

The Assembly met at 13:30.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRESENTING PETITIONS

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Cypress Hills.

Mr. Elhard: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, with the widespread concern that the government may in its upcoming budget apply a broad-based sales tax which would include meals, I've been asked to present the following petition on behalf of my constituents. The prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government not to implement the Commission on Financing Kindergarten to Grade 12 Education's recommendation to expand the provincial sales tax to include restaurant meals. Please do not tax our food.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

Mr. Speaker, this petition comes from constituents from the community of Abbey, as well as Shackleton, Lancer, Elrose, Moosomin, and White City.

I so present.

The Speaker: — Recognize the member for Cannington.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also have a petition to present today. The prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government not to implement the Commission on Financing Kindergarten to Grade 12 Education's recommendation to expand the provincial sales tax to include restaurant meals. Please do not tax our food.

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

This petition, Mr. Speaker, comes from the Arcola, Regina, Kisbey, Carlyle area, and none from Newfoundland today.

I so present.

The Speaker: — Recognize the member for Canora-Pelly.

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, a number of communities in my constituencies are sending forward a petition that I'd like to present on their behalf. The prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government not to implement the Commission on Financing Kindergarten to Grade 12 Education's recommendation to expand the provincial sales tax to include restaurant meals. Please do

not tax our food.

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

Mr. Speaker, the signatures to this petition come from Canora, and Kamsack, Sturgis, Rama, the Cote First Nations. And Yorkton and Melville are also included in the position . . . in the petitions I present today.

The Speaker: — Recognize the member for Kelvington-Wadena.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also rise today to present a petition. The prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to not implement the Commission on Kindergarten to Grade 12 Education's recommendation to expand the provincial sales tax to include restaurant meals. Please do not tax our food.

The people that have signed this petition are from Tisdale, Watson, Codette, basically all over the northern part of Saskatchewan.

The Speaker: — Recognize the member for Rosetown-Elrose.

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition for fairness for Crown lease holders. It's addressed to the Hon. Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan and legislature assembled. Mr. Speaker, it is concerned that there are indications that the government of Saskatchewan is contemplating major changes to its lease policy for Crown land. The prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitions humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the provincial government to take the necessary steps to ensure current Crown land leases. . . lessees maintain their first option to renew those leases.

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

And Mr. Speaker, the signatures on this petition are from the communities of Lucky Lake and Demaine in the constituency of Rosetown-Elrose. And I am pleased to present it on their behalf.

The Speaker: — Recognize the member from Melville-Saltcoats.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also have a petition to do with the expansion of the PST (provincial sales tax). The prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government not to implement the Commission on Financing Kindergarten to Grade 12 Education's recommendation to expand the provincial sales tax to include restaurant meals.

The signatures, Mr. Speaker, are from the communities of

Esterhazy, Stockholm, Saskatoon, Windthorst, Yorkton, Tantallon, Yarbo, and the city of Melville, Mr. Speaker.

I so present.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Lloydminster.

Mr. Wakefield: — Mr. Speaker, I have a petition I would like to present on behalf of several of the signatures from the Esterhazy area. The prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government not to implement the Commission on Financing Kindergarten to Grade 12 Education's recommendation to expand the provincial sales tax to include restaurant meals. Please do not tax our food.

I so present.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Indian Head-Milestone.

Mr. McMorris: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too have a petition to present regarding the raising the PST on restaurant meals, or putting it on to restaurant meals. The prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government not to implement the Commission on Financing's Kindergarten to Grade 12 Education's recommendations to expand the provincial sales tax to include restaurant meals. Please do not tax our food.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

Mr. Speaker, this petition is signed by many people, people from Fort Qu'Appelle, Lebret, Vibank, and Sedley.

I so present.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Estevan.

Ms. Eagles: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too have a petition from people concerned about the proposed expansion of the PST. And the prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government not to implement the Commission on Financing Kindergarten to Grade 12 Education recommendations to expand the provincial sales tax to include restaurant meals. Please do not tax our food.

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

And, Mr. Speaker, this is signed by over 400 people from Estevan, Lampman, Macoun, Bienfait, Roche Percee, Midale, Alameda, Redvers, Carnduff, and even Anchorage, Alaska.

I so present. Thank you.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Melfort.

Mr. Gantefer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise as well this afternoon on behalf of the citizens concerned about an expansion of the provincial sales tax. The prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government not to implement the Commission on Financing Kindergarten to Grade 12 Education's recommendation to expand the provincial sales tax to include restaurant meals. Please do not tax our food.

Signatures on the petition this afternoon, Mr. Speaker, are from communities like St. Brieux, Pilger, Melfort, Regina, Star City, Weldon, Kinistino, Naicam, all through the Northeast.

I so present on their behalf.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Humboldt.

Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I too have a petition with citizens concerned about the increase and expansion of the PST. And the prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government not to implement the Commission on Financing Kindergarten to Grade 12 Education recommendation to expand the provincial sales tax to include restaurant meals. Please do not tax our food.

And the signatures, Mr. Speaker, cover a number of constituencies. They're from Melfort, Spalding, Lumsden, Humboldt, LeRoy, Watrous, Muenster, Prince Albert, Elfros, Annaheim, Burr, St. Gregor, Quill Lake, Bruno, Pilger, Saskatoon, Lanigan, Rama, Invermay, Englefeld, Watson, Redvers, Nipawin, Lake Lenore, Rosetown, Kamsack, Canora, Guernsey, and Airdrie, Alberta.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Weyburn-Big Muddy.

Ms. Bakken: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too rise today to present a petition on behalf of the constituents of Weyburn-Big Muddy, but also signed by residents throughout the province of Saskatchewan who are concerned with the expansion of the PST. And the prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government not to implement the Commission on Financing Kindergarten to Grade 12 Education's recommendation to expand the provincial sales tax to include restaurant meals. Please do not tax our food.

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

And this petition is signed by residents of Yellow Grass, Weyburn, Lumsden, McTaggart, Lang, Midale, Radville,

Regina, Osage, Pangman, Fort Qu'Appelle, Stoughton, Avonlea, Moose Jaw, Khedive, Coronach, Goodwater, Minton, Saskatoon, and also Red Deer, Alberta.

I so present.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Wood River.

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also have a petition from citizens who are extremely concerned with this proposed tax on meals. And the prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government not to implement the Commission on Financing Kindergarten to Grade 12 Education's recommendation to expand the provincial sales tax to include restaurant meals. Please do not tax our food.

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

And, Mr. Speaker, this is signed in total by the good citizens of Rockglen and Fife Lake.

I so present.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Turtleford Shellbrook, pardon me, for Rosthern-Shellbrook.

Mr. Allchurch: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I rise in the Assembly today to bring forth a petition signed by citizens of Saskatchewan that are concerned with the government's implementation of the possible tax on meals. And the prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government not to implement the Commission on Financing Kindergarten to Grade 12 Education's recommendation to expand the provincial sales tax to include restaurant meals. Please do not tax our food.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

The signatures on this petition, Mr. Speaker, are from Rosthern, Duck Lake, Prince Albert, Laird, and Waldheim.

I so present.

The Speaker: — Recognize the member for Arm River-Watrous.

Mr. Brkich: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also have a petition here concerned about putting PST on restaurant meals:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government not to implement the Commission of Financing Kindergarten to Grade 12 Education's recommendation to expand the provincial sales tax to include restaurant meals. Please do not tax our food.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

Signed by the good citizens of Govan, Regina, Liberty, Colfax, Stalwart, Imperial, Craik, Bethune, Nokomis.

I so present.

The Speaker: — Recognize the member for Kindersley.

Mr. Dearborn: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today on behalf of concerned citizens worried about the expansion of the PST, specifically with the cut to jobs that it will cause for young people. And the prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government not to implement the Commission of Financing Kindergarten to Grade 12 Education's recommendation to expand the provincial sales tax to include restaurant meals. Please do not tax our food.

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

Mr. Speaker, this petition is signed from many communities but primarily from the community of Kerrobert.

I so present.

READING AND RECEIVING PETITIONS

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

A petition concerning the financing of kindergarten to grade 12 recommendation to extend the provincial sales tax on meals;

A petition concerning the renewal of Crown land lessees;

A petition concerning the dispute over the water level of the Qu'Appelle river system; and finally

A petition concerning the repairs to Highway No. 22.

PRESENTING REPORTS BY STANDING AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES

Standing Committee on House Services

Clerk Assistant (Committees): — Mr. Speaker presents the first report of the Standing Committee on House Services, which is hereby tabled.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Melfort.

Mr. Gantfoer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move, seconded by the member from Regina Douglas Park, that the first report of the Standing Committee on House Services be now concurred in.

The Speaker: — It has been moved by the member for Melfort, seconded by the member for Regina Douglas Park, that the first report of the Standing Committee on House Services be now concurred in.

Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — Motion is carried.

(13:45)

NOTICES OF MOTIONS AND QUESTIONS

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Kindersley.

Mr. Dearborn: — Mr. Speaker, I give notice that I shall on day no. 8 ask the government the following question:

To the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Revitalization: have the assessments for pasture land for 2003-2004 been adjusted in relation to the emergence of the BSE case in May of 2003; and if not, why not; and what measures are being considered to offset this?

I so present.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

The Speaker: — I recognize the Member for Moose Jaw Wakamow.

Hon. Ms. Higgins: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, to you and through you to all the members of the House, I would like to introduce a special delegation that we have sitting in your gallery, Mr. Speaker.

It is a six-person delegation of gender equity officials from South Africa. This is a working tour by officials of the South African Government Gender Machinery, specifically officials from the Office of the Status of Women and their departmental gender focal point persons from the provinces of Limpopo and Free State.

