post* in the same article the member's referring to, in the year 2000, the Crown Investments Corporation made earnings of \$293 million. The dividend that was taken for that year, Mr. Speaker, was zero. Why, Mr. Speaker? Because we said we do not need that money in 2000 and 2001; we will leave it in retained earnings until we need it.

You know what that opposition did, Mr. Speaker? They came into that . . . this House and they opposed that. They said we should spend that money then. We said, Mr. Speaker, we were going to plan ahead for the future for when we would need it. We are now drawing down those retained earnings, Mr. Speaker, and those retained earnings can pay the dividends in a planned way.

What we have here, Mr. Speaker, is good management, not a plan to privatize the Crowns as they would do, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — Well, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker . . .

The Speaker: — Order, please.

Mr. Wall: — The only way I could substantiate the minister's claims that our argument is all wet, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan people don't trust the NDP's accounting tricks, and we certainly knew the minister would give the answer that he just gave. Mr. Speaker, we knew that he would repeat what the CEO, (chief executive officer) Frank Hart, had to say about this information. Because Frank Hart said in the paper:

We didn't pay a dividend in 2000, so instead of spending it we just put it in the bank . . .

Well, Mr. Speaker, taxpayers are hoping they didn't put this money in the same bank that the minister put his rainy day fund in, Mr. Speaker. You're familiar with that, you're familiar with that bank, Mr. Speaker — it's the first national bank of never-never land, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the problem is this. Even if you accept the Minister of Finance's argument and Mr. Hart's argument, he didn't take the \$150 million dividend in 2000, so he's using it to make his dividend payments in 2001 and 2002. He says he'll need \$100 million of this amount to make his dividend payment in 2002, and that only leaves 50 million for 2001. But we know that they're \$70 million short in 2001.

So to the minister: where is the missing \$20 million in the NDP fudge-it budget?

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Mr. Speaker, just to look at how ridiculous the arguments of the opposition are, we've now gone from the missing 200 million to the missing 20 million. And by the time

he's done we'll be down to 2 million, I'm sure, Mr. Speaker.

But I want to say this. One of the other things that Mr. Hart says in the article is that the CIC's (Crown Investment Corporation) debt-to-equity ratio is 54 per cent, Mr. Speaker. In other words, there's a lot of equity in the Crowns; they're well managed and they can afford to pay the dividends.

Do you know, Mr. Speaker, what the debt-to-equity ratio was by the time those people, including that member from Swift Current who worked for the Devine administration, was when they got through? It was about 90 per cent, Mr. Speaker. Because when those people get control of the Crown corporations, they strip them of their assets, Mr. Speaker, so that they can prepare them for privatization as they tried to sell SaskEnergy, as they sold the natural gas fields, and as they want to sell SaskTel, Mr. Speaker.

And this government is not going to allow it, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — Mr. Speaker, we on this side of the House can't believe the sanctimony of that minister. That minister, quite rightly, just pointed out the failed practices of the '80s where the government of the day . . . where the government of the day racked up the debt . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. Members will come to order. Members will come to order. Members will come to order.

Mr. Wall: — Mr. Speaker, I saw that . . .

The Speaker: — Hold it, hold it. Members will stay in order — come to order and stay in order.

Mr. Wall: — . . . that government up close and it looks a lot like this government over here.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — And, Mr. Speaker, it's going to suffer the same fate. That minister just stood up and decried the practice of racking up debts in the Crown corporation to balance the books in the General Revenue Fund.

Mr. Speaker . . . Mr. Speaker, he then says . . . he then says that what they're doing is sitting on . . .

The Speaker: — Well let's just try one more time here, members. I want to . . . I want . . . Order, please. Order please, order on both sides.

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can tell why they're just a little sensitive. They have become . . . they have become what they beheld, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, that minister stood up and decried the practice of racking up Crown debt in order to balance the books. And in the same breath, he confirms they're sitting on a large savings account now in the Crown Investments Corporation — a dividend fund — while they have racked up another \$470 million in Crown debt, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the question to the minister is this: in the 2002 budget the minister says the Crowns will pay him \$300 million. If they were off the target at 200 million, how in the world are they going to generate 300 million? Will he table his projections in the legislature today.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Well in the course of a few questions, Mr. Speaker, now we've gone from having a shortage of money to sitting on a large dividend fund. So who knows.

But I want to remind the public, Mr. Speaker, that this is the same member who came into this House last year and said, why are we paying the world price for natural gas, thereby raising natural gas prices? Why? Because when that member worked for the previous administration, they sold off the natural gas fields. They sold off the gas and then say, why do we have to buy the gas, Mr. Speaker.

But I want to say this. Last year when we didn't take a dividend for 2000, they complained about that and said we should take the money. This year when we take the money, they say we shouldn't take the money. So it reminds me of the thought of the day in *The Globe and Mail* the other day, Mr. Speaker, which is from a Mr. La Rochefoucauld who says:

Little is needed to make a wise man happy, but nothing can content a fool.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Hon. Mr. Wartman: — Mr. Speaker, with leave to introduce guests before I make my statement.

Leave granted.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Hon. Mr. Wartman: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the rest of this Assembly, a visitor that is seated in your gallery, at the back of your gallery, Mr. Sinclair Harrison, who is no stranger to the members here.

Mr. Sinclair Harrison served eight years as president of SARM (Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities) and he is visiting today in his capacity as chairman of the Farmer Rail Car Coalition, a group formed a number of years ago for the purpose of acquiring a fleet of Government of Canada grain hopper cars and operating them for the benefit of western grain producers.

Mr. Harrison is in Regina today to meet with myself and others to discuss the Farmer Rail Car Coalition's progress on this very important matter.

On behalf of the members of this Assembly, I would like you all to join with me in welcoming Mr. Harrison to this Assembly. Thank you.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Farmer Rail Car Coalition

Hon. Mr. Wartman: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to make a statement on an issue of critical importance to rural Saskatchewan and the grain producers of this province.

Last week in Saskatoon, the Farmer Rail Car Coalition held its board of directors meeting to discuss the recent announcement by Transport Canada that it has resurrected its plan to sell the fleet of federally owned grain hopper cars.

Mr. Speaker, this is the continuation of a plan first announced by the Government of Canada in its 1996 budget. That announcement resulted in the formation of the Farmer Rail Car Coalition with the objectives to purchase, maintain, and operate the entire federal grain hopper fleet for the benefit of western Canadian farmers.

The farmers of Saskatchewan and Western Canada quickly understood the ramifications of the federal government's initial plan to sell the hopper cars to the railway companies. Farmers understood that having the rail companies completely control the supply of hopper cars would result in higher costs to producers, and farmers quickly rallied together to ensure their interests were protected.

The Farmer Rail Car Coalition has broad-based producer support and is comprised of the Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities, the Saskatchewan Canola Growers Association, the Family Farm Foundation, Southern Rails Co-operative, the National Farmers Union, Keystone Agricultural Producers from Manitoba, and Wild Rose Agricultural Producers from Alberta.

And, Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to acknowledge today that the Government of Saskatchewan initially supported and now continues to support the objectives of the Farmer Rail Car Coalition. And we have demonstrated that support by providing financial assistance to the coalition as they organize and plan for their bid on the Government of Canada grain car hopper fleet.

The federal government allowed the national railways the right of first refusal on the sale of the hopper cars for five years. That period expires June 30 this year and the federal government has indicated its intention to sell the hopper car fleet by the end of the year. And that, Mr. Speaker, is the reason I raise the issue in the House today — to clearly state that our government's policy remains firm.

We believe that the federal hopper car fleet must be owned and controlled by the farmers of Western Canada for the benefit of the farmers of Western Canada, and that this government continues to support the Farmer Rail Car Coalition in its efforts as it works towards obtaining control of the grain hopper car fleet for the benefit of grain producers.

Mr. Speaker, this is an issue of tremendous importance to

Saskatchewan's grain producers, and I thank you for the opportunity to reaffirm our government's policy in this statement today. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Elhard: — Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I would like to respond to the minister's statement in the House today and, before I do that, I'd like to thank him for making a copy of his ministerial statement available to me earlier today. I appreciate the opportunity to review the statement made by the minister outlining the government's position.

I would also like to welcome Mr. Harrison to the Assembly today, and I'm sure that he has a great deal of interest in this particular issue as indicated by his years of dedicated effort toward a resolution to the grain car problem in Western Canada.

Mr. Speaker, if there was ever any doubt, the federal government announcement today about its intention to sell the grain car fleet indicates once and for all that the intent of the senior government is to extricate itself from western agriculture forever.

There is no clearer indication of the changing attitudes at the federal level toward western agriculture with the exception possibly of the failure of the government to offset the devastating subsidies that are being offered by our international competitors.

The Minister of Highways and Transportation's statement in this House today explains some of the history surrounding the ownership of grain cars in Canada and acknowledges the importance to the industry that a well-repaired and -maintained grain car fleet represents.

Now while I acknowledge the support given to the rail car coalition by the Department of Highways and Transportation in providing financial assistance now as the group organizes and plans for the future, I would add a word or two of caution.

(14:30)

Mr. Speaker, much of the fleet that is up for sale is anywhere from 20 to 30 years old. It represents a total number of cars somewhere in the range of 13,000, some which we know are clearly unacceptable for use in a modern transportation system. The market value of these cars appears to be depressed somewhat, having fallen from \$400 million to roughly \$100 million value in the last five years or so. And while it might be a good time to buy into a fleet of this size, it might also — at that price — present a temptation to buy more than we really need.

The official opposition believes that full and regular access to grain cars is more important to farmers than outright ownership. However, having said that, Mr. Speaker, if a good business case can be made for the purchase of the federal cars, we in the official opposition would support a farmer initiative to make such a purchase.

I would have serious reservations about the provincial

government involving itself financially to any great extent under questionable circumstances. The government's track record in business ventures with which it is unfamiliar is sketchy at best, Mr. Speaker, and we would not want to see all taxpayers' dollars put at an unnecessary risk.

The official opposition also firmly believes that the federal hopper car fleet ought to be made available to the ultimate success of western grain farmers. Ownership and control of the fleet needs to be determined under the stringent criteria of a best-business-case scenario. If such a situation exists, we would be supportive of a farmer-led effort to consummate the sale.

One other word of caution needs to be voiced regarding this possible purchase, Mr. Speaker. The question I would like to pose is this: does the sale advance the cause of real agricultural diversification, or will it perpetuate a system that has kept Western Canadian agriculture at the mercy of the export market?

Assuming that the purchase of the federal grain car fleet is a good idea, a suitable private sector financier ought to be available to the buyers. This proposed purchase could be an arduous effort, and the task has just now begun. We will be following the negotiations with real interest.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

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

Leave granted.

Mr. Hillson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise to say that, on behalf of the Liberal Party, that we wish the Farm Rail Car Coalition well.

It seems to me that with all aspects of public services and utilities, in our system we require either open competition or regulation. And I'm afraid the grain transportation is in grave danger of having neither. And so in order for it to make . . . to make it work for producers in this country, there needs to be direct involvement of our producers.

I think we also need to look at the issue of open running rights. I know that the rail companies take the position of private ownership, but even the most cursory examination of Canada's history certainly shows that the construction and maintenance of our railways was never private enterprise.

It was, from the very beginning in the 1880s, largely financed through public dollars, and therefore it is a public enterprise which must serve the public in general and western producers in particular.

And so I say that we wish the Rail Car Coalition well. We need the input of producers into a system which serves the producers of Western Canada, and we need to look at the issue of open running rights.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 29 — The Architects Amendment Act, 2002

Hon. Mr. Thomson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that Bill No. 29, The Architects Amendment Act, 2002 now be introduced and read the first time.

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

Bill No. 30 — The Liquor Consumption Tax Amendment Act, 2002

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 30, The Liquor Consumption Tax Amendment Act, 2002 be now introduced and read the first time.

