

EVENING SITTING

SPECIAL ORDER

ADJOURNED DEBATES

MOTION FOR COMMITTEE OF FINANCE
(BUDGET DEBATE)

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

Mr. Hart: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, before the dinner break, I was talking about some of the assumptions that the Finance minister made when he was developing his budget and pointing out perhaps some errors in some of the assumptions that were made.

As I'd indicated earlier, if you look at page 20 in the budget document, you'll see the commodity price outlook and some of the assumptions made for 2003. And as I'd indicated in my earlier comments, I believe a closer look at current market conditions in the commodity markets would indicate that perhaps the wheat and canola forecast for this year are some 13 per cent higher.

Now if you look at the assumption made for barley, this one really puzzles me, Mr. Speaker. The only thing I can conclude, Mr. Speaker, with the price assumption of about \$147 a tonne is that this NDP (New Democratic Party) government is assuming that all the barley grown across this province in this upcoming year will be sold into the malt market because that price that they're using reflects a malt price.

It's not a wheat price by any means, and yet only approximately 20 per cent of the barley produced in a normal year goes into the malt market, Mr. Speaker.

So a more realistic price, I would suggest, Mr. Speaker, would be about \$88 a tonne. So in other words the . . . if you do the calculations, the assumptions that were used by the Minister of Finance is some 67 per cent too high.

So what does that mean, Mr. Speaker? If you're using assumptions for your budgeting process that aren't accurate, well the obvious result is that your conclusions are going to be suspect and not accurate, Mr. Speaker. And one only needs to take a closer look at this year's budget document to illustrate that fact.

I'm really quite puzzled when I look on page 12, entitled schedule of revenue and under the first heading, taxes — when you look at the estimates for corporate . . . corporation income tax this year, Mr. Speaker, we see a figure of \$340.9 million, where last year that same figure was \$118.5 million — quite a difference, Mr. Speaker; in fact it's some \$222 million difference.

I would suggest, Mr. Speaker, that even if you accept their projections in GDP (gross domestic product) growth of 6.8 per

cent, I don't know how you get some \$222 million increase in corporate income tax, even with that type of growth, Mr. Speaker. So that really leads one to question the accuracy of some of these projections, Mr. Speaker.

So if we go back to the budget document and we look at page 23, Mr. Speaker, and we see there a graph on the top of page 23 — the impact of crop production on Saskatchewan real GDP in 2003. And we'll see the first bar there under normal crop of the 6.8 per cent as I mentioned, and then the 10 per cent below normal the GDP drops to 4.5, and the 20 per cent below normal crop gives us a 2.2 per cent growth in GDP.

That's down into the area where a lot of the other economic forecasters are saying that in the two and a half to three point two — somewhere in there is most likely where our real GDP will grow.

So as I said earlier, Mr. Speaker, I'm sure the farm producers of this province, all across this province, are really hoping that these folks know something that no one else seems to know and that we are going to have a normal crop. The odds are reasonable that we will produce a normal crop.

But to see that kind of economic growth would say that we would have considerably higher prices for those commodities that are being produced than what the market is telling us at this point in time, Mr. Speaker. And I've indicated some of the errors that these folks have made, Mr. Speaker.

So if in the budgetary process, if your assumptions are wrong then of course your projections are going to be wrong. And even with these enhanced and inflated projections, the Finance minister is telling us that we will at the end of the year on a \$6.6 billion budget we're going to have a surplus of \$145,000. If you put that in terms of a household budget — a family budget — it's like a family sitting down and projecting as accurately as they can their expenditures for the year and saying we'll end up with a \$1.45 as a surplus or some such foolish thing like that, Mr. Speaker. So it seems like this budget once again is certainly in that realm of fantasyland, Mr. Speaker.

Now if we take a closer look at this year's Highways budget, and I know in that little card that accompanied the budget information on the first page, Highways and Transportation infrastructure was mentioned and this government is pretending and trying to tell people that a Highways budget of \$296.2 million is a great investment in infrastructure and it's something new and it's helping to grow this province and so on. But yet if you look at these numbers more closely and we look at last year's budget document, as a matter of fact, Mr. Speaker, and we look at the document that was tabled in this House about a year ago and we look at the estimates for the 2002-2003 Highways budget, we'll see that the estimated budget at that time was \$300 million — 300.3 million to be exact, Mr. Speaker.