Mr. Speaker, I will attempt names but I apologize to our guests if I . . . if they aren't quite right on. And I would ask that you please stand when I call your name: Ms. Masawa, who is the deputy director, the Office of the Status of Women in Free State; Ms. Tsotetsi, special program officer, Municipality and Local Government of Free State; Mr. Daniel Nkala, special program officer, the Health-Gender Focal Point in Free State; Ms. Ntsala, special program officer, the Office of the Premier in Free State; and Ms. Kgare, senior administrative assistant, Office of the Premier, State of Limpopo; and Ms. Phasha, senior administrative assistant, Office of the Premier, State of Limpopo.

Mr. Speaker, our special guests are accompanied by Corinne Bokith, the executive director from the Status of Women office; Donna Braun, senior policy analyst from the Status of Women; and Irene Bauer, deputy chief of protocol.

This visit is funded by the Canadian International Development Agency. And, Mr. Speaker, as we all know we live in a very small world, and any chance that we have for an exchange of ideas and programs benefits us all, right across the world.

So, please, I ask that the House welcome our guests to Saskatchewan.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Higgins: — Mr. Speaker, while I'm on my feet, I also would like to introduce a variety of women's groups that are here in attendance today for a member's statement to help recognize International Women's Day.

Seated on the floor with us today is Georgina Heselton and her husband, Allan, from the DisAbled Women's Network of Saskatchewan. In the west gallery . . . Or in the Speaker's gallery, Mr. Speaker, there's Tania Theriault and Christiane Soucy from the Fédération provinciale des francosaskoises. Also, Francine Proulx-Kenzle, the Assemblée communautaire francosaskoise. And Amy Stensrud from the Provincial Association of Transition Houses.

Also we have Shirley Leibel and Laura Ross from the Provincial Council of Women; Kripa Sekher from the Saskatchewan Action Committee on the Status of Women; Sherri Doell from the Sexual Assault Services of Saskatchewan; Laura Small from the Women Entrepreneurs of Saskatchewan. Also, Bonnie Roach and Allia Koback from the Women Today Canada.

And these women . . . women's organizations are accompanied by our officials from the Status of Women office — Corinne Bokitch, Donna Braun, Melody Wood, Julie Johnson, Jocelyn Mohr, and Gail Quinney.

Mr. Speaker, in my role as Minister Responsible for the Status of Women it's been a privilege to work with these women's groups and have the opportunity to travel around the province and see the work that they do in our communities and the services they provide and the support that they provide to women throughout the province. It truly has been a privilege.

Mr. Speaker, on International Women's Day and throughout this month I would hope that and ask that all members of the Assembly welcome these groups to the Assembly and give them a warm round of thanks for the work that they do. Thank you.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Recognize the member for Kelvington-Wadena.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to join with the minister to welcome the delegation from the provinces of Limpopo and Free State. And I'd also like to welcome the officials from the Status of Women and the protocol office.

I understand that Saskatchewan has twinned with the province of Free State since 1995 and that there's been some beneficial partnerships have taken place. I'm hoping that the delegation will consider sharing their weather with us as well and maybe taking home some of our snow when they return.

And I'd also like to welcome the women that are from the various women's groups that came, representing the

International Women's Day. And I thank you all for your part in making Saskatchewan a very better place to live.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Recognize the member for Saskatoon Silver Springs.

Mr. Cheveldayoff: — Mr. Speaker, I'd like to join with the minister in introducing Laura Small. Laura and I were colleagues at Western Economic Diversification. It's a pleasant surprise to see you here this afternoon. And I'd also like to add that Laura is the new president of the Saskatoon Chamber of Commerce. So welcome, Laura.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Recognize the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To you and through you to my colleagues in the legislature, it's a pleasure to introduce today three guests who have joined us on the floor: Cheryl and Gerald Sim who farm in the Rosetown area and their son, Trent, who is a mixed operator in the Swift Current area. I'd ask all members to welcome them here today.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Recognize the member for Meadow Lake.

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is with pleasure that I introduce to you some friends in the Speaker's gallery, to all members of the Assembly as well, of course. Seated in your gallery — if they would stand please — John and Deb Broadly from Meadow Lake who are owners and operators of Meadow North Agencies. I had the pleasure of visiting with them as well on Friday evening at the brokers' convention in Saskatoon where there were many other brokers.

And they have been long-time friends and it's just great to have them here with us and with me today so please join me in welcoming them to the legislature.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Recognize the member for Weyburn-Big Muddy.

Ms. Bakken: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me today to introduce to you and welcome to the legislature 25 students from the Southeast Regional College in Weyburn. Mr. Speaker, they are seated in the east gallery and also with the students today are their instructors, Twyla Molnar and Bev Kulach, and college coordinator, Laura Hamilton.

I hope you enjoy your stay today and I'm looking forward to meeting with you in about an hour or so, and I'd like all members of the Legislative Assembly to help me in welcoming them today.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Recognize the member for Regina Coronation

Park.

Mr. Trew: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a good friend of mine seated in the west gallery, Gunnar Passmore, who's well known to many people throughout the province as a union representative with the Sheet Metal Workers Association. Gunnar and his wife, Dee, are great people who live in the village of Sedley and as I've already stated Gunnar certainly does his work broadly around the province and Dee works as a nurse in Regina. Anyway, please join me in welcoming Gunnar Passmore.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

The Speaker: — Recognize the member for Saskatoon Eastview.

International Women's Day

Ms. Junor: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. March 8 was International Women's Day, a key date for women worldwide as evidenced by our provincial, national, and international guests that are here today.

Although International Women's Day has come and gone, I want to draw attention to this important date to inform the members of the House that in Saskatchewan we have come to celebrate International Women's Day throughout the month of March.

International Women's Day marks women's efforts over the years to attain justice and equality for themselves and for their children. Today more women have their own independent sources of income; more women are entering jobs denied them in the past; more women are attaining higher levels of education; more women than men are starting their own business. These are positive gains, yet many women still face barriers to achieving success.

Mr. Speaker, our government is taking action to advance women's equality throughout the province through the action plan for Saskatchewan women which was released last fall. The importance of International Women's Day was confirmed as a priority in the action plan through the government's commitment to the annual support of International Women's Day events. Thanks to a grant program through Saskatchewan Labour's Status of Women office, women's groups and organizations that serve women are holding activities in communities all over Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all members of the legislature and the people of this great province to join me in recognizing and celebrating the accomplishments of women in the home, in the workplace, in our communities, and in all of society every day.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Recognize the member for Kelvington-Wadena.

International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, and again a very warm welcome to our special guests in the gallery today. On behalf of the official opposition I am pleased to bring greetings to the delegates from the provinces of Limpopo and Free State in South Africa, as well as those accompanying you on your tour here in Regina. We sincerely hope that your visit will not only be informative and enjoyable but that you'll find much useful information on government organizations, policy-making, legislation, and best practices.

Mr. Speaker, in welcoming this delegation from South Africa I am both honoured and humbled — honoured that they have chosen to be here with us today and humbled because I know they come from a country that has seen much horror and bloodshed due to oppression and racial discrimination.

While most of us have grown up in a peaceful and harmonious society here in Canada, we've also had our own clashes between races and culture. While we can't begin to know the hardships and personal struggles that those living under this kind of oppression face on a daily basis, we all have a responsibility to see that we're never part of this shameful practice and that we do whatever we can to stop it.

Yesterday, March 21, was the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination and there is a reason why this day is honoured worldwide. Racial discrimination doesn't stop at borders. It can be passed from one generation to the next and it breeds on fear and ignorance. Through understanding and acceptance of other races and cultures, we will learn that we are indeed all equal, and that diversity and respect go hand in hand.

I ask all members to recognize March 21 as the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Recognize the member for Swift Current.

Saskatchewan Broadcaster Harry Dekker

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's with great sadness that I rise today to mourn the loss of a great Saskatchewan broadcaster.

Harry Dekker passed away over the weekend at the age of 81. Mr. Dekker was a pioneer in the Saskatchewan broadcast industry who will be remembered for a great many things that he accomplished throughout his lifetime.

Named to the Canadian Broadcast Hall of Fame in 2001, Mr. Dekker took an interest in broadcasting at an early age — 14 years old in 1936, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Dekker got his start with CFQC Radio in Saskatoon at the age of 18, working up the ranks to program director by the late '40's. In 1951, he married broadcast colleague Christine Wiebe. The two went on to host the first-ever husband and wife radio show in Western Canada, the Double Dekker Breakfast Club. The couple moved the show

to CJNB North Battleford three years later, and under his leadership as station manager CJNB underwent two frequency changes, power increases, and the construction of a new studio and office.

Mr. Dekker will be remembered by his many fans, colleagues, friends, and those who grew to love and know him over the course of his career.

Most of his sons, save one, in fact went into broadcasting and he was also the mentor for a number of other radio personalities we know today including John Gormley and Murray Wood, Mr. Speaker. The only son that didn't go into radio, Chris, is a friend of mine and today, Mr. Speaker, on behalf of all of the opposition members in the Assembly, I would like to extend our sincere condolences to the Dekker family.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Recognize the member for Saskatchewan Rivers.

International Day for the Elimination of Racism

Mr. Borgerson: — Mr. Speaker, on March 21, 1960, a group of demonstrators gathered in the town of Sharpeville, South Africa, to protest the so-called pass laws that restricted their freedom of movement under the apartheid regime of that time.

According to reports, the crowd was neither violent nor threatening, and yet the South African police felt threatened. They opened fire on the crowd, and 40 seconds later 69 people were dead and 180 wounded. Among the victims were women and children.

Mr. Speaker, to commemorate the Sharpeville massacre the United Nations proclaimed March 21 as International Day for the Elimination of Racism. Canada was one of the first nations to support this proclamation, and now over 40 years later we continue to dedicate March 21 to all past and present victims of racism, discrimination, and intolerance.

Mr. Speaker, racism in its many forms is still a tragic reality in many societies in the world, including ours. Some of it is overt, but most of it is silent and institutional which makes it difficult to overcome.