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

Bill No. 31 — The Tobacco Tax Amendment Act, 2002

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 31, The Tobacco Tax Amendment Act, 2002 be now introduced and read the first time.

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

TABLING OF STATEMENTS

The Speaker: — Members of the Assembly, before orders of the day I would like to advise members that I hereby table the financial statements of the Saskatchewan Liberal caucus office up to the date of December 2, 2001.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

WRITTEN QUESTIONS

Mr. Yates: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. By leave I request permission to table written responses to questions 126 through 135 inclusive.

The Speaker: — The Whip has requested leave and has delivered questions 126, 127, 128, 129, 130, 131, 132, 133, 134, and 135.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Mr. Speaker, with leave to move a motion related to the constitution of the Private Members' Bills Committee.

Leave granted.

MOTIONS

Substitution of Member on the Standing Committee on Private Members' Bills

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move, seconded by the member from Indian Head-Milestone:

That the name of Daryl Wiberg be substituted for that of Bill Boyd on the Standing Committee on Private Members' Bills.

Motion agreed to.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' MOTIONS

Motion No. 5 — Building Independence Program

Mr. Prebble: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Prebble: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and my thanks to my colleagues. Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to introduce a resolution this afternoon relating to the building independence program. And at the end of my remarks, Mr. Speaker, I will be moving the following motion:

That this Assembly endorse the building independence program which assists tens of thousands of Saskatchewan families every year, and to date has reduced the number of families receiving social assistance by nearly 5,000 with more than 10,000 fewer children growing up on social assistance.

Mr. Speaker, I think that one of the major initiatives that's been undertaken by this government in the last five years has been the introduction of the building independence program. It's one of the initiatives that has been able to make a real difference to the lives of families in our province. And it is part, Mr. Speaker, of a larger strategy that has been undertaken by this government to try to reduce the rate of child and family poverty in our province.

And, Mr. Speaker, to paint this in a broader context for a minute, there are at least three important elements in our initiative to try to reduce child and family poverty.

As you will know, Mr. Speaker, our government in the last three years has moved to significantly reduce the income tax burden on lower-income families in Saskatchewan. And the result has been, Mr. Speaker, that 55,000 persons have been removed from the income tax rolls at lower income levels, Mr. Speaker. And I think that's an important accomplishment that supplements the work that I'm about to discuss in some detail, Mr. Speaker.

In addition to that, Mr. Speaker, we've introduced a provincial training allowance that has provided a monthly allowance for students who are enrolled in basic education or other related courses to be able to move off social assistance and instead, Mr. Speaker, receive a training benefit.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the third significant step that our government has taken relates to what's referred to as the building independence program. And there are essentially three critical elements to that program.

One is an employment supplement, Mr. Speaker, that benefits working families with children and helps ensure that the costs related to child care and child support for those families, that

they might have been eligible for if they'd been on social assistance, continues to be available to them when they go into the workforce.

The second important program, Mr. Speaker, in the building independence package is a child benefit to low-income working families with children that's paid out on a per child basis.

And the third important component, Mr. Speaker, is the principle of extending family health benefits that were previously available only to families on social assistance and extending that . . . those benefits to thousands of low-income working families in the province of Saskatchewan.

And I want to talk about each of these initiatives in more detail, Mr. Speaker. But I want to look at the big picture first in terms of what has been accomplished. And one of the accomplishments is a very substantial reduction in the numbers of persons relying on social assistance in the province of Saskatchewan. And I'll speak about that in more detail in a moment, Mr. Speaker.

But the . . . I think the most significant accomplishment from the initiatives that I just made reference to is the fact that we've now reduced the rate of child poverty in the province of Saskatchewan by 30 per cent, Mr. Speaker — by 30 per cent in the last six years.

And that, Mr. Speaker, I think is the most important accomplishment. And an accomplishment that no other province can point to, Mr. Speaker — a 30 per cent reduction in the number of children in the province of Saskatchewan who are no longer living in poverty.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I want to turn and discuss in a little more detail the elements of the building independence program. And I want to begin by talking about the Saskatchewan employment supplement.

And, Mr. Speaker, in doing so, I also want to bring to the attention of members of the Assembly and to the public that the family supplements program is one that is still not fully subscribed to. And if there are people who believe that they might be eligible for the Saskatchewan employment supplement, they should contact my office, Mr. Speaker, by telephoning either in Saskatoon, 651-2240, or here in Regina at 787-0985.

And I want to say a little bit more, Mr. Speaker, about this employment supplement. This is a monthly payment, Mr. Speaker, that supplements the income earned by lower-income parents either from wages or from self-employment or for child and spousal maintenance payments. It's a supplement to all of those, Mr. Speaker.

And the supplement assists parents with the child-related costs of going to work and supports their decision to work. And for families on social assistance, it helps them to move from dependence on social assistance to the workforce, Mr. Speaker.

(14:45)

In effect the supplement is meant to top up Saskatchewan

people's income to a subsistence level. And the program encourages people who have the opportunity to work more to take advantage of that and to retain the security of their assistance benefits at the same time. And this program, Mr. Speaker, came into effect in July of 1998.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to report to members of the Assembly and to the public that the participation rate in this program continues to increase in the province of Saskatchewan. Three years ago, Mr. Speaker, we had 5,149 families taking advantage of this program. Today, Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to announce that we have 8,200 families taking advantage of this program. So an increase, Mr. Speaker, of 3,000 families who are participating in this initiative. And the average monthly payment to those families, Mr. Speaker, has risen from \$160 a month to \$190 a month.

And I'm also pleased, Mr. Speaker, to tell members of the public that effective in this new budget, which started on April 1 of this year, we're adding another \$1.3 million in funding to this initiative, Mr. Speaker. And I might add that we increased spending in this area by \$1.7 million last year.

So in total, Mr. Speaker, we're adding to the financing of the Saskatchewan employment supplement an additional \$3 million, Mr. Speaker. And that, Mr. Speaker, will allow not only for an improvement in benefits but it will also allow for an increased number of families to take advantage of the employment supplement in the coming year.

So, Mr. Speaker, I just want to say a word more about some of the new initiatives that we're pursuing this year under this employment supplement program. First of all there'll be an increase in the maximum benefits available to eligible families with children under 18 years of age.

There'll also be a new supplementary benefit, Mr. Speaker, for eligible families with children under 13 years of age to help cover the additional costs working parents encounter when raising young children. And I think, Mr. Speaker, this is an . . . a particularly important initiative because we've seen some of the highest rates of family poverty being among families who are trying to raise very young children. And this supplement will be good news to those families, Mr. Speaker.

We're also extending Saskatchewan employment supplement benefits across a broader range of incomes. And we're introducing a new \$25 a month minimum payment to ensure that Saskatchewan employment supplement benefits are always large enough to be meaningful to working families and worth their reporting effort, Mr. Speaker.

So, Mr. Speaker, these are some of the improvements to the Saskatchewan employment supplement. And it's one of our anchor programs in this building independence initiative which already has reduced rates of child poverty, as I was mentioning earlier, Mr. Speaker, by 30 per cent.

Now, Mr. Speaker, a second important element of the building independence program is what's called the Saskatchewan Child Benefit. And this assists lower-income families with the cost of raising children. The benefit is paid to eligible families on behalf of each child under 18, and provides for basic food,

clothing, and personal needs. It further reasserts this government's commitment to keeping working families in the workforce, and reduce financial barriers.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I think that this program — the one that I just made reference to — has also been an important financial benefit, a concrete financial benefit, for working families — low-income working families with children, to make it advantageous for them to be in the workplace rather than needing to rely on social assistance.

And the third program that I want to make reference to, Mr. Speaker, that I think has probably benefited the most families in Saskatchewan, in terms of the building independence program, is the one that relates to family health benefits, Mr. Speaker. Because previous to . . . A few years ago, Mr. Speaker, family health benefits were only available . . . only available to families who were relying on social assistance, and now they've been extended, Mr. Speaker, to thousands of other families in the province of Saskatchewan.

We now have more than 24,000 families who are eligible for family health benefits, Mr. Speaker. And I want to say a word about these because they include, but are not limited to, benefits to help cover the cost of prescription drugs, benefits that are related to covering the cost of children's dental care, and optometry coverage in the province of Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker.

So low-income working families, with children under 18 years of age, have basically got most of their dental costs covered if they're eligible for this program. They also, Mr. Speaker, are eligible for no prescription drug charge for *Formulary* drugs that are under the drug *Formulary* for the province.

They're entitled to an eye examination once a year with all costs for that covered. They also have . . . Children can also have their . . . the cost of their basic eyeglasses covered under this program.

They're fully covered, Mr. Speaker, for ambulance services for emergency purposes, and they're also fully covered for chiropractic services. And they're covered, Mr. Speaker, for medical supplies which . . . on the prescription of a doctor. Now, Mr. Speaker, those are . . . that is a very significant additional benefit to low-income working families in this province.

And any family, Mr. Speaker, that is eligible for the Saskatchewan employment supplement or eligible for the provincial training allowance, Mr. Speaker, or any family that is eligible for the Saskatchewan Child Benefit, all of those families, Mr. Speaker, are automatically eligible for extended family health benefits in the province of Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker. And it's this package of programs together, combined with our income tax cuts to 55,000 lower-income people in the province of Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, that is starting to put a real dent in poverty rates, particularly for children and families in this province, Mr. Speaker.

Now I want to, I want to also point out that this initiative is allowing . . . one of the unexpected benefits actually, Mr. Speaker, is that this program has proven very successful in

reducing the number of people who need to depend on social assistance in the province of Saskatchewan. As more and more people move into the workplace, fewer people, Mr. Speaker, who are able to work are needing to rely on social assistance.

And I want to, I want to report to the Assembly some of the progress that has been made in this area, Mr. Speaker. Now let me begin by saying that social assistance . . . Well the numbers of people who are relying on social assistance are reported in two ways. One, Mr. Speaker, is that the number of family cases is reported, although that can include single individuals as well. But the number of households that are relying on social assistance is one way of looking at these figures.

And the second, of course, is the total number of individuals who are relying on assistance. And I want to report to the House, Mr. Speaker, that we've been making steady progress on both those fronts.

First of all, Mr. Speaker, in terms of caseload reduction, the number of cases has declined, Mr. Speaker, from 41,058 households relying on social assistance in March 1994, down, Mr. Speaker, in March of this year — in March of 2002 — to 30,815. So, Mr. Speaker, that's a drop of more than 10,000 households relying on social assistance in the province of Saskatchewan.

Similarly, Mr. Speaker, the number of individual beneficiaries relying on social assistance has also dropped from 83,120 in March of 1994 down to 56,074 in March of 2002. Mr. Speaker, that's a thirty-two and a half per cent decrease in the number of individuals relying on social assistance in the province of Saskatchewan over a period of eight years, Mr. Speaker.

In effect, Mr. Speaker, we've seen a steady decrease in the numbers of persons needing to rely on social assistance in the province of Saskatchewan over an eight-year period, Mr. Speaker. And I think that's an accomplishment that all the people of Saskatchewan can be proud of, Mr. Speaker. And the building independence program has helped to make that possible.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I just want to report in a little more detail on the fact that this has been a steady decline. For instance, Mr. Speaker, and I'll start with the year when the building independence program was introduced, in March of 1998. At that time, Mr. Speaker, we had 72,535 people relying on social assistance. Within a year of the building independence program having come in, we reduced that number, Mr. Speaker, to 66,454.

Mr. Speaker, by March of last year the number of persons relying on social assistance had decreased to 60,897. And, Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to report that in March of this year the number declined to 56,074.