Now so how does 296 become such a wonderful budget this year when last year they were forecasting or estimating expenditures in the neighbourhood of \$300 million? Well, let's see what happened there, Mr. Speaker.

Well I think if we remember back to the debate last year in this session over the increase in long-term care fees we'll recall that the Minister of Highways shouted from his seat in a moment of heat and passion of the debate making some sort of a comment about increasing the fees was the right thing to do. Well . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . for seniors exactly, increasing those fees for seniors, Mr. Speaker.

And when the government finally was pressured into retracting those fee increases, they had to scramble to come up with some additional \$7 million. So where did it come from? It came from the Highways budget. So the Highways minister lost one of his gravel piles, Mr. Speaker, and his budget was reduced to \$293 million.

And then if we . . . so then if you look on the surface of things you would say, well okay last year's budget was 293; this year it's 296.2. So there is actually an increase. Well there may be if you accept those figures at face value. But I recall, Mr. Speaker, attending a press conference a number of weeks ago at Government House where the Prime Minister was present and the minister from . . . the federal minister from Saskatchewan where there was an announcement made. The Premier was there, the Minister of Highways was there. They had the press out and invited a number of people to attend, Mr. Speaker. And there's this announcement that Saskatchewan was getting some federal dollars for highway construction. In fact they were getting \$82 million for highway construction. That was the headline. Of course it was over five years, Mr. Speaker, but even so, that works out to approximately \$16 million.

Well when you look at this year's budget, you have to ask yourself, where is that \$16 million, Mr. Speaker? What has this government done with it? Have they added that to last year's budget? If they would have done that, we would have seen that the budget for this year would have been around 310 million, somewhere in there. If they would have added it to last year's estimated budget, it would have been 360, but in fact it's 296.

So what has this government done with that federal . . . the federal money? Well I would suspect, Mr. Speaker, that they've done the same thing they did with the millennium scholarship when the federal government brought that program forward. And the announcement was that students were going to be receiving these bursaries from the federal government through the millennium scholarship. But at the end of the day when the smoke cleared, really what happened, the students were no better off. Because what in fact happened is that this government withdrew their funding from that particular program and backfilled it with federal dollars. And I suspect, Mr. Speaker, that is exactly what's happened in this year's Highways budget.

So if we look at and compare apples to apples, even accounting for that \$7 million reduction in the Highways budget, Mr. Speaker, we're still \$13 million short of provincial dollars in this year's Highways budget, Mr. Speaker. And that's shameful, Mr. Speaker.

We all know the deplorable state that our highways were . . . have been in over the last few years. Within the last couple of years, we've seen some small improvements. We have to give the government credit for that. They did take some of those

extra revenues from oil and gas that they received a year or two ago and they did allocate some of that funding to Highways. But this year where they called a press conference, they gathered all the . . . gathered the Premier and the Highways minister along with the Prime Minister and the minister of . . . Saskatchewan's representative in the federal cabinet, people thought that, perhaps well we're going to see at least a 10 or \$12 million increase in the Highways budget. Not so, Mr. Speaker.

If in fact, as I said, we actually have seen a \$4 million reduction if we're comparing estimates last year initially to estimates that we have this year, now what could this . . . what could be done . . . what can you do with even 4 or \$5 million under a \$6.6 billion . . . a \$6.6 billion budget? It's not large dollars in comparison to the total expenditures but it could make some real differences in certain areas.

It could for instance, Mr. Speaker, at least temporarily address the traffic problem that the city of Regina faces over on Victoria East where we have the congested traffic due to growth of commercial space in that area and activities in that area, and we have the traffic that's coming in from No. 1 East and trying to get around Regina through the bypass, and we see the long lineups, and so on. A simple thing some expenditures of 1 or \$2 million, perhaps with some city funding, could put an additional turning lane in there. It's certainly not the long-term fix to that solution but it would alleviate . . . be an intermediate term fix until a bypass could be built and so on, which is certainly much more expensive, Mr. Speaker. But it would at least provide some . . . address the problem somewhat, Mr. Speaker.