(14:00)

But we do know that racism grows out of ignorance and fear and that it can only be dispelled through education and understanding. To that end, let us continue to work together here in Saskatchewan to eliminate racism, celebrate diversity, and make social justice and equality a reality for all people. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Recognize the member for Biggar.

Fire in Hog Barn

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Wednesday,

March 18 a massive fire consumed a farrowing barn which is part of a hog operation for the Bear Hills Pork Producers near the community of Perdue; 400 sows and 3,500 piglets were lost in this fire, creating a substantial economic setback for the operation. Fortunately none of the employees were injured.

Thanks to the efforts of 25 firefighters from the Perdue and Biggar fire departments, and the assistance of some of the local farmers who hauled water to the site, the breeding, gestation barn, and finishing barns were saved, leaving hope that the 19 employees that work at the operation will be able to retain their jobs.

Earlier this month the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool announced its plan to sell the hog operations, leaving some question as to the future of this site. A spokesperson for the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool, which is the majority shareholder in the company, has said that it's too early to really determine what's going to happen at that site when it comes to whether the barn will be rebuilt.

I would like to thank those 25 firefighters from Perdue and Biggar as well as the farmers that assisted in battling the blaze. I would also like to extend my regards to the operators of the barns and express my hope that the 19 employees at that operation will retain their employment.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Recognize the member for Regina Wascana Plains.

Rural Women's Month in Saskatchewan

Ms. Hamilton: — Thank you Mr. Speaker. This year, in recognition of the ongoing contributions of rural women to the development of this province, March has been declared Rural Women's Month in Saskatchewan.

Requests for this proclamation came from numerous sources including women's institutes across the province, the Saskatchewan representative to the Women's Advisory Committee of the National Farmers Union, the Whitewood Women's Network, and the Partners for Rural Family Support of Humboldt.

Rural Women's Month provides us an opportunity to raise awareness and foster appreciation of the varied and vital roles that rural women play and have always played in building this province. Whether we're talking about Saskatchewan's economic development or the enlightened social policies the province has put in place over the years, the contributions made by rural women have been immeasurable.

Rural women have had and continue to have a huge impact on the development of health care, education, and social services in Saskatchewan. They serve as volunteers, small-business owners, service providers, and leaders in their communities, and they're also one-half of most of the farm operations in the province, if not farmers in their own right.

I want to take this opportunity to acknowledge the contributions that rural women have made to this province, from

homesteading days to present, as well as to thank all those groups and individuals whose caring, time, and effort have made Rural Women Month in Saskatchewan a success.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Estevan.

World Water Day

Ms. Eagles: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to share with my colleagues in this Assembly the importance of today, March 22, which is World Water Day.

The United Nations declared March 22 to be World Water Day back in 1992 to recognize the importance of this very important natural resource. And after the tragic events that unfolded in Walkerton, Ontario, as well as in North Battleford, quality water is not something that anyone should take for granted.

According to the United Nations, Mr. Speaker, 1 billion people around the world do not have access to safe drinking water. At a special world leaders' summit in 2000, it was pledged cut in half by the year 2015 the amount of people who are unable to reach or afford safe drinking water.

The theme of World Water Day is water and disaster. And its goal is to enhance awareness towards preventing water-related disasters. I am sure all members of this Assembly will take a moment today to reflect upon the importance of World Water Day and the access to safe drinking water.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ORAL QUESTIONS

Surgical Waiting Lists

The Speaker: — Recognize the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, this week the Saskatoon Health District begins cancelling so-called elective surgeries in order to save \$200,000. The head of orthopedic surgery says patients are already waiting up to three and a half years for surgery and these cancellations will increase the waiting time by a couple of months.

Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan people are already waiting far too long for surgery. The question to the Premier is this: why is his government allowing that wait to grow even longer?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Health would be glad, of course, to speak to specifics. But I do want to say today on the very important eve of a federal budget, the challenges facing health care across Canada, whether it be in our emergency wards, whether it be in waiting lists — and this, Mr. Speaker, is true across Canada — will need to be addressed

by a greater federal input in health care funding in Canada.

Tomorrow, Canadians I believe wait with baited breath to see if the national government in Ottawa will, in fact, demonstrate their concern for the health care of Canadians by improving the level of fiscal and federal funding for health care across Canada.

As we challenge with shortening our waiting lists in Saskatchewan, as we make the appropriate and necessary changes, if we are going to sustain publicly funded medicare for Canadians for the long term, much will be riding on what happens tomorrow.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Wall: — Mr. Speaker, it is important that this government take responsibility for health care in the province of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, Cheryl Sim of Rosetown is one of these people on the waiting list. She's just 57 years old, but she's suffering from a pinched nerve at the base of her spine due to two deteriorating vertebrae.

Cheryl went on the waiting list July 2003, but while she was waiting for surgery on her back, her health declined further and she needed to have her left hip replaced. So in December she was placed on a different waiting list for hip-replacement surgery. While Cheryl waits on a waiting list, she's suffering a domino effect of increasing health problems. The joints are suffering under the strain, as you can imagine, and she's been forced into a wheelchair.

Cheryl Sim is one example of a patient who is forced to suffer for months and years waiting for so-called elective surgery. To the Premier, how long must Cheryl wait?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Health.

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the previous question, the member opposite raised the issue around the cases that were changed in Saskatoon this month. Of those cases — there are about 90 patients — 25 of them received their care sooner, and 6 of them decided they didn't want to go ahead with the surgery, and the others are being done in the first three weeks of April. So I just wanted to make sure I corrected the statements that the member made there.

As it relates to all of the surgery in Saskatchewan, we are working very carefully to develop the best system in Canada around tracking the surgery. Patients will get care and our ultimate target, as we announced this morning, is 18 months on elective surgery, but all surgeries will be assessed in six categories. We will have optimum times for all of those things — first place anywhere in Canada that's done that.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. While Cheryl Sim is being shuffled from one waiting list to another, notwithstanding targets of 18 months, every day her pain gets worse, her mobility gets worse, and her ability to function becomes more limited. Cheryl says, and I quote:

I hear my situation referred to as non-life threatening, my surgery requirements elective — as though they are a whimsical choice I have made. This illness threatens my life every day. It holds me hostage in my home and denies me many choices you take for granted. The system is not working.

Close the quote. Mr. Speaker, to the Premier, when is Cheryl Sim going to get the surgery she desperately needs and deserves?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Health.

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My concern is for individual patients like Mrs. Sim, and I know all of us have that concern. We end up then trying to make sure that our system works to provide care on a regular, predictable basis.

In Saskatchewan the Canadian Institute for Health Information shows that we have the highest rate of hip replacements in the country along with Alberta. So we're providing many of these services, but we have a backlog. We know that; we're working towards that. And we anticipate that we'll have some information about that in the coming weeks.

But what we want to do is to make sure that we have care for those people in a priority basis and in a fair-ways basis and an open basis — and that's what our Surgical Care Network is going to do because we want to be able to provide good care for all of our Saskatchewan residents, including Mrs. Sim.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Wall: — Well, Mr. Speaker, it's interesting that the minister would talk about priorities because even though the NDP (New Democratic Party) health system is failing her badly, here's what she goes on to say, and I quote:

I know there are others waiting far longer than I. There are many with death-threatening symptoms whom are system is failing at a growing rate but it seems to me that pitting us against each other based on who might die first is totally barbaric.

Surely the cost of my internment in a total care facility which will become necessary without intervention far outweighs the cost of the treatment I've been judged unworthy of.

Mr. Speaker, how much longer will Cheryl have to wait?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Health.

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, we work with the professionals — the surgeons and others within the system —

and we also have in our new Surgical Care Network, surgical care coordinators who can answer questions for patients, make sure that they go back for further consultation with the doctors if it requires that they move in the whole waiting list.

But one of our challenges clearly is to understand how and why people wait in the system. And we have been operating on anecdote and stories and things that don't relate to actual facts for many years. But in Saskatchewan we are going to have the information that will be provided by the surgeons, by the health administration people, so that we actually have the ability to manage and put resources so that people like Mrs. Sim can have some very clear target time frame for when their surgery is going to be done.

That's what we want to do. We want to provide the best care we can for our Saskatchewan people.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Wall: — Well, Mr. Speaker, that anecdotal story and her family are here today, so the minister will have every opportunity to deal directly with this situation. And I put it quite simply through you to the Minister of Health: when will Cheryl get the surgery she needs?

The Speaker: — Recognize the Minister of Health.

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, the surgeries are provided in Saskatchewan on the advice of the doctors and surgeons who are involved related to the space that's available in our operating rooms. They set the priorities. We work together with them to make sure they have the best information possible. We will continue to do that, working with the professionals because that's what we have to do.

Ultimately though, it goes right back to the Premier's earlier response. If we are going to maintain a health system that has a standard across Canada, which is our national medicare system, we need the federal participation. We need the dollars that come on a basis that makes sure that every Canadian gets the best care possible. We've been taking a real kicking in that area.

We also have the other problems with equalization which are also of a concern to the province of Saskatchewan. All of those issues do relate to how we provide services, but we're going to make the best use of the dollars that we've got to help Saskatchewan people.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Recognize the member for Melfort.

Termination of Director of Emergency Medicine at Royal University Hospital

Mr. Gantfoer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker, my questions are for the Premier. Two weeks ago the NDP fired Dr. Jon Witt as the head of the emergency medicine at the Royal University Hospital for expressing serious concerns about understaffing and patient safety.

Last week the Saskatchewan Party released letters of support for Dr. Jon Witt from all of the other doctors and nurses that work with him at RUH (Royal University Hospital). And today I want to table four more letters of support for Dr. Witt from emergency room physicians across Canada.

The chief of emergency medicine at Toronto East General Hospital calls the NDP decision to fire Dr. Witt "appalling". The chief of emergency medicine at St. Michael's Hospital in Toronto writes this of Dr. Witt and I quote:

You did what we all . . . try to do every day: the right thing. Advocating for our patients and for the quality of care in our . . . (emergency rooms) is . . . the reason we were hired in the first place.