So, Mr. Speaker, as more and more people enrol in the building independence initiative and benefit from the Saskatchewan employment supplement and move into the workplace, and as more and more people apply for the provincial training allowance, and as more and more people are able to take advantage of the Saskatchewan Child Benefit, and as thousands more people, Mr. Speaker, are able to take advantage of

extended family health benefits, that combination, Mr. Speaker, has resulted in a 30 per cent reduction in rates of child poverty in this province and thirty-two and a half per cent fewer people relying on social assistance, Mr. Speaker. And, Mr. Speaker, I think that is one of the most significant accomplishments of this government, Mr. Speaker, and an accomplishment that I'm very proud of.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Prebble: — Now, Mr. Speaker, I want to, I want to touch on a couple of other important matters related to this motion, Mr. Speaker, before I sit down.

Mr. Speaker, first of all I want to compare this initiative with what members opposite, members of the Saskatchewan Party, say they would do as it pertains to lower-income families in the province of Saskatchewan. And, Mr. Speaker, we should look at their record not . . . both with respect to what they say they would do now and what the former Devine government did, Mr. Speaker.

Because I can remember, Mr. Speaker, when I was Social Services critic during the '86 to '91 period, Mr. Speaker, and I can tell you what the policy of the former Devine government was in effect, and that is to offer a one-way bus ticket out of the province to those relying on social assistance. That's how tough conditions were, Mr. Speaker. And I paid for a number of those bus fares myself, Mr. Speaker. There was no help coming from, from the former Devine government for lower-income families in this province, Mr. Speaker.

And what do, what do members of the Saskatchewan Party say they would do this time if they were elected to office? Well, Mr. Speaker, they're . . . the Leader of the Opposition said in the October 2, 2001 *Leader-Post* that he would cut \$50 million from Social Services — \$50 million, Mr. Speaker — by focusing more on placing people in jobs, is what he said.

(15:00)

Now, Mr. Speaker, a \$50 million cut from the Social Services budget, I tell you what that translates into. That translates into the eradication of the building independence program. And if they're not going to take it from that, Mr. Speaker, are they going to take this money away from those, Mr. Speaker, who are disadvantaged by reason of mental illness or disability, Mr. Speaker? Or are they going to take that \$50 million away, Mr. Speaker, from child . . . from the child protection budget?

Well it doesn't matter where it comes from, Mr. Speaker. I tell you, \$50 million is a very, very deep cut in the budget of the Department of Social Services. And what it translates into, Mr. Speaker, is less money for those who are less fortunate in our society. And we on this side of the Assembly reject that proposal categorically, Mr. Speaker.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, I believe that this is so disconnected from the basic ethic that Saskatchewan people have of their willingness to help their neighbour, Mr. Speaker, that this will cost . . . this will be one of the reasons why the people of Saskatchewan reject the proposals of the Saskatchewan Party in the next provincial election.

Now, Mr. Speaker, what else did the official . . . the Leader of the Official Opposition say? Well, Mr. Speaker, he said he would impose a D-Day on employable people's assistance cheques — a D-Day on those cheques.

Well, Mr. Speaker, our approach has been to work with employable people to provide them with the training they need first to re-enter the workplace and then to give them the kind of supports that they need to re-enter the workplace. And we've done that with great success as the Saskatchewan employment supplement indicates and as the dramatic decline in the numbers of persons relying on social assistance indicates — as I mentioned earlier — a thirty-two and a half per cent decline.

And I think, Mr. Speaker, that is a much better approach than the kind of workfare approach that I dare say members opposite would reinstitute and that we saw from the Devine government in the 1980s, Mr. Speaker.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I want to touch on a couple of other important matters before closing my remarks. The first, Mr. Speaker, is that . . . the first is that I want to say a word about social assistance rates themselves, Mr. Speaker.

And I want to in doing that, recognize an important resident of Saskatoon who passed away this week, Mr. Earle Mireau. Mr. Mireau, Mr. Speaker, was I think known to all residents of Saskatchewan as a tireless advocate on behalf of low-income people in this province.

He was an active member of Equal Justice For All in Saskatoon for many years. And he represented hundreds of people in workers' compensation cases and before various tribunals, Mr. Speaker, and he did so at no charge to them. He did this absolutely free of charge, Mr. Speaker. At no charge to the public purse, and at no charge to the individuals that he was helping.

And, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Mireau brought to the attention of Saskatchewan people the need for not only the program initiatives that I made reference to today, in terms of the building independence program, but also the need to also remember that social assistance rates need to keep up with inflationary costs, Mr. Speaker. And that we must not forget the poorest of the poor, those who remain on assistance, and their families, Mr. Speaker.

And so, Mr. Speaker, I want to recognize Mr. Mireau today. And I want to say that I agree with the cause that he aspired to, and that is seeing an improvement in the lot of the very poorest in our province. There is a need, Mr. Speaker, I think to increase the basic allowance for food and clothing and shelter in this province, and to provide transportation benefits for all those on social assistance, Mr. Speaker. And to improve the shelter allowance of those on assistance. And it's my personal view, Mr. Speaker, that that also needs to be a priority for our government.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I want to, in closing my remarks, cite from an article entitled "The Saskatchewan Advantage". It's an article that was printed in the *Western Catholic Reporter*, which is an interesting newspaper, Mr. Speaker, because it's based in Edmonton, Alberta, and it provides an Alberta perspective on

what we've been accomplishing in Saskatchewan in terms of tackling child poverty.

Mr. Speaker, this is from the June 18, 2001 *Western Catholic Reporter* based in Edmonton, Alberta. And here's what they have to say about what has been accomplished in Saskatchewan.

They begin the article, Mr. Speaker, by recalling that the House of Commons, in 1989, passed a resolution urging Canadians and urging the Government of Canada to work towards the elimination of child poverty in our nation.

And they point out that unfortunately although that resolution was successful in passing, instead of reducing child poverty in Canada, what we've actually witnessed is a significant increase in child poverty since 1989.

So they discuss that in the article, and then they go on to say this, Mr. Speaker:

A report released earlier this month (and this of course was written in June of 2001, so a report released earlier in June, 2001) by the Canadian Council on Social Development found that Saskatchewan has done a much better job than . . . Alberta or Ontario in reducing child poverty, especially among single-parent families.

The article goes on to say:

Between 1993 and 1998, Saskatchewan cut the incidence of poverty among single-parent families from 51 (per cent down) to 20 per cent, (Mr. Speaker).

Now that, Mr. Speaker, is a significant accomplishment. And this is not a Saskatchewan . . . This is not a Saskatchewan government release, Mr. Speaker. This is what the *Western Catholic Reporter*, based in Edmonton, Alberta is saying. And they're citing a study undertaken by the Canadian Council on Social Development.

The article goes on to say:

In 1998-99, Saskatchewan spent \$37 million on child benefit programs (get this, Mr. Speaker) compared with \$6 million in Alberta, a province with a population three times as large.

And, Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to report that since this article was written, as I mentioned earlier in the House, we're going to be investing even more in the building independence program to support our children in this province, Mr. Speaker.

The article goes on to say:

Alberta Children's Services Minister Iris Evans downplays the . . . report (by the Canadian Council for Social Development) and says (that) her department has doubled its budget since 1998. However, we . . . have a long way to go (and by we, she's referring to Alberta, we have a long way to go) to match the record of a province with far fewer economic resources than . . . (ours).

And finally, she says, Mr. Speaker:

The (Canadian Council for Social Development) . . . study provides further contrary evidence to the belief that a wealthy society will trickle some of that wealth down to the poor. What is more likely is that governments that put a priority on ending poverty achieve that end more readily than those that believe in the trickle-down myth.

And, Mr. Speaker, I think what we see in the building independence initiative is evidence of a government that is serious about making a priority of ending poverty, Mr. Speaker. And ending particularly child poverty and family poverty, rather than simply subscribing to the trickle-down myth that a strong economy will solve the problems of all people in the economy, Mr. Speaker.

A strong economy can make a lot of difference in terms of creating employment opportunities for a lot of people in Saskatchewan. And it's critical, Mr. Speaker, to any strategy for reducing child poverty in our province.

But combined with that, Mr. Speaker, has to be targeted initiatives that are designed to specifically help the families and their children that are facing poverty in our province. And, Mr. Speaker, that's what the building independence initiative is all about. I think it's clear that it's been a great success, Mr. Speaker.

And I'm pleased to say that it's . . . although it's often not recognized by members opposite in this Assembly, it's now receiving international and national recognition, Mr. Speaker, including national awards and international recognition from the OECD (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development).

We've even had members of parliament from Britain visiting Saskatchewan to study this program and look at how they might be able to apply it back home in their own country, Mr. Speaker.

And so, Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to move the following motion:

That this Assembly endorse the building independence program which assists tens of thousands of Saskatchewan families every year, and to date has reduced the number of families receiving assistance by nearly 5,000, with more than 10,000 fewer families growing up on social assistance.

I so move, Mr. Speaker, seconded by the hon. member for Saskatoon Meewasin. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Jones: — Thank you very much.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Jones: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to second the motion made by the member from Saskatoon Grystone.

And I want to repeat again, Mr. Speaker, 88 consecutive months, 88 months of decreasing the numbers of families on social assistance. I think that's a record that everyone in this House should be particularly proud of, and especially members on this side of the House because I believe that our opposition members' plan would have a much different outcome for the people of Saskatchewan than to be able to say 88 consecutive months of decreasing numbers.

Mr. Speaker, a very key part of the social policy agenda of this government is a three-pronged solution to families on social assistance and in poverty highlighted in the building independence strategy which began in July of 1998. And we as a government are certainly enjoying the success with this strategy, but more importantly, Mr. Chairman, the people of . . . the people that are helped by this strategy are enjoying their own personal success.

And I want to just make a little note here from the numbers. We talked about the numbers, 88 consecutive months of decreasing numbers. And I want to say, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that behind every number is the face of someone who has returned to the workforce and gotten back their dignity as a productive human being.

And I believe that that's what our strategy is all about, is giving people the dignity, the right to work in the workforce, the right to have the supports that are necessary for them to return to the workforce and still have all of the things that they need to raise children and to live in dignity.

I want to also quote . . . we have wonderful quotes made by the member from Saskatoon Greystone from an Edmonton paper, and I think they're very, very indicative of the success and of perhaps some of the jealousy that other provinces feel in the success that Saskatchewan has had in reducing its rate of child poverty. And I suggest that they could soon join with us if they were willing to employ similar strategies and to invest a few more of the taxpayers' dollars in a strategy that is so necessary to help children.

But I want to quote from the Minister of Social Services, from April 15, 2002, and remind everyone of what our key message in this is. And that is, he quotes . . . or I quote:

. . . what you have to do is to look at those things that you do that provide supports to enable low-income families to enable themselves to achieve the most desirable form . . . (most desirable from) income security, which is a job.

(15:15)

And that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is a quote from *Hansard* of April 15, and I think that sums up very nicely what we're all about, and what it is that we are trying to accomplish for the people of Saskatchewan.

Well certainly this is not a brand new program. It began in 1998, which is how we've been able to rack up 88 consecutive months of declining numbers of people on assistance. And I just want to highlight again the . . . some of the elements that go into the building independence program and some of the very necessary elements that are so helpful to people.

The Saskatchewan employment supplement, I think, is one of the finest elements in this program, in that it is a payment that supplements income earned by lower-income parents from wages, self-employment, and child and spousal maintenance payments. And what this does, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is to allow and to assist parents for the child related costs of going to work. And it actually supports their decision to work. And for families on social assistance, it helps them to move from dependence on social assistance into the workforce.

Many times we understand that there's a barrier to people who want to get into a job because they have needs that could not be met by a minimum wage or a part-time job in the workforce. And they have been on social assistance and they are entitled to benefits; they are entitled to health benefits for their children and, to a degree, for themselves; and they're entitled to assistance in other ways. And moving into the workforce, with . . . in the absence of these child benefit and the health benefit that is provided, would make it very difficult for them to move into the workforce and give up those very important needs that their children have.