So that's some of things that could be done with . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . and the minister . . . I must have hit a nerve, Mr. Speaker, because the Minister of Highways is chirping from his seat there, Mr. Speaker. So perhaps a light came on and he said, that sounds like a good idea and perhaps I'll take that back to my department folks, Mr. Speaker.

Now if we go on, Mr. Speaker, and talk about this year's agricultural budget, Mr. Speaker, and look at what is this government's record this year as compared to the last four years, Mr. Speaker, and we'll see that this year's budget is considerably less than what it has been in the past.

And that's not to be unexpected from these folks, Mr. Speaker, in that they realize that they're really in the upcoming election they're not going to make any gains in rural Saskatchewan. They know that, Mr. Speaker, and it's very evident in this year's budget. So why would they want to spend more money?

But somehow there's a parody here, Mr. Speaker, because they're depending on agriculture to power them out of this fiscal problem that they have. They've said a normal crop is going to lead to 6.8 per cent growth, yet they end up spending considerably less money in agriculture this year than they have in other years. They're down to \$251 million from a high of \$333 million, Mr. Speaker.

If you look at the . . . but then we hear . . . Do you know what the answer is, the answer we hear from the Minister of Agriculture? Well we put \$70 million last year into CFIP (Canadian Farm Income Program) and that money is sitting

there waiting for farmers to access it.

(19:15)

Well what about this coming year, Mr. Speaker? When you look at the expenditures in that department and go through, go and see what they've allocated to farm stability, it's . . . it really makes one wonder as to what . . . as to what this government is thinking, Mr. Speaker.

You look at the area of the budget, on budget estimates on page 28, Mr. Speaker, under the area of farm stability and adaptation, and we see under the . . . under farm sector initiatives we see last year a budget of \$70 million. And that . . . and the Minister of Agriculture has said in the press and said in this legislature that that's the money that his government put into the CFIP program last year.

Well what's there? Well what's there this year? Well CFIP as . . . The minister was correct; CFIP is . . . dies its death tonight. So what do we see to replace it? Well we see something in the agricultural policy frameworks initiative of \$18 million. Well the agriculture policy framework initiative has five components to it, business risk management being one of them, and this is the area where the minister has consistently told us over the last number of months that crop insurance, an enhanced crop insurance and a super NISA (Net Income Stabilization Account) were going to be the programs that are going to replace the AIDA (Agricultural Income Disaster Assistance) and the CFIP.

Well they must be quite the super programs, Mr. Speaker, if the CFIP program required funding of 70 million and this new super NISA — which is supposedly a better program, supposed to react more quickly and target the funding more accurately — it only requires \$18 million. I really want to see this program, Mr. Speaker. The little bit that I've seen through the Internet and through the SARM (Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities) presentations, I really have my doubts, Mr. Speaker. I would suspect that that \$18 million is . . . in this budget is probably . . . addresses the four other envelopes in the APF (agricultural policy framework) initiatives — the environment, the food safety, the science and innovation, and renewal, and those type of things.

An Hon. Member: — Where's the rest of it then?

Mr. Hart: — It isn't here. And you know, I'll tell you why it isn't here, Mr. Speaker. It's because this government, they weren't part of the process in designing the new programs. They agreed . . . So in Saskatchewan we're going to, once again, just like we did with AIDA and CFIP, we're going to have to live with programs that have been designed by other provinces and the federal government. But the way the new programs — as I understand them — the way they are to work is that the farmers put their money upfront to buy this risk insurance and protect . . . I believe the catchphrase is to protect their production margin. That's the new catchphrase in this new program.

So the farmer puts his money upfront but the governments, like the NISA and some of these other programs, their money doesn't come forward until it's needed. So what happens? In the

example that I sat in on, Mr. Speaker, they used an example farm where they had a production margin of \$100,000. So if the producer wished to protect that \$100,000 production margin, he had to put up \$26,000 — a \$26,000 premium for \$100,000 worth of coverage. Sounds like quite a program — 26 per cent premium, Mr. Speaker.