Mr. Speaker, will the minister do the right thing today and reinstate Dr. Witt as head of emergency medicine at Royal University Hospital?

The Speaker: — Recognize the Minister of Health.

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, there were some challenges in the emergency ward at the Royal University Hospital in Saskatoon. Those were raised with me. I raised them with the senior managers, administrators, doctors in charge of the Saskatoon Health Authority and they have made some decisions around how they're going to move forward to make sure that patients get good care at that emergency ward and the other emergency wards that they have in their area to take care of.

We will continue to work together with them because they are working on the ground, and they will make sure that the patient care is the best that's possible. That's how this government works. We work with the professionals and others who are running the system because that's the way that it's important to do it.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(14:15)

The Speaker: — Recognize the member for Melfort.

Mr. Gantfoer: — Mr. Speaker, Dr. Witt wrote a letter to the minister raising serious concerns about patient safety due to understaffing. But the minister says that Dr. Witt didn't follow the right process and couldn't substantiate his claims, and so he was fired.

Mr. Speaker, all of the doctors and nurses who work with Dr. Witt, along with ER (emergency room) physicians across Canada, support him. And yet the minister says Dr. Witt didn't follow the right process and didn't substantiate his concern.

Well, Mr. Speaker, if the words of dozens of front-line health care professionals isn't good enough, maybe this information will be. The Saskatchewan Party has acquired a briefing note from the Saskatoon Health Region on ER waiting times at Royal University Hospital. It says the average wait time to see a doctor after entering emergency department with someone having a heart attack was 24 minutes.

Mr. Speaker, is it acceptable to this NDP government that someone having a heart attack has to wait almost half an hour to see a doctor once he gets into the emergency room?

The Speaker: — Recognize the Minister of Health.

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, we work with the professionals who are monitoring and working in the emergency wards, and their job is to make sure that the care is provided there in a safe basis.

I know that some allegations were made by Dr. Witt. He was given opportunity in . . . through the Saskatoon Health Authority processes to substantiate those allegations. The information I have was that he could not or would not substantiate those allegations, and they have been dealing with him.

If there are further issues that are arising in the emergency ward, they will be clearly raised with the Saskatoon Health Authority and with the doctors there. And we will make sure that the patient care for people in Saskatoon and area is the best that it can be.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Recognize the member for Melfort.

Mr. Gantefoer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, Dr. Witt and the emergency room professionals at RUH hospital are indeed health care professionals who are advocating and expressing concerns.

Mr. Speaker, according to the information acquired from the Saskatoon Health Region, the average waiting time for someone presenting with angina, a precursor to serious and immediate heart problems, is 45 minutes. The average waiting time to see a doctor for someone going to the emergency with chest pain is one hour.

Mr. Speaker, medical professionals often describe the first 60 minutes after a patient suffers a heart attack as the golden hour. It is critical for patients to get to a hospital, see a doctor, and have treatment initiated as soon as possible. And yet this report, which was tabled by Dr. Witt to the health care system in Saskatoon, says that it takes at least 30 minutes to see a doctor.

Will the minister explain why he didn't view this unacceptable waiting time as hard evidence of serious problems with understaffing and patient safety at Royal University Hospital?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Health.

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — The member opposite has referred to a report which I do not have, so I would ask that he table that. I also ask him to table the two letters he referred to on Friday, which I have been unable to find, related to support for Dr. Witt so that I can further investigate those.

But what I would say is that we have some very capable, professional people who are providing care in the Saskatoon Health Authority, in all three of the emergency wards, and they are working together with their senior management to make

sure that good care is being provided in Saskatoon.

I think the appropriate place to sort out a lot of these care management issues is in the Saskatoon Health Authority. But when the member opposite raises them in this House, then I will be finding out exactly what happens. But I need the information that he's got, and I would ask him to provide that.

Our goal is to make sure that our health system provides good care at all times.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Melfort.

Mr. Gantefoer: — Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The minister relies so heavily on the senior management of the Saskatoon Health District. All of this information was in their hands, but I will be pleased to table it here as well.

The hard truth is that Dr. Witt did the right thing by raising legitimate issues related to understaffing and patient safety. And for that, despite the excuses by this minister, they fired him. In so doing, the NDP have poisoned the environment at Royal University Hospital and created a huge barrier between the staff at RUH and the health region administration.

It is finally time for the minister to take positive action. Will he do the right thing – reinstate Dr. Jon Witt as the head of emergency medicine at Royal University Hospital, and then launch an independent investigation into the issues raised by Dr. Witt with regard to understaffing and patient safety, headed by an out-of-province emergency medical professional?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Health.

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, the senior doctors and management in the Saskatoon Health Authority have been working on this particular issue and dealing with a number of challenges related to the Royal University Hospital emergency ward and also Dr. Witt.

They are continuing to work on that, and I have faith that they will be able to sort out a solution which will provide the best care and continue to provide the best care for Saskatoon residents. I think it's important that we provide the support to make sure that this particular facility provides good care because it's one of our flagship facilities in Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Recognize the member for Saskatoon Northwest.

Out-Migration in Saskatchewan

Mr. Merriman: — Thank you. Mr. Speaker, my question is to the Premier. Statistics Canada released information today on Saskatchewan's population. And once again, unfortunately, the news is not good. That's because Saskatchewan continues to lose young people to other provinces — 3,500 in the past year alone, Mr. Speaker. And what's more disturbing, Mr. Speaker, is that more than 17,000, 17,000 since the member for

Saskatoon Riversdale has become Premier just three years ago.

Mr. Speaker, how much longer will parents and grandparents have to be subject to a lack of a plan by this government to reverse this trend? How much longer will we have to say goodbye to our children and our grandchildren as they leave Saskatchewan for jobs and opportunities in other provinces?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Recognize the Minister of Industry and Resources.

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for the question. And I'm pleased to report to the House that actually over the last year, out-migration, which has been a problem in our province, dropped by more than 10 per cent, Mr. Speaker. And the net out-migration, the number of people moving out over the number of people moving in, was the lowest it's been in five years, Mr. Speaker.

Do we need to do more? Yes, we do, Mr. Speaker. Are we doing more? Yes, we are, Mr. Speaker. We have a new regime, a taxation in oil and gas which has resulted in record oil and gas drilling. We have a new regime in mining which is leading to a 25 per cent increase in mining exploration, Mr. Speaker. And despite the problems we've had in agriculture, we're going to be building oil and gas, building mining, building forestry, building manufacturing to continue to tackle the challenge that we face, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Recognize the member for Saskatoon Southeast.

Mr. Merriman: — Mr. Speaker, I'm glad that the member opposite recognizes that the trend is still there, although getting better.

Mr. Speaker, the number from StatsCanada today tells a sad story because behind every person that leaves Saskatchewan is a family that says goodbye to a son, a daughter, or a grandchild. With every family that leaves this province, there's a school that loses a student, a kids' soccer team that loses the coaches, a community that loses a small business.

And every time a family leaves, so do the dollars, tax dollars that could be used to reduce hospital waiting lists, help to reduce education property tax, or rebuild a crumbling road.

Mr. Speaker, what specific steps is the NDP government taking to address this record – five straight years, five straight years of young people and families leaving Saskatchewan to build careers and opportunities in other provinces?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Industry and Resources.

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Well, Mr. Speaker, it was good to hear something from the member opposite that we don't hear from

the members opposite every day, and that is, the situation is getting better.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Mr. Speaker, that is the point that I made in my first answer. And I said, do we have more work to do? Yes we do. Are we headed in the right direction? Yes we are, Mr. Speaker, because the numbers the member refers to indicate that we are moving in the right direction, Mr. Speaker.

Last year, I mean 2002, the figure for net out-migration, the number of people we lost, was close to 7,000, Mr. Speaker. This year it will be about 3,500, so we've cut it in half for this year.

Do we have more work to do? Yes we do, Mr. Speaker. Are we committed to getting the job done over the next course of this term of government? You bet we are and we will, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Recognize the member for Thunder Creek.

Support for the Livestock Industry

Mr. Stewart: — Mr. Speaker, last week this government's Throne Speech made just one brief passing reference to the BSE (bovine spongiform encephalopathy) crisis. The NDP said they would work with other governments to open the borders. Once again the NDP's actions did not match their words.

Today the Prime Minister of Canada is in Alberta announcing a billion dollar aid package, mostly for cattle producers. The Premier of Alberta is in Washington trying to get the border reopened, and the Premier of Saskatchewan is sitting here, doing absolutely nothing to help.

Mr. Speaker, why didn't this Premier go to Washington with Ralph Klein? Why isn't the NDP government providing its support to this important trade initiative?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Speaker, the member opposite raises the matter of the Prime Minister being in Alberta to announce BSE support. I want to join with that member, I'm sure, and all members in acknowledging with welcome arms this new federal support package for BSE.

I would argue, Mr. Speaker, that we've made our point, that now in trade injury the federal government has finally accepted the reality that that trade injury payment – whether it's in BSE or elsewhere – should be the 100 per cent support of the national government. And so we're looking forward to that support.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Today, Mr. Speaker, I am fully aware that my colleague, Ralph Klein, is in Washington, DC (District

of Columbia). He's in Washington today, Mr. Speaker. There will be many areas in which the Premier of Alberta and I will disagree, whether it be the Wheat Board, publicly funded and administered medicare, and some other issues. But on this point, Mr. Speaker, the Premier of Alberta and myself — and I would say all Canadian premiers — are in 100 per cent agreement.

And I am very confident that the Premier of Alberta in this venue will be taking the message from Canadians, from Canadian premiers, to the corridors of Washington as we have taken it, as I most recently spoke with the American consulate here.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Recognize the member for Thunder Creek.

Mr. Stewart: — Mr. Speaker, I agree that Ralph Klein has been a very effective spokesman for Canadian cattle producers, far more effective than this NDP Premier. But that's the problem. The NDP is always letting someone else carry the ball, especially when it comes to sticking up for Saskatchewan agriculture.