And so this is a very important aspect of the building independence program because it tops up what they're able to make in the workforce so that they have a subsistence level and also it — the other leg of that, the child benefit or the health benefit — allows them to live on that wage with the help of the employment supplement and still be able to provide the necessary health care that their family needs.

The provincial training allowance is certainly something that indeed is another piece of the dignity that people are able to acquire by enrolling in these programs. People who are able to go back to school, to be able to support their families, to be able to acquire student assistance, so that they can go to school.

They can have child care that helps them with being able to be a full-time student. They can get assistance with their student loans or the money that's required for them to enrol. They have the ability and the security of knowing that they can feed their children, that their housing needs will be met. And all this time that they're doing that and going to school, they're securing their own future.

And this gives a tremendous sense of dignity to perhaps a single parent or a student who might have dropped out of school too early and has been living on subsistence wages or perhaps has reverted to social assistance. And to be able to move into that education field, be able to prepare themselves for a meaningful, well-paying career in the workforce, this is a benefit that I think is probably one of the most important for employable people — to be able to get that education and get into the workforce and become self-sufficient.

There's a tremendous sense of pride that comes with going back to school, having somebody help you to do that, and coming out of it many times with an honour or a very notable mark in their schooling career. Because in many cases they're adult students or mature students and they have a very great sense of why it is that they're going back to school. And in many cases they're going back to school so that they can provide a decent standard of living for their children.

As I said, the Saskatchewan Child Benefit assists lower-income families with the cost of raising children. It's paid to eligible families on behalf of each child under 18 and provides for basic food and clothing and personal needs. And it further reasserts the government's commitment to keeping working families in the workforce and reducing financial barriers.

I want to say, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that families that are eligible for support in any of these three strategies are automatically registered for family health benefits. So you don't have to make a bunch of phone calls and do a lot of application forms. If you've filed your income tax and you're eligible, you're going to be automatically registered in the family health benefit. So that is a very important part of the strategy as well.

And these family health benefits include, but are not limited to, drug and dental and optometric coverage. And as part of the building independence initiative, all the health care costs for children and some of them . . . some of the health care costs for parents or guardians are covered under family health benefits.

So as the previous speaker said, the member from Saskatoon Greystone, we have the Saskatchewan employment supplement, the Saskatchewan Child Benefit, and Saskatchewan health benefits. And together, all of those things help to improve the ability of people to move off of social assistance and into the workforce. And it most certainly has shown and proven its worth in that we have had, as I said earlier, 88 consecutive months of decreasing the numbers of families on social assistance. And I'm certainly proud of that strategy.

I think that our strategy and our philosophy is a more integrated, holistic approach to building the capacities that individuals and families need for independence and self-reliance. It emphasizes the principles of inclusion and citizenship. People want to be able to look after themselves. I think we're all quite fiercely independent if we're given the tools and the opportunity to be so.

People who leave social assistance . . . who leave the system and can get onto work, no longer need social assistance from the government. And in many cases this actually breaks the cycle of dependence.

We've all heard about how quite . . . how the numbers are greater, the chances are greater that a child will end up on social assistance if he's been raised . . . he or she has been raised in a family that was dependent upon social assistance. So if you can break that cycle, if you can get the parents working and the children live in better conditions, are more likely to be educated, are more likely to be able to make their own way in their world and that cycle becomes broken.

And what a compassionate way to break it as compared to what we have heard from the opposition and indeed from the Leader of the Opposition. And I have here a Thursday, March 21, 2002 article from the *Humboldt Journal* where the Saskatchewan Party was discussing its plans to reverse the population decline. And when he was asked certain questions about the labour force, the Leader of the Opposition said, and I'm quoting here:

The party, he continued, would also change labour laws to encourage outside investment in the province, he said, and

get employable people living on social assistance back into the workplace by imposing a "D-Day" on their assistance cheques.

Now I certainly have no idea what a D-Day is. I think it means certain things in war circles. It means certain things in other circles. But I'm wondering, does D-Day mean de-insure? Does D-Day mean deport? Does D-Day mean disallow? Does D-Day mean degradation? What does D-Day mean . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . All of the above, says the hon. member from Moose Jaw North. Well I . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Yes, defeat for the Leader of the Opposition.

So anyway, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it's certainly a contrast I might say between this government's record on reducing the number of families dependent on social assistance and the opposition's plan for dehumanising perhaps the people who are living on social assistance and who are wanting desperately to come off and to be independent.

And I think that our government certainly has the good record and that the people of Saskatchewan will trust us to continue with our record.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Jones: — Now I think it's important to note that although those are all very good accomplishments and we're very proud of them, we're not stopping there, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

We are continuing with our 2002-2003 budget to continue with the income security redesign and we have grand plans to proceed with that.

Now the first phase, as the previous speaker has said, has resulted in 4,600 fewer families relying on social assistance and I think that's certainly a record to be proud of.

Service delivery changes were introduced last year in Yorkton and Regina, and those changes were subsequently expanded to Saskatoon. And over the course of the next fiscal year these services will be offered in Department of Social Services offices throughout the province with the exception of northern offices where planning of service delivery is still underway.

But early results of the new services indicate that 30 per cent . . . that 30 to 40 per cent of those booked to jobs first secure employment — 30 to 40 per cent of the people who look to our program for help actually are able to secure employment after being booked to jobs first. Clients have certainly expressed positive opinions about our first-step services and of course the result of that is that fewer people need to apply for social assistance.

In 2002 and '03 additional job supports will be available for families, for youth at risk, and for people with disabilities. And I think that's an important area that we need to continually look at and refine and try to assist people with disabilities to get the job supports that they require in order to be effective and able people in our workforce.

So the services under consideration for families and youth at risk and people with disabilities include things like job mining,

job coaching, mentorship, post-employment supports, on-the-job training, community connections and linkages to help them with mentors and people who can help them get into the workforce.

The income security redesign is moving forward and we're certainly working on improving supports in the following policy directions and these include child care; child care including early childhood development which of course is another one of the important programs of our government in helping children get out of the lower-income and sometimes abusive, sometimes not very productive family situation — getting them the supports that they need that they can grow up and be healthy, productive members of our society. Emphasis on healthy.

So looking at policy directions in child care, we're looking at improved standard and . . . an improved standard and affordability of housing — housing is a very important issue to people who are having a hard time making a go of it — and certainly our income supports are very helpful to them.

We're looking at how adequate our supports are. And I think it's always important to review your progress, to see where you've been, where you might want to go. And I think the review process tells you how to get there. And I think that's terribly important.

We're looking at expanded employment and training supports.

(15:30)

The government is also looking at opportunities and supports available for people with disabilities. I mentioned that, how important it is for them to be able as opposed to being disabled. I think they need to be assisted to be able — able participants of society, able in our workforce — and many times it's simply a matter of making some adjustments that allow them to be very productive in the workforce.

We want to support youth. Youth sometimes get a real bad rap in our society and many times it's just a matter of extending a helping hand, of being understanding of their needs and helping them through a difficult time, and certainly supporting them to make sure that they have an education. And skills to join the workforce will go a long way to reducing some of the outcry against what people think is unreasonable amounts of crime in our province. But they need some help to get to where they need to go.

We always have to keep our eye on northern initiatives and on every community, and we're doing that, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

And we also need to take a look at increased federal investment in basic children's benefits. Certainly the federal program has been very helpful and very complementary to our Saskatchewan program but they should not, by any means, rest on their laurels. There is much to be done and we're happy to help them remember that little fact.

I want to move a little bit too because many times people, people look at social assistance and think that it's an inner city, urban issue. And many times it is. But helping families is not

just about inner city, urban issues. And our government is very, very proactive in this area. We have an aggressive agenda in our 2002-3 budget and more money is being added to Saskatchewan employment supplement to accommodate the increased participation in the program.

And Mr. . . . I mean the member from Saskatoon Greystone was talking about the increased participation in the program. And that isn't because more people are living in poverty, that's because more people are learning about the program, are becoming aware of the program, and after having filed their income tax return, in many cases are automatically eligible for one of the prongs of the program. But certainly more money is being invested by our province into the employment support program.

We are going to be adding \$200,000 to the Legal Aid Commission to increase maintenance enforcement for single parents, and that's an important issue when you're talking about building independence and about all of the, all of the issues that face people who are struggling. And maintenance is an issue. And better enforcement . . . legislation is coming from Justice that will assist in that, plus money is coming from the department to increase maintenance enforcement for single parents.

We have job services for families — \$400,000 is being put in there to assist multi-barriered families on social assistance to secure and maintain employment. Job coaches will be available and they can provide a variety of job services, including job mining, post-employment supports, job mentoring and coaching. So there's \$1.28 million is going to be going into that particular area of employment supports.

We have increased funding in our budget for child care — 500,000 for a \$70 per month increase in the centre grant, from 680 to 750; 750,000 for new child care spaces; 450,000 to increase grants that support the inclusion of children and families with special needs.

And again we talk about special needs, we talk about enabling people, and certainly this is part of it. We are certainly going to be looking at increased funding for career and employment community-based organizations and individualized funding for home care services for people with disabilities.

But the other, the other part that I said I wanted to talk about is what have we done to increase the program's effectiveness for farm families. And I think that this is an important aspect of the program as well because many times the income support that's necessary in the cities and in the inner cities is also necessary in the rural areas. And many times it's so very directly related to the practice of farming and to the success or lack of success or the drought.

And so our government looked at that and said perhaps there's a better way that we can handle this. So just by . . . In the past, in 2001-2, the department reviewed this issue of Saskatchewan employment supplement eligibility for farmers. And while the supplement is not intended to provide farm industry support, the department found that the program rules sometimes excluded farm families that could reasonably be defined as low income.

With the declining profitability of family farming, the practice of Saskatchewan employment supplement eligible income at 40 per cent of gross farm income sometimes provided an unreliable indication of disposable family income.

So in 2001-2 a new method of determining the supplement eligibility was introduced for low-income farm and small-business families, allowing them to define net eligible income as either 25 per cent or 40 per cent of gross income — whichever one provides the greater benefit. And this has certainly helped to restore equity in the program's treatment of farm and non-farm programs.

So again, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we're looking at many times inner city families but also small town and rural families are an important component of this government's plan to create . . . to build independence and create healthy and productive homes.

So on that note, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'm happy to stand in my place. I'm very happy to second the motion from the member from Saskatoon Greystone. I think that our government's record is sound on this. Our government's record is the envy of the OECD, some British MPs (Member of Parliament). It is certainly the subject of discussion in an Alberta paper. And I think that it is nothing short of a miracle to have reduced consistently — 88 months in a row — the rate . . . the number of families on social assistance. And I'm proud of the record of our government.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to take a few moments to respond to the motion or speak to the motion that's before this Assembly regarding the building independence program that the government is applauding, and the endeavour that they are creating to actually help move people or assist people in moving from dependence to independence.

And having said that, Mr. Speaker, I would like to applaud the government for finally realizing and seeing the light and becoming aware of the fact that any individual, regardless of who they are, would just as soon be living independently rather than totally dependent on somebody else.

And, Mr. Speaker, I think when we talk about dependence, unfortunately there are individuals in our society who have to look to government for some assistance due to factors beyond their control, whether it's disabilities or what have you.

And I believe and my colleagues believe that governments need to be there to assist individuals of that nature and to make sure that they're cared for and that they are treated with respect and have the dignity that they, that they rightfully deserve in regards to their livelihoods.

But, Mr. Speaker, when we look at this motion before us and the building independence program for all . . . in all due respect really is what one would have to call a positive program. However as we will find, Mr. Speaker, as we get into further debate with the Minister of Social Services, there are a number

of areas, a number of questions that need to be raised in regards to not only the program but, Mr. Speaker, the way the department operates and functions.