What does the government have to put in? Well if you look on page 28 under farm sector initiatives, for this year the estimated expenditure for this government . . . Do you know what it is, Mr. Speaker? It's zero — nothing — and that's what the government has to put up, Mr. Speaker.

But the Minister of Agriculture says, don't worry, we've got some money squirreled away in an old program that you may or may not be able to access and so on. Well I don't think that's good enough, Mr. Speaker.

If you look around and look at the global forces that are impacting on our agricultural industry, Mr. Speaker, I think we need to be more proactive and have some funding in place because with the vagrancies of the marketplace and the vagrancies of the weather, Mr. Speaker, we can't cross our fingers and hope for a normal crop.

We're going to get 6.8 per cent growth, Mr. Speaker, and we'll all be fine. It just doesn't work that way, Mr. Speaker.

So, Mr. Speaker, I see that my time is coming near to the end and for those reasons, Mr. Speaker, I certainly will not be supporting the motion but I will be supporting the amendment.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Yates: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm extremely pleased to enter into the budget debate this year, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to start by talking about the fact that this budget presented by the Minister of Finance is a balanced approach to meeting the needs and aspirations and expectations of the Saskatchewan people, Mr. Speaker.

So, Mr. Speaker, over the last decade the Government of Saskatchewan has followed a very balanced approach to its budgeting. Our fiscal management style has been one of not reacting to every little change that comes across in the economy, quarter by quarter, month by month, but, in fact, putting a plan in place and staying the course, Mr. Speaker.

And, Mr. Speaker, I want to talk about what that's done for Saskatchewan. What it's done is delivered now 10 balanced, consecutive balanced budgets.

Now I can understand why the members opposite aren't happy with that, Mr. Speaker, because all they do is they go out and they talk to people and they tell them what they want to hear. They promise all things to all people without having to worry about delivering anything, Mr. Speaker. All the time they're out there talking to people telling them exactly what they want to hear, promising everybody everything, without the ability to deliver it, Mr. Speaker.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I want to talk a little bit about the environment in which we're putting a budget forward. Mr. Speaker. I want to talk about the challenges we faced in 2002-2003 when the Finance critic for the opposition called last year's budget a fudge-it budget. It couldn't add up.

Now, Mr. Speaker, in 2002-2003 we had the second year of extensive drought throughout Saskatchewan. Two years in a row of excessive drought throughout Saskatchewan. We spent 47 million additional dollars fighting forest fires, Mr. Speaker. Then the federal government announced 300 million reduction in equalization payments.

Throughout the year, commodity prices fluctuated, particularly in the oil and natural gas sectors, Mr. Speaker. Individual income revenue was much higher than expected. Of course we all know that oil and natural gas revenues came in much higher than expected, particularly in the fourth quarter of the year.

Mr. Speaker, despite all these challenges — despite all these challenges — this government brought in a balanced budget with a \$2 million surplus without even . . .

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Yates: — Mr. Speaker, without even touching a single cent from the Fiscal Stabilization Fund. And that's what the Finance critic for the opposition calls a fudge-it budget.

Mr. Speaker, he clearly, he clearly doesn't understand that the people of Saskatchewan want that type of performance from their government. They don't want what they're promising: all things to all people and delivering nothing, Mr. Speaker. They want a government that has a balanced approach in meeting their needs, their aspirations, and their expectations for the future.

They don't want a government that would be out there promising to give them everything and not being able to deliver any of it.

Mr. Speaker, I want to take a couple of minutes to talk a little bit about where we came from. And to do so I'm going to use an article entitled "The Alberta advantage slowly disappearing." This is a column by Bruce Johnstone, April 6, 2002, and I'm quoting Mr. Speaker:

Let's go back to 1993, when Saskatchewan taxes were at their peak, and look at the Alberta advantage.