Today the federal government announced a billion dollar assistance package, mostly for BSE, with no help or input from this NDP government. Today Ralph Klein is in Washington fighting to get the border reopened with no help from this NDP government. Mr. Speaker, when it comes to addressing the BSE crisis, the NDP is all talk and no action. Why?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Speaker, the member opposite seems to have a short-term memory. Was it not but months ago that his now friends in Ottawa that he praises in this House stopped funding to support the livestock producers of Saskatchewan? And who filled in the difference? Who filled in the difference? The Government of Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — This member stands in the House today and would argue this government has done nothing to support the livestock industry in Saskatchewan when he knows that from the treasury of this government has gone \$55 million in support of the industry — and by the way, Mr. Speaker, with the criticism of members opposite; with the criticism of members opposite who say we shouldn't be spending those dollars, Mr. Speaker. We have stood with our livestock producers. We stand with the federal government. We stand with other Canadian provinces in saying to our American friends and neighbours: open the border; open it on science; don't open it on politics or close it on politics; open it on science. The period is now and the time is right.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(14:30)

TABLING OF DOCUMENTS

The Speaker: — Members, before orders of the day, I have several documents which I would now like to table.

First of all is the members' accountability and disclosure reports for the fiscal year ended March 31, 2003.

Second, audited financial statements, auditor's opinion, and schedule of fixed assets for the government and the opposition caucuses for the fiscal year ended March 31, 2003.

Thirdly, financial statements for the offices of the independent members of the Legislative Assembly for the fiscal year ended March 31, 2003.

Fourth, end-of-term financial statements for the offices of independent officers of the Legislative Assembly.

And last of all, the audited end-of-term financial statements, auditor's opinion, and schedule of fixed assets for the opposition caucus.

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

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Speaker, to move a motion under rule 49.

The Speaker: — The Premier has asked . . . requesting leave to move a motion under rule 49. Would the Premier state the nature of the motion.

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — The nature of the motion, Mr. Speaker, will be to ask of this Assembly a unanimous vote providing from this Assembly to the federal government our position on what we believe is the inequity and unfairness of the current equalization system in Canada, particularly as it pertains to Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — The Premier has requested leave and given an explanation. Is leave granted?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — Leave has been granted. The member may proceed.

MOTION UNDER RULE 49

Equalization Program in Canada

The Speaker: — I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Speaker, thank you very much. At the close of my remarks I will be making the formal motion which we have discussed with the members of the opposition. I understand that motion will be seconded by a government member and then there will be debate and perhaps an amendment from the opposition, and finally we will come to what I hope can be a unanimous vote.

The matter here today, Mr. Speaker, of some urgency, given the federal budget tomorrow, given the immediate or soon-closed renewal period of the equalization formula and program, and given the information that has been made widely available to Canadians now through the very exceptional work of Professor Tom Courchene makes this, I believe, a very, very timely debate.

I want to begin, Mr. Speaker, today by talking a little bit about the role of equalization so that all members and the general public, I hope, can have an understanding of the important role of equalization — what is equalization intended to do. Well shortly put, Mr. Speaker, equalization is a national program, a federal program, that is now constitutionally enshrined; a program which seeks to bring a reasonable level of services to all Canadians at a reasonable level of taxation no matter where we live in Canada.

It is one of those national programs, like federal transfers of all sorts, which seek to bind the nation together, to give glue to this federation, this nation that we love and call Canada. It is one of those programs which seeks to bring us together, to bind us together. The theory here, Mr. Speaker, is good. The theory is good. It is the right thing to do for we as Canadians to forge national programs that should support regions of the country and support Canadians wherever we live with that stated goal of a reasonable level of service for reasonable levels of taxation wherever we live. It is the right thing for the national government to do.

And I would argue, Mr. Speaker, that the equalization program has worked relatively well up until the early 1980s — 1982 to be exact. And what went wrong, Mr. Speaker, in 1982? At that time the federal government changed the formula for equalization from what was once a 10-province standard to a five-province standard. Under the 10-province standard, Mr. Speaker, the economies and the relative strengths and revenue potentials of all Canadian provinces were taken into account. Then the equalization dollars were apportioned based on relative strengths within the Canadian Confederation.

In those early years of the 1980s, the national government opted to reduce the 10-province standard, national average of all provinces, to a five-province standard — a five-province standard, Mr. Speaker. And the five provinces chosen at that time were British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, and Quebec.

In that new five-province standard began the difficulty that is singled out on Saskatchewan, because under that five-province standard suddenly our wealth in energy, oil, and gas rose extremely high in the 5 per cent . . . in the five-province average, simply because the other provinces — particularly at that time — had very, very minimal energy resources. So just to point this out to you, Mr. Speaker, and to members present.

As Tom Courchene identifies in his report, under the 10-province standard, Saskatchewan — under that standard — accounted for 48.9 per cent of heavy oil resources. Under the five-province standard, Saskatchewan is claimed to account for 94.2 per cent of heavy oil resources in Canada.

Under the 10-province standard, what is defined as third-tier oil,

under the 10-province standard, Saskatchewan was credited with 36.9 per cent of the resource. Fair. Under the five-province standard, we are accounted for 97.4 per cent of third-tier oil.

You see the problem that was created when we moved to the five-province standard. What that has led to, I would argue, Mr. Speaker, is that Saskatchewan over the years has been singled out for unfair treatment under equalization.

Even worse, Mr. Speaker, while other provinces in the Confederation have had this inequity addressed through individual accords, namely the provinces of Nova Scotia and Newfoundland, no such accord has been offered or given to the people of Saskatchewan.

Now then we add on the change that came to the mining revenues, the mining revenues. And you will know, Mr. Speaker, that the former minister of Finance, now the Minister of Industry and Resources, and I tackled Ottawa on this issue and had some success, but limited success. We count that to represent another 40 to \$50 million in lost equalization to this province, resources rightfully belonging to the people of Saskatchewan that have been taken out.

So we have a circumstance now in Canada, we're under a five-province standard. Saskatchewan is unfairly singled out because of our oil and natural gas revenues and the potential that we have in growing that specific industry, that specific sector of our economy.

Now bad enough that we're singled out under the treatment, then along comes a federal government in the last number of years which has reached right into the pockets of Saskatchewan residents and taken our money more than dollar for dollar, so that for every dollar we put in one pocket from revenue from oil and gas, the national government has reached into our pocket and has taken out more than a dollar — more than a dollar.

Now that's documented by Professor Courchene as having happened over these last number of years. When this has become now a matter of public discourse, the national government has responded.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I want to talk about the response today. What has the response created? Well we're told now by the national government that we will receive \$120 million in payment. I underline this, Mr. Speaker. They say this is one-time money — one-time money. They say that this provides for the money that they have taken out of our pockets over the last number of years, money that they have lifted from the people of Saskatchewan and here it is back.

So get this. They take our money, then they just give it back, and expect the province of Saskatchewan to be pleased with the result. Well, Mr. Speaker, we appreciate the work that has been done. But, Mr. Speaker, this is only but the start of the work that needs to be done — only but the start.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — So for this period of 17 to 18 years which Ottawa has now reviewed, they come to us and say, well here's a cheque for all the money that we stole of \$120 million.

Well over 17 years . . . And by the way, Mr. Speaker, that's only operating on one narrow category under which equalization is defined; it comes to oil and gas. There are eight of those categories. This is only dealing with the one category where they've taken more than a dollar in clawback.

Now what if we were to extend that to some of these other categories where more than a dollar has been taken? There would be millions of dollars more even under this, their methodology.

But I say to you, Mr. Speaker, 17, 18 years of inequitable equalization and we receive a cheque for \$120 million — that represents about \$7 million a year. Well, Mr. Speaker, this is not the solution to the inequity or unfairness of equalization as it has affected Saskatchewan.

Then they say but oh, but hold it, we promise not to do it any more. We promise not to claw back more than a dollar on a dollar under the Crown lease category. We're not going to do that any more. We're going to quit reaching into your pocket and taking out more than a dollar for a dollar.

Well, Mr. Speaker, that is not, that is not the solution to the inequity that has faced the people of Saskatchewan under this flawed equalization program ever since 1982. So it's little wonder we perhaps feel a little less than satisfied.

And then, Mr. Speaker, the third point they say to us is now just be patient and we'll look at the entire circumstance regarding equalization over the next equalization review period which begins this April and extends for five years.

Now officials from the Department of Finance tell me that if, if successful in this round of negotiations and seeing some change to equalization, that in fact, in fact if changes were to be made they would not be made then till five years from today, 2009. And the officials tell me that any change to equalization usually takes two, three, four and five years to implement, which could take us to 2013, 2014, before we see an answer that's fair and equitable to the people of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, this province, this government, the people of Saskatchewan, and I hope this legislature unanimously today says we are not going to wait until 2009 or 2014 for a solution to the unfairness that affects the people of Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Speaker, just so that we clearly understand the inequity, just so that we clearly understand the inequity of what's wrong with the current formula and its application, it is vividly illustrated in this current fiscal year which is now coming to an end.

In this current fiscal year, our sister province to the east, Manitoba — similar population, very similar economy — this fiscal year the province of Manitoba will receive under equalization \$1.2 billion. Saskatchewan this year will receive about \$120 million.

The member asks, how much? That means to Manitoba 10 times the amount of equalization that is coming to the province

of Saskatchewan.

(14:45)

If, Mr. Speaker, you take the period of years from 1991-92 to present and compare the amounts of equalization that have come from the national government to Manitoba and Saskatchewan in that period of time, Manitoba has received over \$10 billion more, Mr. Speaker.

Now that could be argued, Mr. Speaker, that could be argued as fair if in fact the formula was recognizing the benefit to the people of Saskatchewan from oil and gas revenues and activity in the energy sector. But no — instead of benefiting the people of Saskatchewan, they've been reaching in here and clawing it back more than a dollar on a dollar.