And we talk about . . . the member from Greystone, the member from Meewasin talk about the reduction of some 5,500 caseloads off the welfare rolls in . . . or the assistance rolls in the province of Saskatchewan over the last eight years, with some 10,000 children not relying on assistance any more, Mr. Speaker . . . or Deputy Speaker.

However if that's the case, Mr. Deputy Speaker — and the members opposite argue about the member from Rosetown and my colleagues talking about actually reducing expenditures in this department — one would have to ask why over the last eight years we've actually seen an increase of almost \$100 million expenditure in the Department of Social Services if we're doing such a good job of putting people into job opportunities and assisting them and helping them move from the roles of need and dependency on the province to independence.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, if we're really moving them into an independent role, if they're actually moving into areas of employment where they are not relying on the taxpayer, then it would rightfully seem that there should be reductions in the department rather than increases.

And the members, both the member from Greystone and the member of Meewasin, brought out the fact that the member from Rosetown-Biggan talked about in . . . a reduction of \$50 million.

Well I would like to, I would like to ask the members if they've actually looked at the estimates in this current budget fiscal year. And they both talked about — and I'm sure all their government colleagues agreed with them — they both talked about the need to have income supports for those who need assistance to make sure we meet those needs. But right in the Estimates on page 100, income support programs in this document, there's a reduction of \$26 million there already.

So I'm not sure exactly what the government members are complaining about. Their own document is showing that there's a reduction in the expenditures in this department, and unfortunately most of it is coming in income supports to the very people, the families and the children in need.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, if indeed the government is doing such a fine job, one would have to ask, one would have to ask, Mr. Deputy Speaker, why is the food bank still struggling? Why are they continually looking for support and looking for the food and . . . to meet the needs of the people who continue to come and seek their services?

Why is the organization, the Souls Harbour Mission, continuing to meet the needs of so many families through a feeding program each day in this city of Regina? In fact, Mr. Speaker, just chatting with a number of individuals who are quite involved in the mission, that lately they've really found it to be getting very tight for the foods that they would need to provide the feeding for . . . the meal programs that they provide on a daily basis.

And I guess we've listened to two members of the government opposite. I'm certain some other . . . many others will plan . . . are planning on standing and applauding their building independence program. But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, there's some significant questions that need to be answered.

If we have moved people from assistance to independence and given them the tools with which to find some quality employment so that they can provide for themselves totally, then why do we continue to see the need for the food bank program and the different programs that charitable organizations like Souls Harbour are doing to meet the needs of individuals who are lacking and, as a result, seek the services of these programs?

Mr. Speaker, just the other day we met with the members of SARC, Saskatchewan Association of Rehabilitation Centres. Here's an organization that is reaching out and assisting people, especially individuals with disabilities, to feel like they have some independence in trying to meet their needs. But, Mr. Speaker, we talk about . . . They were telling us of the problems they are facing with the amount of funding they need for the program to continue to exist, for the opportunity for them to actually assist people in . . . who need their services.

(15:45)

We've talked to community-based organizations, Mr. Deputy Speaker, who find that they're having difficulty employing individuals with the skills that are needed to meet the needs of a number of the disability . . . people on disabilities that they provide services for.

And, Mr. Speaker, when we look at the building independence program, certainly my colleagues and I do not have a problem with assisting people from dependence to independence. We all believe in that. We feel very strongly that we need to work to give people a greater opportunity to provide for themselves and feeling fulfilled in their own lives, in their own well-being and to look after their families. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I don't know of any parent who does not want to have the opportunity or feel that they are able to provide for the needs of their families.

But every time we turn around, the government talks about their employment programs and I believe just last year the government talked about a work first program and their implementation of this work first program and I believe what it says is, it's placement of jobs first, pilots matching low-income people directly to jobs. And this was a program that was commenced last year. And it'll be interesting to see what that program has done to actually assist people.

We talk about . . . When we talk about jobs first or skills training benefits — and I believe those are necessary if we're going to assist people moving from assistance into independence — but when we talk about those programs, I noticed by an order of the Assembly to a question that was posed to the Assembly on April 4, that the work placement program is now eliminated, the skills training benefit program has been reduced by \$2.2 million. And that came directly from the minister.

And both members that just spoke in this Assembly talked

about how those programs are working well and how the need to provide skills training and yet all of a sudden the work placement program is now eliminated and the skills training benefit program is reduced by \$2.2 million.

So we need to know exactly what happened there. Or was the reduction maybe in the Department of Social Services but has that moved into another department and so the expenditure is still there but it just . . . as far as the Department of Social Services, their numbers look better?

Mr. Speaker, it's important that we realize that the need to work with people, to assist them actually into a real job opportunity.

When we talk about building independence income security . . . and I'm quoting from the Social Services annual report:

(The program is to) Work with individuals . . . toward preparation for and linkage to jobs.

And it says:

In this way, all Saskatchewan people may enjoy prosperity, opportunity, security, and an improved quality of life as a result of full participation in a growing provincial economy.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I have to ask you, where is that growing provincial economy?

We agree, you need the job opportunities, but the job opportunities are only going to be there if we indeed have a growing provincial economy. But what have we seen over the last . . . the last few years — in fact, the last few months? Is this economy growing? Mr. Deputy Speaker, have we seen jobs increase in the province of Saskatchewan? No, we haven't.

In fact, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in the 1999 election, the NDP went into that election and promised the people of Saskatchewan that if elected, if re-elected they would create 30,000 new jobs or we would see the creation of 30,000 new jobs in the province of Saskatchewan over the next short period of time.

But the statistics show us that actually, Mr. Speaker, rather than a creation of, we have lost almost 30,000 jobs — 24,800 jobs have been lost in the province of Saskatchewan. So one has to ask if indeed we're going to meet the needs of people who would like to move to independence, we need to have job opportunities for those individuals. And not just a minimum-wage job, because a minimum-wage job in many cases . . . in most cases, Mr. Deputy Speaker, does not even put the equivalent amount of funds in a person's pocket that they could receive on assistance.

And that's why, over the period of years when people have looked at going to find a job, they've decided . . . once they found a job, the one that was available and happened to be a minimum wage or barely above, and they looked at what they had left after they'd paid their rent and all the other fees and provided for food and clothing, they had less to work with than they did on assistance. And therefore, there wasn't a lot of incentive to move into the workplace and to actually gain . . .

find gainful employment.

And so therefore, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I could say . . . when you talk about the independence program and the implementation of the Saskatchewan employment supplement, I think that was a positive move. But I think it should be considered a positive move in view of assisting someone, if the first opportunity they have is a low-income job, of supplementing until they get the job training or the skills training or the opportunity to move ahead in life.

And so in some ways, that program is probably assisting some people who would probably never have moved off assistance and their dependence on the people of Saskatchewan to provide for them.

But, Mr. Speaker, coming back to creating real job opportunities. Mr. Speaker, this government rather than just bragging about people leaving dependence, we need to begin to look at where they're going to. Did the numbers go down because people just finally left the province? They got tired? They get fed up with a government that every time they turned around just kept taxing or taking away from them — such as we're seeing with the senior population in the province right now? Or did people just get tired of the fact that they were running around in circles and going nowhere because the government doesn't seem to have a vision for growth in the province of Saskatchewan?

Mr. Speaker, if we're really going to assist people, we're going to have to build job opportunities. We're going to have to have a vision to grow the province of Saskatchewan.

It's important that we begin to look at ways in which we can grow Saskatchewan. It's important that we begin to look at methods and at our taxation programs that hinder the creation of job, real job opportunities by focusing and discouraging corporate entities and businesses from really establishing in the province that would create the quality jobs so that people could look at moving from dependence to independence.

And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I think it's important that they . . . that, as elected officials, we don't just look at how we can create opportunities for people to depend on the taxpayer, depend on government.

And as I listen to the member from Greystone and the member from Saskatoon Meewasin, they were almost talking of . . . well they were bragging about how their building independence program supposedly has worked and moved people off assistance. On the other hand, if you listen to their speeches very clearly, it almost talked . . . they were almost basically talking about how well they were doing at bringing people on to assistance.

The member from Saskatoon Greystone said . . . invited people to call his office if they weren't . . . if they thought they might qualify for the Saskatchewan employment supplement program. And the member from Regina northwest, the member from . . . if he was listening to the member from Saskatoon Greystone, he would have heard the member from Saskatoon Greystone inviting people to call his office just in case they might qualify for the Saskatchewan employment supplement.

Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I think, if people wanted to, they would be calling. But I think people don't want to be living off the taxpayer. They want to be dependent, living on their own, and they just want the opportunity for some real job creation and job opportunities and quality jobs that give them the ability to go out and find gainful employment to provide for their families.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I think it's important that this government then really take a look at what they are doing to create the economic climate in this province that would create job opportunities, rather than the government doing all the job creation, allowing the business community, allowing the corporate sector, even outside of this province . . . is look at this province as the place to invest in. Because I believe this is an excellent province. I believe this is a great province.

In fact, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I believe it was the member from Saskatoon Greystone a few years ago when we were . . . actually we were on the verge of moving into an era of really developing the uranium industry and the job opportunities that would have evolved from the development of that uranium industry, opposed any development in that sector.

And it's unfortunate, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because had we moved forward and rather than, rather than just being the hewer of wood and the drawer of water, mining our uranium and sending outside of our province for further development, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we could have created the jobs here. We could have created the opportunities.

And we would have created quality jobs in . . . right throughout Saskatchewan so that we could actually see a greater reduction of people living on assistance. So that at the end of the day, the only need for assistance would be for those who truly needed it because they had no other alternative.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I believe job creation and growth in this province is important. And therefore I move an amendment to the motion, seconded by the member from Estevan:

That the following words be added to the motion after "social assistance":

"but urges the government to finally recognize that the best social program is a job and to abandon its negative economic policies that have led to negative economic growth and job creation."

I so move.

Ms. Eagles: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am pleased to stand today and enter debate on this motion that was put forth by the member from Saskatoon Greystone, his motion being to endorse the building independence program.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I, as well as my colleagues, have some grave concerns regarding the structure and responsibility of this program. It would be of interest on this side to receive information as to what happened to the people no longer on assistance. As your motion claims the reduction of 5,000 families on assistance, did these people actually find

employment, or is it because of the out-migration that these families needing assistance have decreased? Are they part of the continuous stream of people leaving this province, Mr. Deputy Speaker? Or did nearly 5,000 families find jobs in the workplace?

Just where do these numbers come from? Perhaps some could have been channelled over to education, as once they are in training they are no longer social services statistics.

As well, Mr. Speaker, or Mr. Deputy Speaker, when saying that tens of thousands of Saskatchewan families were assisted, are we talking two or three or more tens of thousands? And if the number of families requiring assistance is that high, Mr. Speaker, how did we ever reach that point?

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is very important that the people are independent and become part of the workforce. But many times when people don't have a lot of training and work at minimum wage jobs, they make less dollars at those jobs than they did when they were completely reliant on social services. So it is very discouraging for them. It is also very important that people have access to training so that they can qualify for employment that provides a reasonable quality of living.

But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, perhaps most important is the fact that people, once they are trained, that they have a job to go to, a job here in Saskatchewan. We have to start by growing our economy, having an attractive business climate, making our personal tax exemptions comparable with our neighbouring provinces so that people will come here, invest in our province, start businesses which in turn provide employment for the people of this province.

StatsCanada population figures show that we are above the national average until the age of 25 years. Then people leave this province when they are in their very productive years, the years where they pay the taxes that allow social programs to happen. They leave. So we must find ways to keep them after we educate them, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

According to the 2001 StatsCanada figures, Saskatchewan has the lowest population in over 20 years. Also we have seen thousands of jobs lost in the past couple years. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, this is from a government that in 1999 promised to create 30,000 new jobs over four years. So the NDP really have no problem in making promises, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but they certainly have a very hard time in keeping the promises.