For families earning \$50,000 a year, moving to Alberta (they) would see their provincial tax bill (including income and sales taxes, health care premiums and other taxes) cut in half — from \$5,246 in Saskatchewan to \$3,497 in Alberta. (This) . . . would be a saving of about \$1,750 annually.

Skip ahead to . . . (2003) (after two years of tax reform in Saskatchewan and a tough budget in Alberta). Saskatchewan's provincial tax bill for the same family (assuming their income hasn't increased) has fallen to \$3,789 versus \$2,896 in Alberta, a difference of just under \$900.

In other words, the Alberta advantage has been virtually cut in half in less than 10 years — for middle-income families, at least.

It goes on to say:

While taxes have gone down in both provinces, utilities, such as power and home heating, and other charges have gone up (more than 50 per cent here, (and) more than 100 per cent in Alberta) over the last nine years.

Mr. Speaker, still quoting:

The result is the Alberta advantage (including provincial taxes, utilities and other costs, like auto insurance) is now less than \$100 for middle-income families . . .

Mr. Speaker, that's where we came from and that is where we're going. We're making steady progress.

So that was talking about the Alberta advantage, and how they had an advantage and how we worked hard as a government to cut that advantage down by changing the royalty structures for oil and gas last year, and for making progressive tax changes over the last decade.

But, Mr. Speaker, I want to take a minute then and talk about the Saskatchewan advantage. As reported on June 18, 2001, *Western Catholic Reporter* out of Edmonton, Alberta. It says:

The soul of a nation, or any other group of people can be seen in how it treats the most disadvantaged.

In Canada, in recent years, we have made one significant improvement. It's called the National Child Benefit and increased funding is helping to bring a lot of children out of poverty. Twelve years ago, the House of Commons passed a resolution to do its best to eliminate child poverty by the year 2000.

It goes on to quote:

A report released earlier this month by the Canadian Council on Social Development found that Saskatchewan has done a much better job than either Alberta or Ontario in reducing child poverty, especially among single-parent families. Between 1993 and 1998, Saskatchewan cut the incidence of poverty among single-parent families from 51 (per cent) to 20 per cent.

Mr. Speaker, that's the Saskatchewan advantage. It goes on to say, Mr. Speaker, and I'd like the members opposite to pay special attention to this, Mr. Speaker.

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

Alberta Children's Services Minister Iris Evans downplays the CCSD report and says her department has doubled its budget since 1998. However, we likely still have a long way to go to match the record of a province with far fewer

economic resources than Alberta.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I wanted to bring into this debate the fact that it's about choices when you're putting a budget together. And the choices this government has made is to help those who need it most in society. It's about choices in reducing taxes to help average families in Saskatchewan, but it's also a choice about helping those who are most in need of the services of government within your province. And Saskatchewan has done a much better job than Alberta in the last decade in dealing with those issues.

Mr. Speaker, I want to just refer to a couple of news reports that came back on the budget. The members opposite continue to talk negatively about the budget and that nobody liked it. Well, Mr. Speaker, I just want to point out to them there are some people who liked this budget in Saskatchewan.

I'd like to start with an article or media release that says "Good news budget for people with disabilities," Mr. Speaker. Those in our society who need our help believe they're getting it, Mr. Speaker. It goes on to say:

The Government of Saskatchewan is to be commended for its commitment to advancing the full citizenship of people with disabilities in Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, that's the difference between this government and the members opposite — that this government cares for people. It's going to put its priorities for those who need the services of government most, first.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to take a minute to also talk about another group of people who thought very highly of this budget. I have an e-mail here. It says:

On behalf of all the early childcare directors in Sask. I would personally like to thank you for addressing childcare in the budget . . . I am celebrating what your gov't is going to be doing for the children of Sask. Your gov't has 'dared to care'.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Yates: — Mr. Speaker, I talked about this government daring to care, putting people first, putting those who need our help in society — children — children first, Mr. Speaker. And I think that's a very, very important thing for government to do.

(19:30)

Now, Mr. Speaker, I want to talk about a number of other things, but I think I want to just highlight a couple of things that I think are important as I talk about some of the economic indicators and some of the progress that we're making.