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, therefore we propose, and we'll lobby and we will do battle towards the following solution.

First of all, in terms of any retroactive payments, let us be sure that we're addressing all of the categories where we have been inappropriately clawed back. Not just the one, but all of the categories. Point number one.

Point number two. Beginning today, beginning next week, beginning immediately, this province seeks to establish with the national government an accord that protects our energy, oil, and gas resources in a fashion that is fair and equitable with the Atlantic, with the Atlantic provinces.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — We're not asking for anything special. We're not asking for any unique treatment. We only want for our people what is fair, what is fair. Point number two.

Point number three. We will continue, continue to pressure, work, and lobby to see an adjustment to this matter of the mining, the mining tax revenues that are coming to Saskatchewan. This unfairness is costing us today 40 to \$50 million in appropriate equalization.

And fifth, fourth, Mr. Speaker, fourth, our long-term goal is to establish again in Canada a 10-province standard that brings equity and fairness to all the regions and all the people of Canada.

Now that said, Mr. Speaker — and I want to close with this before I read the motion — what is our ultimate goal? The ultimate goal of this government, the ultimate goal of this government is to see a strengthened economy that gets us right out of equalization altogether.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Before I take my place, Mr. Speaker, I just want to reflect a little on an opportunity that I had to serve in this legislature as the minister of then Social Services. When we introduced into this province the Building Independence program, the Building Independence program, we became aware that in the practice of social assistance in Saskatchewan, what were we doing for those families who went and earned

some of their own income, what did we do? Well we deducted it straight off the welfare cheque, right off the social assistance cheque — therefore no real incentive to those families to maximize their own potentials, their own benefits. Well we changed that, Mr. Speaker. We changed that to give incentive, to help families build their independence. We changed that, Mr. Speaker. And you know what, as a result? More than 40 per cent or about 40 per cent of our families receiving social assistance are now independent of social assistance.

Mr. Speaker, this principle is no different. This province wants to build its economy, wants to maximize its tremendous potential, particularly in energy, particularly in oil and gas. We want to maximize that potential. We want those revenues of those resources which constitutionally belong to the people of Saskatchewan. Make no mistake about that. These are not resources belonging to the national government, these are resources constitutionally belonging to the people of Saskatchewan. And we want to maximize the economic opportunities from those resources and we want to maximize their return to the people of Saskatchewan from those resources to provide quality health care, quality child care, safe neighbourhoods, and good education.

Under this confiscatory equalization scheme that has singled out the province of Saskatchewan, we are being handicapped in doing that. The sooner, Mr. Speaker, we can see that change, is the sooner that we can see our economy grow, it's the sooner we're out of equalization altogether. That's our goal, Mr. Speaker.

And so, Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the member of Saskatoon Massey Place:

That this Legislative Assembly extend appreciation to Dr. Thomas J. Courchene for his recent research and publication, "Confiscatory Equalization: The Intriguing Case of Saskatchewan's Vanishing Energy Revenue," which has provided important and respected validation of arguments in equalization that Saskatchewan has been making for many, many years; and

that this Legislative Assembly express grave concerns that, given the federal government recent actions and their commitment for future review, Saskatchewan will continue to be significantly disadvantaged in equalization in comparison to the provinces of Newfoundland and Nova Scotia; and

that this legislature confirm the position of the province of Saskatchewan that fairness and equity in the treatment of resource revenues must be integrated into the federal equalization program similar to fiscal arrangements with Newfoundland-Labrador and Nova Scotia; and further,

that the Premier meet with the Prime Minister as soon as possible to seek a solution that will provide Saskatchewan with fair and equitable treatment within the equalization program and thus within the federation itself.

I so move, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — On the motion moved by the member for Saskatoon Riversdale, seconded by the member for Saskatoon Massey Place:

That this Legislative Assembly extend appreciation to Dr. Thomas J. Courchene for his recent research and publication, "Confiscatory Equalization: The Intriguing Case of Saskatchewan's Vanishing Energy Revenues," which has provided important and respected validation of arguments in equalization that Saskatchewan has been making for many years; and

that this Legislative Assembly express grave concerns that, given the federal government's recent actions and their commitment for future review, Saskatchewan will continue to be significantly disadvantaged in equalization in comparison to the provinces of Newfoundland and Nova Scotia; and

that this Legislative Assembly confirm the position of the province of Saskatchewan that fairness and equity in the treatment of resource revenues must be integrated into the federal equalization program similar to fiscal arrangements with Newfoundland-Labrador and Nova Scotia; and further,

that the Premier meet with the Prime Minister as soon as possible to seek a solution that will provide Saskatchewan with fair and equitable treatment within the equalization program and thus within the federation itself.

I recognize the member for Saskatoon Massey Place.

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Well thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise as seconder of the motion, although not pleased that we have to have this debate at all in the sense that the case for fairness that the province of Saskatchewan has is so clear that this is not a matter where we should be having to have debate in the Legislative Assembly to convince the federal government, including its representatives in Saskatchewan, that there has to be some change to the way the province is treated.

The Premier spoke very eloquently about the origin of the issue. I would like to discuss with the House, and for the benefit of anyone watching or who may be reading *Hansard*, some of the effects of the issue and what is happening.

The Premier pointed out that there are several areas where Saskatchewan is being unfairly treated and I'd like to outline those areas in four parts.

The first area identified by Professor Courchene — and I want to add that these areas have been identified to the federal government by our own ministers and Finance officials for many years — but the first area, Mr. Speaker, is the area of oil and gas Crown leases. This is where the Government of Saskatchewan owns oil or gas rights and an oil or gas company comes along and they want to drill for oil or gas. And they will bid on land in order to have the right to do that, and of course that's something that we're encouraging. And we are having record land sales generally because people are interested in investing in oil and gas in Saskatchewan. So what happens is, in a typical year, we may be paid \$100 million for oil and gas

rights by oil and gas companies.

Now the difficulty is, we take in \$100 million, and the federal government reduces our equalization payment by \$200 million. I want to underline that. For every dollar that we take in in Crown leases for oil and gas, the federal government is reducing equalization by \$2.

How can that be right? It can't be right. And so there are three other things that they're doing that I'm going to talk about in a moment. But I want to say, what the federal government said on Friday is, they will give us \$120 million, but what that \$120 million is, is that money that they've confiscated with respect to Crown leases. In other words, they've taken money that did not belong to them, that belonged to the people of Saskatchewan — that 120 million — and they've said, we'll give that back to you.

Well of course, what else could they do? So that's the one issue. And that, Mr. Speaker, is the one and only thing — the one and only thing — that the federal government has said that they will do.

But there's three other areas, and I want to outline them for the House. The second area is, and the Premier has referred to it, the mining tax base. Now here what the House needs to know, and the public needs to know, Mr. Speaker, is that the federal government is attributing more of the wealth from mining to the province of Saskatchewan than actually exists in the province of Saskatchewan. Saskatchewan produces about 14 per cent — that's one-four per cent — of the value of mining production in Canada. But over the last several years the federal government has said, in calculating our equalization, that we have over 50 per cent of the mining wealth.

Now how does that make sense, Mr. Speaker? It doesn't make any sense. So the Premier and I had to go to Mr. Manley about a year and a half ago when he was still the federal Finance minister, when the federal government wanted to take \$300 million back, and we had to say this is not right, obviously. And they relented and only took \$150 million back, so they didn't take the other 150 million.

But the point is, each and every year we estimate that the federal government is clawing back 40 to \$50 million, because of this problem, that is entitled to the people of Saskatchewan. But the federal government is not giving us that money which we're entitled to, Mr. Speaker.

Now so that's number two issue; number one, I've already talked about.

Number two, the mining tax base. The federal government gave their response on Friday — their preliminary response because, as the Premier said, we're not done with this issue.

What did the federal government say they would do about the problem of the mining tax base, Mr. Speaker? They said we would look at it when equalization was renewed. When will equalization be renewed? It will be renewed, Mr. Speaker, in the year 2009. That is five years from now. And when equalization is renewed, the other thing the House has to know is that it takes effect over the next five years.

So that what the federal government is saying about this grab of 40 to \$50 million a year is, wait five years and we'll talk about it; wait ten years and maybe you'll see some change.

Mr. Speaker, that's not good enough. That's unacceptable. It's unacceptable to this government. It's unacceptable to every member of this House. It's unacceptable to every person in this province, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Now we have the third thing the federal government is doing to the province of Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker.

I've talked about how they're taking \$2 for every dollar when we have Crown leases. I've talked about how they're shortchanging us 40 to \$50 million on mining.

The third thing they're doing is for every dollar that Saskatchewan earns in royalties for oil and gas, every dollar we take in, the federal government deducts between \$1.08 and \$1.25 from our equalization. Well how does that work, Mr. Speaker?

So you try to build the economy of Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker. You try to build the economy of Saskatchewan, and you are penalized by our federal government. You're penalized for that.

(15:00)

And the Premier is right, Mr. Speaker, when he says that unlike the Building Independence program in Social Services, where when people start to work you let them keep some of their money, unlike that, Mr. Speaker, when we try to build the economy of this province in mining and oil and gas, we are fined by the federal government. We're fined, we're punished for that, Mr. Speaker, and that can't be right. It simply can't be right.

And on these latter two points, the mining tax base and the taking away of the \$1.08 plus for every dollar we take in, in oil and gas royalties, what is the answer of the federal government that we heard on Friday? The answer is we'll talk about it in 2009 and it may change by 2014. And that is unacceptable, Mr. Speaker.

Now I want to point out, I said there was a fourth issue here. The fourth issue is this, Mr. Speaker, that when faced with a similar situation in Nova Scotia and Newfoundland, when they complained about the situation — which I think they're right to complain about it as we have — the federal government made a special deal with Nova Scotia and with Newfoundland. They said for every dollar you take in, we'll only take 70 cents back — only 70 cents.