And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the member from Meewasin was talking about farm families. And I am a farmer myself — my husband and I have farmed for many years — and farmers don't want or expect social assistance. They want the barriers removed that prevent expansion into value added, and then the government won't have to subsidize them.

(16:00)

And it was interesting when the member from Meewasin was talking about how the farmers can get assistance from the government . . . And this is the same government that upped the crop insurance premium, removed spot loss hail, and also took away the 25 per cent rebate on the education tax portion of their

land taxes. And now this same member talks about receiving social assistance from their government. Well farmers don't want that. Rest assured, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I know I can speak for many of them.

In closing, Mr. Deputy Speaker, my colleagues are aware that there are ways that can be . . . we can assist lower-income families to better themselves and that all options should be looked at. And therefore I am pleased to second the amendment put forth by my colleague, the member from Moosomin. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Hamilton: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am extremely pleased to be able to support the motion before the Assembly to endorse the building independence program, and also to speak against the amendment as posed by the member opposite — not for the idea that he is encompassing in his amendment to state that the best way to have people be involved in the economy with dignity is to provide jobs, but because this isn't something that we finally discovered, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It's something that we saw go terribly awry in the '80s with unemployment numbers skyrocketing, people leaving the province in record numbers, and, I believe, that member being a part of a government who believed in a trickle-down theory of the economy.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that we should be supporting with full hearts the thrust of the motion, providing support for a program that assists tens of thousands of Saskatchewan families and to date has reduced the number of people receiving assistance by nearly 5,000 with more than 10,000 fewer children living in families that are growing up in the social assistance cycle, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

So that in essence speaks to the kinds of things that the member opposite says when we're moving people from dependence to independence, but not saying to them that once you do that you become a member of the working poor and all of your assistance that's provided to you drops away and somehow you fall off the edge of a cliff. That leads you to be very frustrated and to feel very isolated and feel it's better to be back on an assistance program with the kind of supports that would be presented to them there.

So it is allowing people to see the benefits of the program, to reach out for employment opportunities, but to stay there.

And also it is for those people who, through no fault of their own, are employed in jobs that might now lead them to be looking at assistance programs to say, why am I not there instead of trying to slog my way through a job that's not providing the kinds of supports and strengths that I need for my children and my family. This program is also avoiding people having to come onto social assistance rolls.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this is all about providing dignity to people, dignity to families, and particularly to have children live in families where that is provided to them, and the supports are in place that they have a quality of life that we all appreciate and recognize as important to healthy families in our communities.

The background to this program, Mr. Deputy Speaker, goes back many years in my life. And I know there have been other opportunities in the Assembly where I've mentioned in debate that this goes back to the years that I was working as a member of Regina City Council.

During 1980s, Mr. Deputy Speaker, many, many people from the community were coming forward and presenting briefs to us concerning hungry children and families in poverty.

They wanted us to take an in-depth look at the issue, and therefore, we constituted a board of inquiry into hunger and poverty. And I was a member of that board of inquiry, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

After many, many hearings, we could not believe what we were seeing as a result of the policies of the Tories in the '80s in this province. But we could also, on the other hand, not believe that we were hearing from the likes of Jack Klein, a Conservative minister at the time, who said that there were no hungry children in Saskatchewan. If you just ignored the problem or denied that it existed somehow it would go away.

Or the minister at the time who said that people who are hungry should just grow gardens like his wife did — we would all know that the name of that man is Mr. Grant Schmidt — and they had the ability to be a part of a rural community who would have garden plots and an ability to grow some food for their families.

But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, what if you are a single parent, living in a core of a city, in an apartment? Do you have the same ability to grow a garden and feed your family as a rural farm person might have? I think not, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

What would lead us to believe that the members opposite — although they've changed their names — would be any different from the Conservative policies that they sat beside, that they supported, they provided advice to, particularly the member opposite from Estevan? I have no hope that their viewpoints or their ideas would change, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

And in fact another member has mentioned, and I quote from the Humboldt *Journal*, that Hermanson said that his party . . . he would continue to:

. . . change labour laws to encourage outside investment in the province . . .

But he also said:

. . . get employable people living on social assistance back . . . (to work) by imposing a "D-day" on their assistance cheques.

We've seen that before, Mr. Speaker. We saw, during those years in the '80s, about 300 or more ways that you would have people cut off social assistance. And where would they end up, Mr. Deputy Speaker? At the food banks, in poverty, living off the avails of prostitution and other things.

And somehow the members in those days didn't see the connection, and I'm not hearing the members today seeing the

same connection to hunger and poverty and many of these issues either, from some of the comments that they've made before in this Assembly.

And I certainly haven't heard the commitment when they said that they would look at reducing the Social Services budget by \$50 million. All this does, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is to say, we will try and put out the fraud squad once again.

Now I don't know if any members in this Assembly remember the fraud squad, but it was people armed with cameras and following people around with lists of the many, many different ways you would be cut off social assistance. And what we found were there were people who were lined up at the appeals boards who lost their dignity, who had to go to great lengths to talk about how they could have any kind of support to dig themselves out from the bottom of the rolls, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Well not today. Not today, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It was under this government that the minister of Social Services, who's now our Premier, listened to the outcomes of the inquiry at Regina and the other communities who were saying the same kinds of things. And the recommendations that were put forward were presented in the new building to independence strategy.

We now have circumstances that are beginning to turn things around. This is a strategy that has received national and international recognition. And with what results, Mr. Deputy Speaker? Declines in social assisting caseloads for 88 straight months.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, put that alongside of the kinds of things that I mentioned, in the ways that people were cut off social assistance and living in the depths of poverty, trying to appeal to people to give them to support, trying to appeal to the government at the time to feed their children or find them a job. Put that beside a decline in social assistance caseloads for 88 straight months, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Hamilton: — Not only that, the numbers of children living in poverty has dropped by 30 per cent.

And we look at the report cards of people who keep an eye on these things across the country, they will tell you that we've been leading the country for three straight years in this area, that we're seeing the reduction of numbers of children living in poverty in negative figures for three straight years in this province. That is why, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'm more than pleased that I would be there with this government to make an even greater investment in the building to independent strategy.

Building independence, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is more than a series of programs. It is a philosophy. It's a way of thinking about these things that is geared more toward integrated holistic approaches to building the capacities of individuals and families and their need for independence and self-reliance. It's one way to look at life that says that we emphasize the principles of inclusion and citizenship in all of our communities in this great province. And it's one that recognizes each individual has both the right to a reasonable opportunity, be part of economic and

community life, and has an obligation to contribute to the fullest extent of their abilities.

Building independence is a way we support families in not only just one way, but in so many different ways. And that's why I'm pleased that I'm part of a government that sees the whole picture and understands the interrelatedness between not only the building to independent strategy but the areas where we also invest in families.

\$1.3 million more for the Saskatchewan employment supplement as part of building to independence. This program helps families leave assistance to the world of work and, just as importantly, makes it worthwhile for people to stay working and off of assistance.

One of the members opposite said, well, how can you do that? We see in your budget you're reducing the numbers of dollars available. Well of course, Mr. Deputy Speaker, when you look at the numbers for 88 straight months where the caseloads are dropping, you can assume that your program is working. You can make assumptions that you're able to help even a fraction of those people, that you're being able to then reduce some of the dollars available to that program. And we estimate that would be about \$15 million worth of savings. That's reflected in our budget.

That's a very good number, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because it reflects the optimism of our province and the people who are becoming involved in this program being off assistance and into economic opportunity and employment in the province.

The other comment the member made was the national benefit program for children and he's wondering why we're reducing the numbers in that program. Well we could all tell him if he took the time to ask us, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that because we were in the forefront of developing that program — one of the first new social programs in this country in more than 50 years — because we were in the forefront of development of that program and all of the pieces were in place, we decided upfront to put our money where our mouth was. And until the national government was ready to put their share on the table, we put our share and theirs there too, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

What we're seeing now is over the years, as the federal government is making their commitment to this program, that we're able then to take that money that the federal government's putting in and use that for further ways that we could support families and we could support the province of Saskatchewan, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

So it's easy as saying, we put all our money upfront, Mr. Deputy Speaker. As the federal government comes forward with their monies, we're able to take that money and put it into even more programs and services that help this great province.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Hamilton: — And as one of my colleagues would say, and we've all said, we invest in people in this province, Mr. Speaker.

Now other ways that we would support families who are using

the building to independence strategy might be to see an increase of about \$200,000 for legal aid to increase maintenance enforcement for single parents. A colleague of mine talked about how important that is because, Mr. Deputy Speaker, when you're looking to support a family and you're a single parent, you want the other member of that family to have the commitment and maintain that commitment, and we're seeking to do just that.

There's an investment of \$1.28 million in employment supports, including \$400,000 for families to secure and maintain employment, for job coaches, and mentoring; \$380,000 for young people and that will assist high-risk youth for adequate housing, on-the-job training, life skills, all with the focus of getting a job and keeping a job. I'd rather spend the money on this, Mr. Deputy Speaker, than I would on the proposals put forward by the members opposite to address high-risk youth — and that's boot camps.

(16:15)

Mr. Deputy Speaker, there's also \$500,000 more for people with disabilities who are currently receiving social assistance to gain attachment to the labour market. I applaud the member opposite for speaking about the SARC initiatives and things that people are doing to assist people with disabilities into the labour market.

But there's more than just one approach. And again I fail to see where they address this issue in a very holistic manner. On this side of the House, that's our commitment, to make certain that all of the pieces fit together and all of the supports are there for families.

There's an increase of \$1.7 million for child care. Included in this is a total of \$500,000 to increase the early childhood services grant from \$680 to \$750 a month, which means higher wages for daycare workers, Mr. Deputy Speaker; \$750,000 to develop 150 new child care spaces for families being diverted from welfare to employment.

Because of course, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it makes sense. When people are employed and they're able to work outside the home for pay, they need to be assured that their children are looked after. The community looks at that and says that there are daycare spaces available to them.

There's also a \$450,000 increase for grants that support children with special needs. There will also be funding for 15 special needs buses to provide transportation for our disabled citizens.

And you can see our municipalities talking about how important that is. Because of course people who are going to be employed, they're going to be off social assistance, they're going to need transportation, they're going to need a way to get to their job. And we're committed to being able to provide greater assistance in that way through the special needs transportation grants, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

What do all these investments have in common? They are all intended to support people's ability to attach themselves to the labour market. And it makes the amendment by the member

opposite redundant.

Because we have not just seen that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, when you look at this budget but budgets before. Each and every year we've been able to increase the budget for those people who need greater assistance in our communities, not just to keep them at the bottom or to see ways we can drop them off the social assistance rolls by cutting them off of assistance payments, but by actively working with them to get them into employment and to jobs and into an active involvement in our economy.

Investment in child care means parents have the freedom to work while knowing their child is receiving the best care possible in a safe environment. Disabled transit means that those with disabilities have another barrier removed to keep them from taking their rightful place in the job market. More than ever before, low-income people, the disabled, those who haven't been traditionally present in our labour force, now have the opportunity and the right environment to take their place in the job market.

By investing now we will be enabling people to have an independent, taxpaying citizen in our community. So each one of the people that we're assisting now have the road to independence, to pay taxes, to be contributing to our communities and our economy.

Another key of course is safe, affordable housing. And that is why the government is working with the federal government to develop a partnership to provide affordable, quality housing to low-income people. And I would say in the broader context of it all, that is also another building block in building independence. And it's the way we look at issues — encompass the whole array of quality of life supports that people need to get off the social assistance rolls.