Mr. Speaker, I think it's important to understand the environment in which this budget was put together, both . . . discussing the upcoming budget and it is important to note what is happening both fiscally across Canada and around the world. Mr. Speaker, after September 11, we've had an economy around the world that's had a difficult time bouncing back, but Canada has done a remarkable job in leading the world.

Of all the G-7 countries, only Canada is in a surplus position, Mr. Speaker. Most US (United States) states are currently in a deficit position, Mr. Speaker. And we've had 10 balanced budgets.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I want to talk a little bit about some of the criticisms that members opposite have about some of the assumptions that the budget is making. When we talk about 6.8 per cent economic growth, they laugh, they make faces, they make gestures that it isn't possible. But, Mr. Speaker, I want to talk about what some of the experts in the field are saying.

For example, CIBC (Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce) World Market notes:

. . . the associated level of real output falls within the band foreseen by economic forecasters . . .

So they're not laughing at 6.8, they're saying it's within the band of possible . . . that the forecasters are predicting, Mr. Speaker.

The Bank of Montreal doesn't question the 6.8 per cent forecast. They simply note it's based on the return to normal crop levels after two years of severe drought. So they're not questioning it; only the members opposite are questioning it.

The Conference Board of Canada has said, if we have a normal crop, I don't think 6.8 per cent economic growth is overly optimistic. It's just based on the assumption of a normal crop, Mr. Speaker.

The members opposite, they can laugh and they can make all the gestures they want, but the sad point is, Mr. Speaker, they simply don't want to hear good news. Because good news, good news hurts their vision and view of the world. Because they want to criticize, they want to be negative, and they want to put down the people of Saskatchewan, and they want to put down our province. They want more people to continue leaving because then they can point to the doom and gloom as to why they should form the next government, Mr. Speaker.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I don't think the people of Saskatchewan are that naive. I honestly don't think they're that naive, Mr. Speaker.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I want to talk about a few other facts that I think they should understand. Mr. Speaker, what is the interprovincial debt to GDP comparison in Canada? I want to point out to the members opposite that Saskatchewan has the second best debt ratio to GDP in Canada.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Yates: — Now the members opposite, they talk about all the negativity. Well, Mr. Speaker, that is significant progress from 1991. Significant progress. Today we sit at about 24.6 per cent of debt to GDP. In '91, it was over 40 per cent, Mr. Speaker. A significant improvement.

Mr. Speaker, what's the interprovincial debt per capita comparison? Well, Mr. Speaker, in debt per capita we are the third in the nation, Mr. Speaker. The third in the nation. And,

Mr. Speaker . . .

An Hon. Member: — Third lowest, third lowest.

Mr. Yates: — We're talking about third lowest in the nation. That's right. We're the second lowest in GDP per . . . GPP per capita, as a percentage of debt and the third lowest per capita, Mr. Speaker.

Now I'd like to talk for just one second about the cost of living in Saskatchewan compared to other major cities in Canada. When you do a comparison of provincial income tax, tax credits or rebates, health premiums, retail sales tax, gasoline tax, rent, electricity, telephone, auto insurance, Mr. Speaker, lo and behold, lo and behold, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan is the cheapest city in Canada for a single male adult at 25,000 total income.

An Hon. Member: — Least expensive.

Mr. Yates: — Least expensive, pardon me. Did I say most expensive? Thank you for helping me out. I mean least expensive, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, we also have the least expensive cost of living for a family of \$50,000 in all of Canada, Mr. Speaker.

And, Mr. Speaker, the member opposite is so excited over there that we're just enthused.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Yates: — Now, Mr. Speaker, and for a family of \$75,000 total income, lo and behold, Mr. Speaker, we are still the cheapest in Canada, the least expensive to live.

Now, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker, the members opposite they want to talk about the doom and gloom all the time. They want to talk about the negativity all the time, Mr. Speaker. But we don't want to talk about that, Mr. Speaker. We want to talk about the good things that are going on in this province and the potential for the future.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I want to refer to another article, this one out of *The Herald* from Herbert, Saskatchewan, Wednesday, May 24. It says:

. . . a study conducted by the Canadian Institute for Health Information ranked Saskatchewan first or second among Canadian provinces in most surgical procedures.