Now why, Mr. Speaker — every member of this legislature and every person in the province should ask — why is it fair that you take 70 cents of the dollar earned by Nova Scotia or Newfoundland but you take \$1.08 to \$1.25 earned by the province of Saskatchewan. How can that be fair?

And what did the federal government say about that on Friday?

What was their response? Their response again was, oh well we'll talk about that toward . . . when we're renewing equalization. It wasn't mentioned that the renewal discussion takes place five years from now, to take effect over the next five years after that. In other words, Mr. Speaker, no answer at all. And that's not acceptable.

And I want to say, Mr. Speaker, that Professor Courchene, in *The Globe and Mail* had this to say on March 4. He said:

The long-term solution to equalization may be more complex, which is why the federal government and its representatives in this province are talking about dealing with it in the year 2009.

But we can't wait until 2009. Professor Courchene says:

That starting with the fiscal year 2001-02, the earliest year for which the equalization books are still open, Saskatchewan's energy revenues should be accorded the same treatment as the energy revenues of Newfoundland and Nova Scotia.

Specifically:

. . . the maximum equalization tax-back rate for each . . . (Saskatchewan) energy revenue category should not exceed 70 percent.

And then he says, surely that would be more equitable and more in the spirit of the equalization program.

And surely it would, Mr. Speaker. Because what is happening here is that when you tax economic development, when the policy of the federal government is to tax economic development in Saskatchewan, you then prevent or discourage economic development, which prevents Saskatchewan from becoming a have province.

And ironically, one of the things that Professor Courchene says is that if Saskatchewan was treated more fairly in equalization, if we were given what we were entitled to, we would have the means to put into place more policies that would promote more development which would lead to Saskatchewan becoming a have province and we'd be out of equalization, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — And because of the perverse way in which the federal government is treating this province — and bear in mind, that other than giving back \$120 million that they have stolen from this province over the last several years, the reaction of the federal government, Mr. Speaker, is they're not going to do anything at all — bearing that in mind, I want to refer just to some of the words of Professor Courchene in his paper. He says:

. . . Canada's equalization program has more than fully confiscated Saskatchewan's energy . . . (resources.)

He says:

. . . (there is) a marginal equalization tax-back rate on

own-source energy-revenue increases of 125 percent.

He says that:

. . . these equalization clawbacks or tax-backs are nothing short of astounding . . .

He says

. . . the operations of equalization for Saskatchewan involve tax-back rates of a magnitude that the federal government is simply not willing to apply to energy revenues in Nova Scotia (and) . . . Newfoundland.

I wonder why the differential treatment, Mr. Speaker.

He says — and I'm just going through his paper:

. . . any attempt by Saskatchewan to match any (or all) of these lower tax rates (in Alberta for example), especially for mobile factors, is fully stymied because of the voracious appetite of the equalization energy clawback . . . with Saskatchewan's energy revenue increases subject to a tax-back rate of 125 percent . . . the differing fiscal situations of these two energy-rich provinces could not be starker.

He says, Mr. Speaker:

Nor could the equity and efficiency implications . . .

He points out that Ottawa has ensured that equalization offsets would not be confiscatory for Newfoundland and Nova Scotia, as noted above. But what about Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker? The answer of the federal government, other than giving back \$120 million of money which was stolen from this province, confiscated over the last several years, the answer was, wait until 2009 and we'll talk about it.

And, Mr. Speaker, that is unacceptable. It is unacceptable.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — And I want to say in closing, Mr. Speaker, that it has also been indicated by representatives of the federal government in this province that somehow, whatever happens in equalization has been agreed to by the province of Saskatchewan. And they refer to some agreement in 1987. I want to report to the House and to anybody listening to this, Mr. Speaker, that is not how equalization works. Equalization is unilaterally determined and implemented by the Government of Canada, by the federal government.

It is true that they will say every five years — as I've indicated they say they will again in 2009 — they will ask for the province's views, and we have made our views known, Mr. Speaker. But at the end of the day, they impose equalization. That is how they arrived at special deals with Nova Scotia and Newfoundland, Mr. Speaker. That is how they arrived at those deals; they decided that's what they were going to do.

And I want to say in closing, Mr. Speaker, this — that I have always considered myself to be a Canadian first. One of the

reasons is that I believe, as a country, we share the benefits of our country; we share the challenges of our country. That is what Confederation is all about.

But I put it this simply, Mr. Speaker: as long as the federal government is not willing to redress the challenges that this issue presents — and in particular the three areas that I've outlined where they have said that they will do nothing except start to talk about it in 2009 — as long as that situation continues to exist, Mr. Speaker, it is the simple fact of the matter that Confederation is not working as it should for the province of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, that cannot be denied. That cannot be denied. And, Mr. Speaker, when the emperor has no clothes, sometimes someone has to stand up and say, as the Premier has and as I have, and as I hope the opposition will, the emperor has no clothes.

And in this particular instance, Mr. Speaker, unfortunately we have to say very clearly that as long as this situation is left unredressed, Confederation is not working as it should for the province of Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker. And in the interests of this country, Confederation is going to have to be made to work fairly and equitably as it should for the people of this province.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Recognize the member for Canora-Pelly.

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to enter into debate this afternoon on the motion as presented by the government opposite.

Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest to the remarks of the Premier as he described the conditions that Saskatchewan faces and the need to put forward an emergency debate today.

Mr. Speaker, the Premier made reference to the fact that the year that created great difficulties for the province of Saskatchewan was 1982. And he made reference to the fact that there are other provinces, like Newfoundland and Nova Scotia, who have negotiated their own accords and have determined that 70 per cent of their developing oil and gas sector needed to be protected; and in fact those accords are working quite well for those provinces. And he said today to this Legislative Assembly, we have an emergency. We have a situation that Saskatchewan is facing that needs to be dealt with by an emergency motion. It's a 12-year emergency.

While there may be a concern about tomorrow morning's . . . or tomorrow afternoon's budget from the federal government, Mr. Speaker, I daresay that the Premier, with all of his influence with the new Prime Minister, will not be able to change that federal budget.

So, Mr. Speaker, where has this government been for well over 20 years? Where have they been regarding the equalization payments that they received? You know, I looked at the Provincial Auditor's report that is produced on an annual basis and it's a document that I've made reference to many times in

this Legislative Assembly, and it's called *Understanding the Finances of the Government*.

Mr. Speaker, I want to make reference to a number of years. In the year 2000 . . . And, Mr. Speaker, I want to qualify for all people who are listening and watching that indeed this document is produced on what is called summary financial budgeting. It is the entire economy of the province. It's not just the General Revenue Fund where this government has been misleading the people of Saskatchewan, and in fact we have had deficit budgets. We have had three years of deficit budget.

So let's take a look at the year 2000. In the year 2000 — I'm not going to break down the equalization and the Canada health and safety transfers — I'm going to look strictly at monies we received from the federal government. Mr. Speaker, in the year 2000, the amount of money that we received was \$1.5 billion . . .

The Speaker: — Order, please. The floor . . . I recognize the member for Canora-Pelly.

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. And to the colleagues opposite, I would, you know, want to provide this very valuable information so that not only can the people of Saskatchewan better understand equalization, but the two members from Moose Jaw might be able to better understand equalization.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Krawetz: — You know, Mr. Speaker, when we looked at the report that the Provincial Auditor's produced, in the year 2000 we had \$1.5 billion worth of federal transfers. And in that year, we had a surplus for the province of Saskatchewan of \$406 million. Mr. Speaker, in 2001 we had \$1.02 billion — significantly less from the federal government — but we also saw an increase of \$500 million of own-source revenue from some windfall in oil and gas. You know, Mr. Speaker, the surplus was still 461 million.

Now let's take a look at the last two years where we have completed audited financial statements. In 2002, from the federal government, 1.5 billion — but not a surplus, Mr. Speaker; a deficit of \$483 million. In 2003, Mr. Speaker, a transfer from the federal government of \$1.4 billion but not a surplus again, Mr. Speaker — a deficit of \$654 million.

So, Mr. Speaker, while we concur with the Premier that we need to address concerns that face the equalization formula . . . Because as I looked at Professor Courchene's document, it was a very intriguing document. And the Premier made reference to all of the years that this study alludes to. Mr. Speaker, I want to make it very clear that Professor Courchene's information is for one year, one fiscal year. He makes reference to the documents of 2000-2001. And the members opposite, I'm sure, have had a chance to look through this document, as I have, and to highlight some of the concerns.

(15:15)

Mr. Speaker, Professor Courchene says very clearly — and I quote from his document — on page 3 he says:

A distinction is made between the remedies that can be applied immediately and those that need some lead time.

So what he's saying to this government opposite is, there are things that you can lobby for immediately. And the concern about the oil and gas lease rates on Crown land has been raised with the federal government and the federal Finance minister responded on Friday. Was it adequate? I'm not an economist to be able to say that that's the correct transfer, but I'm sure our officials in the Finance department have had some concern about those documents.

And, Mr. Speaker, the money that the Finance minister, Mr. Goodale, referred to, he referred to three years. He referred to 1999, 2000, and 2001 as the years where the calculations just seemed to be out of whack — out of whack. Now three years — that's 1999, 2000, and 2001 — where were our officials to raise that concern after those three significant years?

The member for Saskatoon Massey Place — I'm sorry, Mr. Hon. Member — the member for Massey Place made reference to the fact that the mining tax is being raised on an ongoing basis and he was successful in bringing back \$150 million. Where were his officials and where was that former Finance minister when this information came to light that indeed we were being chiselled out of \$120 million? Now it's been raised, and I read with interest that Ottawa will pay back \$120 million discrepancy. Now if that discrepancy continues to be part of the calculations that the federal government is using today, we need to be there, Mr. Speaker. We need to lobby and say, this type of calculation is unacceptable. But to sit there and say, well now it's an emergency and we have a problem because the 1982 formula isn't working so well for Saskatchewan, is outright ridiculous.