This partnership along with the federal government will allow construction of 1,000 new housing units in urban and northern areas, in addition to 3,200 . . . or I'm sorry, 32,000 homes constructed already in Saskatchewan. We are eliminating the barriers to employment and providing tools for self-reliance.

Now a colleague has mentioned that they're probably against that too. Well I would say their record speaks for themselves. We put forward these programs, we put forward these ideas in the budget, and I have never seen a member stand up and say, I support that. They vote against it. Consistently they've been voting against these measures and when they're formulating their budget what do they say — \$50 million less.

But in important areas like education and health, what do they say? As someone mentioned, the Popsicle party says freeze. We'll freeze those because we're going to give people major tax reductions and we can't afford to support people like this any longer. That's their party platform.

I urge them the next election to take that out and see what people think of a Popsicle party who freezes education, freezes health care, freezes all areas of the government that are so important to people, including seniors housing that we have been debating at great length in this Assembly.

As much as the members opposite love to complain and moan about taxes, there are many Saskatchewan citizens, Mr. Deputy Speaker, who would love the opportunity to pay taxes. These investments will create even more taxpayers to support our social programs.

Well building independence is not only just a strategy we talk about and the program that we love to support today. It's also being able to talk about for the fifth straight year Saskatchewan residents see their personal income taxes go down as well. In 2002, an average Saskatchewan family will pay almost one-third less in income tax than in 1993 — one-third. That's greater than any promise I've heard from the members opposite. And I know that they couldn't deliver on the way their tax cuts have been formatted.

So let's not lose sight of the fact that the tax reform in Saskatchewan means that 55,000 low-income earners have been taken right off the tax rolls altogether.

We have also invested in those who do the work at the grassroots level providing services to the most vulnerable in our communities — those that work in community-based organizations. The government knows that CBOs (community-based organization) have a challenge in recruiting and retaining their valued staff, and we've responded in the past by increasing CBO wages by 23 per cent between 1997 and '98, and 2001 and 2002. We're going to continue along this path by increasing funding for wages to CBOs another 4.5 per cent.

I know that CBO workers want a multi-year commitment, Mr. Deputy Speaker, however, the financial situation in this province is . . . and the way we're addressing that, the only multi-year commitment that I could be making at this point, would be that . . . one that neither I or the CBOs in our communities would find acceptable. And they are working with us to see that we're able to have people who work in these areas as well and provide dignity and supports to people living in our communities.

This budget doesn't forget the needs of high-risk children and the building to independence strategy doesn't neglect them either. There is \$2.1 million increase for foster care and services for at-risk children.

Some of the most at-risk youth in our province are those who are exploited in our streets. While we've introduced legislation to deal with this repugnant crime, this budget also includes new money to provide services for these victims, most notably 300,000 for a new safe house in Regina.

We were questioned about why there's more money in the budget for social assistance if we're seeing people taken off the rolls, and then people say well why is there less money on the line for this certain area. And I've explained that.

But to say there's more money is because there's more emphasis on programs like building independence, but it also is more money for programs and services that will address some of the serious needs we have, particularly the repugnant issue of exploitation of children on the streets of our communities.

Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we also know that building

independence also talks about nutritional issues, parenting skills, adult education, cultural activities that are provided in the schools. And most importantly, this concept allows teachers to teach and the freedom to teach about these issues and provide those kinds of supports. And I include them in building independence because it's further supports for families. It's at school and where children are that they learn these kinds of needs that are important to all families to make them healthy families in their community.

And while I'm on that subject, I would also put in the very good program that we've developed and worked with the community to come forward and expand our community schools and the School^{PLUS} program that's tackling these issues to ensure that children have the ability to get the most out of their education.

These are all building blocks. They're all cornerstones that support the building to independence strategy. You can't say one without the other because they all have an impact. They all build to the kinds of numbers we've seen — 88 straight months of reductions in numbers of people living on social assistance.

And that's why I'm not voting for the amendment that's been put forward because the members opposite, I don't think, understand that we're already there. Maybe they need to get to a new place in this issue or it's just come to the light for them.

But consistently in what we've been doing around this strategy since 1998 would be all included in what's needed to help to build to independence in our society. At the end of the day, Mr. Deputy Speaker, this is what this program is really all about. By meeting the short-term challenges that we face today, we're making Saskatchewan the province of opportunity for tomorrow. We're investing in education and economic development and in health of families.

The building to independence program invests in these as well and they're doing it through three key areas where information is readily available. I would note that the department has developed some very good informational pamphlets that people could access if they want to know more about the building blocks for this one particular program.

There's the provincial training allowance and some very good information that says:

Saskatchewan is investing in its people and taking a leadership role in the country by introducing a series of unique programs. These programs will provide income and training supports to lower-income families and they will significantly change the social assistance program so that it assists rather than prevents families in making the leap from dependence to the workforce.

And here's just one part of that, the provincial training allowance. It's a monthly allowance for students enrolled in adult basic education or related courses. The allowance assists lower-income families or families receiving social assistance to move into the workforce. Much good information available on the provincial training allowance.

Now the other or the second pillar in this program, the employment supplement, I've already talked a lot about and

I've already talked about where we're projecting this will go. But the employment supplement is something that the member opposite referred to without even knowing that he was talking about it.

It's a monthly payment that supplements the income earned by lower-income parents from wages, self-employment, and child-spousal maintenance payments. This supplement assists parents with the child related costs of going to work and supports their decision to work.

For families on social assistance it helps them to move from dependence on social assistance into the workforce. And it's also a part of the program that allow them to avoid going on social assistance if they happen to be coming into a workforce that allows them a working-poor wage — brings them up; it's a top-up. It tops up your income to a subsistence level.

The program encourages people who have the opportunity to work more to take that opportunity and retains the security of their assistance benefits. And this began in July of 1998.

It takes a number of years from the time that Regina City Council identify this as an issue that we're able to look at how we can wrest some monies out of the kind of economic gloom and doom that was created in the '80s by the members opposite.

To be able to develop the employment supplement is another cornerstone of the building to independence strategy.

And of course throughout our deliberations, *Children First*, there's a Saskatchewan Child Benefit. It assists lower-income families with the cost of raising children. The benefit is paid to eligible families on behalf of each child under 18 and provides for basic food, clothing, and personal needs. It further re-assists . . . asserts this government's commitment to keep families working and in the workforce and reducing financial barriers to do that.

Families that are eligible for either of these three strategies are automatically registered for the family health benefits. These include, but they're not limited to, drug and dental, optometric coverage, and more. As part of this building independence strategy and initiative, all health costs for children and some for parents or guardians are covered under the family health benefit.

This three-pronged approach provides each client with the ability to draw on the general program but tailor it to suit their needs to move them out of the program as soon as possible.

(16:30)

Essentially, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the program is designed to offer specialization without the bureaucratization of this issue, a personal approach to people of Saskatchewan to assist them and to assist the children in our province.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, there are many accomplishments that we have seen since 1998 in the building to independence strategy. And I want to say them once again, because I find it very, very important — 88 consecutive months of decreasing numbers of families on social assistance.

A key part of the social policy agenda of this government is the three-pronged approach, the building to independence strategy and program that we are discussing today. But it's much more than that as I've stated earlier. It's an integrated, holistic approach to building capacities of individuals and families and their need for independence and self-reliance. It's one that emphasizes the principles of our society that are inclusion and full citizenship. People who leave no longer need social assistance from the government and in many, many cases this is breaking the cycle of dependence.

If these people have children, they now become role models for those children. It decreases the level of social assistance and diminishes the chances that these people will return to the rolls. This program returns human capital, human investment back into the workforce.

But not only that, Mr. Speaker. Behind every number that we talk about in this Assembly today is the face of someone who has returned to the workforce and the pride that someone has that's been restored to their lives and the face, the smiling face it gives to the children that live in those families. They've gotten their dignity back and the feeling that they just know they are being productive in our workforces.

But also many of them then can turn around and share this knowledge with other people and can share the idea that anyone can become a productive member of our society. And this program gives them the tools to do just that.

It's what I like to call — and I would like to bring the Assembly's attention to, as the *Western Catholic Reporter* did from Edmonton, Alberta — “The Saskatchewan Advantage.”

Too often in this Assembly we've heard of the Alberta envy from the members opposite. Now, you know, it's been calming down recently, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because they stood up and said, hear, hear, we're going to be like the British Columbia government; you just wait and see what we do; we're going to do the same things they do. We haven't heard that.

When we hear what's happening in Alberta recently with the pulling out of the foundations and the pillars that have been important to Saskatchewan society such as health care and education, we don't hear as much Alberta envy, but it still creeps in over there once in a while.

We're going to be like the government in Alberta. Well this person talks about, in 1998 and '99, Saskatchewan spent \$37 million dollars on the child benefit program. What did Alberta do? It said, Alberta, in comparison, spent \$6 million — a province with a population three times as large as Saskatchewan.

Now the minister of social services then, Iris Evans, downplayed the Canadian Council on Social Development report saying her department has doubled its budget since 1998. So that would be a whopping \$12 million, 12 million compared to the 37 million we spent — and more — since then in Saskatchewan.

The CCSD study provides further contrary evidence to the belief that a wealthy society will trickle some of that wealth

down to the poor.

We've heard it in America. We've heard it from the Tory government. Now they've changed their name. We hear it from the Saskatchewan Party government. It's the trickle-down theory in the economy.

Well this group in Edmonton knows it doesn't work. And what do they say? What is more likely is that a government that puts a priority on ending poverty will achieve the end more readily than those who believe in this trickle-down myth.

The Alberta government frequently trumpets the Alberta Advantage . . . (and) that's only one side of the coin. (I say) the other side (of the coin) is . . . a healthy community (that) not only provides economic opportunity, it also provides a helping hand to those least able to help themselves.

And it's what the *Western Catholic Reporter* from Edmonton, Alberta calls “The Saskatchewan Advantage”.

Mr. Speaker, I'm supporting the motion before us because everything we've talked about, we've worked for, we've built and put into the building to independence strategy, is there. This program works. It's part of what I'm proud to call the Saskatchewan advantage.

I stand in support of the motion before us and against the amendment that was placed by the member opposite. Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wiberg: — Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It's a pleasure this afternoon to get up and speak to my colleagues in the House in this motion that's been brought forward by the NDP in regards to their so-called building independence program.

It's certainly interesting, as I've listened to the debate this afternoon, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the many members who have spoken both for and against the amendment that's come forward to strengthen the motion that's been brought forward by the member from Saskatoon Greystone.

And, Mr. Speaker, the reason we needed to bring that amendment forward, we need to strengthen this motion. It is wishy-washy. It is leaving out a great detail in what is important in helping people to attain the independence, to attain the pride that they feel when every morning they rise and, with great enthusiasm, go out to help take on the world, a world that has been given to us to look after and a world that we take a great deal of pleasure in in being the stewards for.

Building independence is one of the most important things that we can do in a society. We need to build independence to create dignity and not, and not, Mr. Speaker, building a dependent workforce.

We need to have people understand that what they can contribute to society is important. People do not want to be treated as work horses where they are roused every day, fed

their oats, sent off out in front of the plough, packed off into a barn at night. They want the independence that can be created by allowing them the choices to pick and choose the career that they're suited for — a career that people find fulfilling.

Many of us in this Assembly of course, Mr. Deputy Speaker, are fully aware of the importance of being able to feel fulfilled in a career. And it's important that fulfilling yourself as an individual and that independence, that pride that we're . . . be passed on to everyone in society.

What we see here by this program, a program that kind of is not very well taken by the province of Saskatchewan, by the people of Saskatchewan . . . In fact what we hear is that the NDP government actually had to do a poll to find out that the people of Saskatchewan don't believe in their building independence program.