It goes on to say:

How can that be?

As every person in Saskatchewan knows our health care system is falling apart, the worst in Canada.

The Sask Party says it every day. It goes on to say:

How can we explain this apparent contradiction of information?

We know it can't be true. Our politicians have told us our

health care system is in shambles.

This is a rural seat and the Sask Party politicians have tried to convince them that our health care system is in shambles. We have told ourselves that the health care system is poor.

For the last twenty years we have proven to ourselves that our health care system is the worst in Canada.

Because we've gone and told ourselves that, and the opposition continues to preach that, Mr. Speaker.

We haven't stopped at the health care system. Our perception is that everything about our province is terrible.

We hear it from the opposition day in and day out. They're doom and gloom — doom and gloom — nothing positive.

We have the worst of everything.

Every other province is better. I hear that from the members opposite daily, Mr. Speaker. They're richer; they're smarter than we are.

Just ask your neighbor, or your friends in Alberta (it says).

Well, Mr. Speaker, it goes on to say that none of this is true, that all that's happened is that certain people have gone out and they have talked about the doom and gloom to a point they've convinced themselves that that's the way the province should be; and that they portray that image then they should be the government because they can fix all that when the reality is and this report goes on to say, Mr. Speaker, that this is all a myth — that we've convinced ourselves that things aren't so good and in reality it's a very, very good place to live.

So, Mr. Speaker, the members opposite have gone on and continued to try to convince Saskatchewan people that we can't make progress where in fact we have made a great deal of progress. Mr. Speaker, we are a province that has made significant progress. We are a province that brought forward 10 balanced budgets.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Yates: — This is a government with a new Premier, a new Premier who's setting a new direction. And we've seen it in many ways. We've seen it in reductions in royalties to natural gas and oil, Mr. Speaker, in the last year. We've seen it in changes to royalty in mineral structure.

We've seen it in the way that we're approaching the delivery of benefits and services to people. We are putting people first, Mr. Speaker, and that's what it's about. When I talked about the Saskatchewan advantage, that was our province that we have put forward that advantage in, Mr. Speaker, and we dare to care. We have a government and a Premier who cares first about people.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Yates: — We'll put people first, Mr. Speaker, and we'll always take a balanced approach to delivering services, tax cuts

to meet the expectations, the needs, and the future of the people of this province, Mr. Speaker.

They're not interested . . . we're not interested, Mr. Speaker, in the negativity because only through a positive attitude can we move forward, only through innovation and ingenuity and creativity can we move forward into a new Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, a Saskatchewan where every citizen is considered equal — where there's equal opportunity for all of those in our province not based by how much you have in your pocket, Mr. Speaker, how much money you have in your pocket, but the fact that this is a province that's open to all people. There's a diversity of ideas we have in this province and a future that is wide open for every citizen, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Yates: — Now, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker, this is the province that we want to have. And this is the province . . . Our Premier's leading us towards a goal. A goal, Mr. Speaker, of a province that every citizen wants to talk proudly of; not like we hear from the members opposite, Mr. Speaker.

And I can tell you as long as there's breath in this side of the House, Mr. Speaker, we're not going to give — we're not going to give — 1 inch of ground to the Saskatchewan Party. Because we believe in a positive future for this province, not a negative one. And, Mr. Speaker, we believe that every citizen of this province should be treated equally, that every citizen should have opportunity, and it shouldn't be based upon how much money you have in your pockets.

And, Mr. Speaker, it's without doubt I think, after my remarks, that I am going to support the budget. And I'm not going to support the amendment. Because, Mr. Speaker, this budget is about progress for the people of Saskatchewan and the amendment is again about negativity. And on this side of the House, Mr. Speaker, we're going to talk about progress and moving the agenda forward for the people of Saskatchewan.

So, Mr. Speaker, I would move at this time that we adjourn debate.

Debate adjourned.

The Assembly adjourned at 19:41.

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