Well why wouldn't they believe that? Well what do we see, Mr. Speaker? We see a government that is losing people, losing jobs. And so then people are thinking well, if there's jobs not being created in this province, jobs that were supposed to be 30,000 more today than what was . . . there was in 1999. In fact, there's almost double that . . . or almost that amount lost in this province, almost 24,000 jobs were lost since 1999, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

It would leave people of Saskatchewan with the uncomfortable feeling then, is that if there's job losses, then maybe the rolls on . . . for social assistance are actually increasing.

So let's take a look at how this government, not only in their creativity to fudge a budget, is probably using the same type of accounting techniques to show the people of Saskatchewan that they're actually lowering the rolls for social assistance in this province.

Now they have been saying that in the past few years, since the summer of about 1998 or so, since these programs first came into force, is that welfare rolls in this province have actually been reduced by 5,000, Mr. Speaker. But as we watch this government over the last several weeks and certainly last year again also, Mr. Speaker, is that the people of Saskatchewan are very suspicious of the numbers that the government uses.

This year they said they balanced the budget. There's a significant shortfall, but it's still balanced. Well, who bought into their story, Mr. Speaker? Well nobody in this province.

In fact we found out very clearly that when the government starts throwing numbers out, that the people of Saskatchewan become extremely suspicious of where they're being led — down the garden path for the most part, Mr. Deputy Speaker, or Mr. Speaker.

They talked about 5,000 people being removed from social assistance rolls in this province. But we know that some of the programs that are being used, where young people who have ended up on hard times, have ended up having to draw assistance for a period of time, the Department of Social Services is . . . seems to be quite willing to help those young people try to re-educate themselves, finishing high school if need be, moving them on into the technical schools if need be.

And further yet, Mr. Speaker, they're even moving them into university level. Mr. Speaker, they're still on social assistance. But what we're trying to understand here, Mr. Speaker, is that does this government still count them on the social assistance rolls?

Well, according to what we're hearing from the Department of Social Services — no, they don't; they don't count them. They count these people as being gainfully employed. They're going to school; they're drawing assistance to do so. They're trying to better themselves — which we fully support — but the reality is, is that this government counts them as employed.

And we see then by their numbers is that although they're saying that employment opportunities in Saskatchewan are dropping, if we list people as being employed who are actually not employed, it actually creates a false number. So even though it shows that we've significantly lost jobs in the last few years, especially since 1999 when this government promised 30,000 new jobs primarily in the forestry industry. And then we found out through Statistics Canada, actually in the forestry industry right across the main in Saskatchewan, we actually lost 5,000 jobs in forestry alone.

And where are all those people now, Mr. Speaker? Because maybe they're drawing unemployment insurance, are they then considered employed? Is that how they get some of their employment numbers? Or because they're in school, then are they considered gainfully employed and therefore we don't need to count them under social assistance? When the fact of the matter is that in order to get through every day and every week and to pay their bills, that society — rightfully so — is helping them along.

And maybe that's why people of Saskatchewan were highly suspicious, Mr. Speaker, when the NDP government did their polling on the building independence program and found out that nobody actually believed them when they said that social assistance rolls had actually declined.

What is actually needed in this province, Mr. Speaker, is another step. Not only do we need to help people achieve their independence gainfully through education, but there has to be something there waiting for them afterwards. And as we've noticed, specifically this year by far has been the worst in the three years since 1999 when this government — through its behind closed doors and in the dark of night — managed to sneak back into power again with the help of their so-called friends, that we've actually lost jobs.

(16:45)

Was anything created in this province, Mr. Speaker? No. Twenty-four thousand jobs lost. That's what we've heard.

More people have left Saskatchewan in the last three years since the 1930s, since the depression of the 1930s. It's the worst, it's the worst population decline that we've seen in this province. And what have we had for the last 10 years, Mr. Speaker? We've had an NDP government. And so then, when you add up two and two, you get four. There's no one else to blame but the NDP government.

Mr. Speaker, if we take a look around the rest of the country, we take a look at our neighbours to the east and to the west . . . and certainly the member from Regina Wascana Plains clearly outlined her envy of Alberta this afternoon, to the job creation that's going on there, the wealth that's being created for people there. And people on this side, the members on this side of the House are very, very curious as to why we cannot have that in Saskatchewan here; that why do we need to brag about a building independence program when the reality is we should be bragging about job creation going on in this province.

We take a look at other provinces throughout the country. You take a look at, you know, Newfoundland, Prince Edward Island; two small provinces — very small in physical size compared to Saskatchewan — two provinces that have been heavily devastated by the cutbacks in fishing that had to take place in order to, in order to maintain the fish stocks on the East Coast.

And yet we take a look back at what's going on in those two provinces. Well, Mr. Speaker, there's job creation going on in those two provinces. They have decided that they are not going to follow the old path of this is the way we've always done it and that's the way, just going to keep going that way. They've decided that because of what's happened to the fish stocks that they have to retool their provinces to take advantage of some of the things they already have there.

Prince Edward Island, one of the most beautiful provinces . . . places . . . one of the provinces . . . one of the most beautiful places in the world, and they've decided to up the ante on tourism. What has this province done to encourage tourism? Virtually nothing.

The fact of the matter is, when you watch any of the programs, the Canadian programming on the . . . on television, Mr. Speaker, you see . . . who's advertising on it? New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, Newfoundland, Quebec — they're inviting people to come there, that there are great things happening there and come and see the beauty of our province.

Well so what's happening here? This . . . (inaudible) . . . fact of the matter is if you go to Quebec, Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, what are they showing there? Everybody else except Saskatchewan. You can't see this government promoting Saskatchewan anywhere. In fact what they've done — and you take a look at this program, this building independence program — all it does is build a wall, a cement wall around Saskatchewan to keep everybody out.

Well in some . . . (inaudible) . . . we're a little worried they're trying to keep people in. Except of course the member from Athabasca. He has his harum-scarum program of developing an exit strategy.

This is how you would build independence in northern Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker. You create an exit strategy for northerners. You put together a program, looked like pretty good on the surface, until you got down to about the third line when you're . . . we were reading the proposal, and there it was. We're going to educate the people of northern Saskatchewan, train them for quality jobs in Alberta.

Now the members on the other side are always complaining that

members on this side have Alberta envy. Well we don't have Alberta envy. We don't have Manitoba envy. We have Saskatchewan envy. And we have no intention of developing exit strategies for people to move to Alberta or Manitoba or North Dakota or Quebec or Ontario or Newfoundland for that matter, Mr. Speaker.

When we talk about what this government has done, losing jobs would be of course number one. We take a look at health care; they promised in the 1999 election to hire 500 more health care workers. Sounds like a pretty good promise. In the campaign we couldn't argue with it and decided that . . . and agreed with them that this would be a good . . . But what did they do? They made the promise as in typical NDP fashion, Mr. Speaker, made a promise with no intention of keeping it.

So what have we . . . what's happened here? When it comes to building independence, the independence, Mr. Speaker, is being built in Alberta for Saskatchewan nurses. Now how does that build independence, I would like to know, Mr. Speaker, in Saskatchewan?

We need to build independence in Saskatchewan, and we need to build it for the people of Saskatchewan so that they will stay here, raise their families here, and pay taxes here to support the social programs that are necessary in today's society rather than building independence for people to move to Alberta, Manitoba, or Quebec, or Newfoundland where there's actually jobs for them.

Now when the NDP talk about this promise to . . . of how well this building independence program is going, how do they be able to establish the credibility that's necessary to promote this program to those of us in Saskatchewan who believe that it's incumbent upon all of us to help those that are less fortunate, less fortunate than ourselves.

They can't balance the budget. That destroys their credibility. They promised to cut the debt; they didn't do that, which again is an attack on NDP government credibility. So how is this going to be, Mr. Speaker, that when it comes to the building independence program and their promotion — actually having to advertise that it even exists to people — that there's any sense of credibility in Saskatchewan for a program that may have some potential?

Of course, from our perspective, Mr. Speaker, building independence is absolutely crucial. And we see that jurisdictions throughout the country, there's a national program, provincial programs to build independence, to help people to get out from underneath that yoke of social assistance. It's . . . and is mentioned several times by the member from Wascana Plains, the degrading effect that that has upon lives, whether it's the adult members of the family or the children of the family.

And so how does this credibility for this program ever get established in this province when the people of this province have already decided that this government has no credibility? And so then why should we believe them when they say that we have actually reduced social assistance rolls by 5,000 people when we can't believe them on anything else that they are saying, Mr. Speaker?

And of course as we see and we see from the members opposite and certainly from the letters that we're getting on this side of the House — and of course their copies, Mr. Speaker, from the letters that the members on the other side of the House — is that certainly the people of Saskatchewan are starting to wave the white flag everywhere and they want an election so that programs such as this, this building independence program, can be held up to the light and people make a decision in the voting booths of Saskatchewan.

We would need less, Mr. Speaker, less opportunities for a building independence program if there was real jobs in this province. This government has decided that they don't . . . even they won't invest in this province.

Where are they investing? Where are they investing, Mr. Speaker so that the jobs are here in Saskatchewan for the people who are in the building independence program then have the jobs that are necessary to keep them off the social assistance rolls for the future? Well let's see. They have a dot-com company in Atlanta. So how many people who are on social assistance that are in the building independence program are going to be able to take part in that? Well there'll be none, Mr. Speaker.

No one in Saskatchewan, whether you are already gainfully employed or whether you're in the building independence program, are going to be able to take advantage of this government investing in a dot-com company, Retx, in Atlanta, Georgia.

Now how many people in the building independence program are going to benefit from this government, from this government, this NDP government, Mr. Speaker, investing in the stock market of Australia? How many jobs are coming to Saskatchewan so that people in the building independence program are going to have jobs in Saskatchewan? Well the reality is, Mr. Speaker, none of them.

Not one single person in Saskatchewan, not one single person who is already gainfully employed, not one single person who is in the building independence program is going to be able to have a job because of this NDP government's investment in the stock market in Australia.

Now if we're going to take that kind of investment and pour it into foreign countries those dollars could have been gainfully used — gainfully used — Mr. Speaker, in this province. What could they have done? We could have lowered taxes so that there would be job opportunities for those in the building independence program. We could have cut taxes for companies so that they would have moved here to create jobs for people in the building independence program.

Now is any of that happening? No. In fact what we've seen in the year 2001 is that there's actually fewer companies operating in Saskatchewan than there was the year before. So how are we supposed to have the jobs for the people in this building independence program in Saskatchewan if the companies are actually leaving this province?

People are leaving this province in droves, which is a way of voting with your feet, Mr. Speaker; which is passing an extremely negative connotation on this province that there's

nothing here. And yet this government wants to talk about a building independence program, and then have someone like the Minister of Northern Affairs, the member from Athabasca, put together a strategy — an exit strategy to go to Alberta.

So what kind of building independence does that create to help Saskatchewan? So we're building independence to help Alberta? Are we building independence to help Manitoba? Are we building independence to help the Northwest Territories? Are we building independence to help the Yukon Territory? Or are we building independence to help the United States? What are we building independence for?

Well we're certainly not building independence to help Saskatchewan. We have fewer jobs, fewer people. And yet this government wants to brag about their building independence program which has no jobs for these people to go to. In fact, what this government is doing is helping to manage the Department of Education's decline.

They talk about a building independence program for people that aren't going to be here. And a building independence program when, on the other side of the coin, the Department of Education is actually . . . created a strategy, Mr. Speaker — a strategy, Mr. Speaker, where there'll be 30,000 fewer kids in this province.

And yet the members on the other side, and most specifically, the member from Moose Jaw North, is talking about how they're a party of the kids. Well how come that they have designed a program where there will be 30,000 fewer kids in this province in the future in Saskatchewan?

The Speaker: — Order, please. Members, it now being slightly past the hour of 5 o'clock, this House stands adjourned until 7 p.m. this evening . . . pardon me, this House stands recessed until 7 p.m. this evening.

The Assembly recessed until 19:00.