This government has not had a plan, it has not had a vision of how to deal with Ottawa. It has not been lobbying, and as a result we've seen the kicking in many, many areas, Mr. Speaker — many areas where the federal government has not come forward and dealt with Saskatchewan like it has with other provinces. And we can attribute that to the fact maybe that we've had an NDP government in this province for over 12 years.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Krawetz: — Mr. Speaker, I look back at the information that the former Finance minister, Mr. Melenchuk, provided to this House when he presented the budget. And the budget is presented to us on an ongoing basis and the minister makes reference to the equalization formula, talks about the fact that the formula is going to be down a bit because our oil and gas revenues are up a bit and makes no reference to the fact that the equalization formula is failing Saskatchewan. He's never done that in the last four budgets that I've had a chance to look at very closely.

But now I look at, I look at the current Finance minister's quarterly documents that he provides to the Legislative Assembly and I look at the third year . . . third-quarter report. And in the third-quarter report released by the Finance minister he says this, and I quote:

Equalization is forecast to be down \$165.0 million from Budget. The decrease is primarily due to revised population estimates from the 2001 Census . . .

Now he's blaming the federal government for the fact that they've taken back equalization because the province of Saskatchewan hasn't been doing so well on the population side, and in fact the numbers that the federal government received and used to calculate Saskatchewan's equalization were wrong. They were too large because the province continues to lose population as we brought forward today in question period.

Mr. Speaker, for this government to suddenly say everything's wrong with the formula and there is nothing wrong in the province of Saskatchewan is also totally ludicrous.

We have a province that is failing. We have a province that is losing population and the minister himself states that the equalization formula, and by the way the Canada health and . . . CHST (Canada Health and Social Transfer) transfer is forecast to be down \$42.5 million from the budget and again this decrease is primarily due to revised population estimates. So we have lost over \$200 million from the former minister's budget because the province of Saskatchewan is losing people. That's the real reason that we have a problem.

As we look at oil and gas, as we look at the development of Saskatchewan, of course we have to have a fair and equitable plan to ensure that our development and our revenues that are raised within the province of Saskatchewan are treated fairly like they are for Nova Scotia and Newfoundland. But that does not, that does not allow this government to say that we have a deficit budget for the last two years and probably three years and it'll be into the fourth year come March 31 when we see this government's plan, and that indeed we will have a deficit because there is an emergency problem with equalization formula. That simply is not true, Mr. Speaker.

And the people of Saskatchewan I think, are starting to see through this mirage and this smoke that this government is bringing forward time and time again. It is starting to look at the real situation and say, we understand that we have a province that just is not growing.

We have a province where people don't even bid on contracts when it comes to some of the construction industry area.

We have a province where the population is declining. We have a population where the government is planning for the fact that each year for the next five years, they will plan for the fact that we will have nearly 3,500 less students in our K to 12 system each and every year, Mr. Speaker.

That's the problem with this province. We have a province that's not growing, and we need to change that, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Krawetz: — Mr. Speaker, I've listened to this government blame everyone else. I listened in 2002 when the government said, we have a problem in this province because of the September 11 terrorist attack.

Last year we were told it was the agricultural producers of this province who were at fault and in fact that that couldn't . . . could not be achieved. This year we have a BSE problem and the border is closed, so it's another situation that the government has no control over.

And now just days before a provincial budget we have this government coming forward and saying, we have an emergency because the equalization formula isn't good, when in fact just on Friday we saw, we saw the promise of \$120 million to correct what must be an inadequacy.

Mr. Speaker, I've looked at the monies that the . . . have been transferred to this province in the area of health development. We've raised . . . Over the last couple of question periods we've raised a number of health issues. And I've looked also at the mid-year report, where the Finance minister's indicated that he has received \$79 million of federal health money that has been set aside.

It's not being used to ensure that the so-called cost containment of the Saskatoon Regional Health Authority and its goal to save \$200,000 by delaying surgeries until the first three weeks of April — it's not being used to offset that and ensure that people who are on waiting lists for 18 or 28 months are dealt with. It's set aside. It's set aside into a fiscal fund and will be drawn on according to the needs of the province. Again, Mr. Speaker, a lack of vision by this, by this province.

Mr. Speaker, for the benefit of sort of understanding the simple look at equalization, I asked the Minister of Finance for a description of what was to occur with equalization for the last two budgets. And I quote from the Finance minister's own documents, from the officials that provided this. And it says this:

For budgeting purposes, Saskatchewan reports its equalization collections on a receipts basis. Equalization receipts consist of the current year entitlement and prior year adjustments. This differs from the federal government's reporting of equalization, which is based solely on the current year entitlement.

Mr. Speaker, that's the part that I think confuses a lot of ordinary folks in the province of Saskatchewan, when we start to look at a method whereby we as a province need to go back 30 months. Thirty months of actual calculations are used to determine whether there will be further adjustment to the equalization payments. And the member opposite made distinct reference to the fact that we have some ability to correct something that was at least 30 months old, but not any further back than that. And there is an opportunity to do that.

Mr. Speaker, there is a need to move forward and to look at changes to ensure . . . While we have indicated that the motion that has been presented has, as its basis, good points to it . . . It recognizes the work that Professor Courchene has done on one fiscal year, that as I have indicated, and he makes some recommendations that we as a province can look at to ensure that we can correct, in the short term, some of the weaknesses, and we can look at long term.

So, Mr. Speaker, the intent of the government's motion is

acceptable. However it has to be made clear to people in Saskatchewan, to the federal government, to everyone, that we are not going to use the equalization formula as an excuse, as a reason why this province can't do better.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to move, seconded by the member for Swift Current:

That the following be added following the words "within the federation itself":

but that the Assembly recognizes that the equalization formula in itself is not the primary reason for the current financial difficulties being experienced by the provincial government and will not be used as an excuse for past or current budget deficits.

I so move.

The Speaker: — It has been moved by the member for Canora-Pelly, seconded by the member for Swift Current:

That the following be added to the words "within the federation itself":

but that the Assembly recognizes that the equalization formula in itself is not the primary reason for the current financial difficulties being experienced by the provincial government and will not be used as an excuse for past or current budget deficits.

Recognize the member for Swift Current.

Mr. Wall: — Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to enter the debate and second the motion by my colleague, the member for Canora-Pelly, with respect to this equalization discussion that we're having this afternoon.

I think what our amendment does, Mr. Speaker, is strengthens the original motion because it ensures that the federal government knows that this government will not use the equalization formula as it currently exists, as it has existed for years, as an excuse for yet another deficit budget under this Premier.

Mr. Speaker, I guess in making that case I'd point out comments by the federal Minister of Finance and the Member of Parliament for Regina Wascana on the weekend where he was concerned as well, I think, in his comments that this NDP government would be somehow trying to deflect attention from another pending deficit budget away from the deficit budget and on to some other issue like equalization.

And so I think that this amendment, when members opposite look at it, they will realize that this strengthens the motion. This lets the federal government know clearly that this Assembly understands that the equalization formula is not an excuse for a deficit budget. So the Minister of Finance federally will know beyond a shadow of a doubt that this is not about politics on the part of the Premier, the current Minister of Finance, or the former minister of Finance who sounded, frankly, a little apologetic for not having been on this file a whole lot sooner. And well he should be, Mr. Speaker, given the number of years

that have lapsed. The Minister of Finance federally worried, mused publicly on the weekend that perhaps this issue was driven more on their side of the House, on the NDP side of the House, by a desire to hide yet another deficit budget.

And this amendment, if those members vote for it, will send a signal to the federal government that no, this is bigger than any current fiscal year. This is bigger than the last even number of deficits coming from that government. This is bigger than politics. This is about an unfair formula. This is about an equalization formula that seems to recognize one thing in the case of Atlantic provinces when it comes to their oil and gas revenue and quite another for the province of Saskatchewan.

But without this amendment, I think the Minister of Finance federally and the federal Liberal government will be quite right in speculating that the motion was more about NDP politics than about fixing the equalization formula and ensuring Saskatchewan is getting its fair share.

(15:30)

And I would say this to you, Mr. Speaker, that it's little wonder, it's little wonder that this government would seek to deflect attention from the deficit that's pending or the deficits that they've tabled in this legislature over the last number of years.

And the reason that I would suggest that, Mr. Speaker, is . . . can you imagine the caucus meetings over there? Can you imagine the caucus meetings between those new members and those members who were around for the Romanow-MacKinnon era of this Assembly.

And imagine how they shared information back and forth when they realize that Mr. Romanow's administration handed over, according to the Provincial Auditor now, a half billion dollar surplus to this current sheriff in town, Mr. Speaker, who promptly turned that surplus into a billion and a half in additional debt for the province. And a deficit in this current fiscal year of \$463 million is the estimate, Mr. Speaker.

That's why they want to change the subject. They've taken those surplus budgets from a previous government, and they've turned them into deficits – and apparently in the bargain learning nothing from what everybody should have learned from the 1980s regardless of what side of the House they live on or what province they lived in, in where every single province was maxing out their credit card, Mr. Speaker.

This government has returned to those practices in its last successive budgets, so now this government says, well it's the equalization formula federally; that's the problem. My colleague for Canora-Pelly quite rightly pointed out that this is only the latest in a long line of excuses that we've heard from members opposite. They blamed grasshoppers, and they blamed drought, and they blamed BSE, and they blamed international terrorism. They blamed everything they could possibly blame, but they have not taken any responsibility. And the members opposite all hold up their hands and say, what else are we going to do?

Well, you know what, Mr. Speaker, not just a few 10 years ago, I'm sure members opposite will remember that commodity

prices in agriculture were low, that there were regional droughts around this province, that there were federal provincial issues, that there were huge cuts from the federal to the provincial governments in terms of transfers for health care. And the government, ironically their predecessor, still managed to balance the books, so there is no excuse, Mr. Speaker. There's no excuse for mismanagement except that, except that, Mr. Speaker, there's a different leader of the party right now.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — There's a different Premier today than there was. And the cabinet's all changed. If you look at that front bench, the cabinet's all changed. And it's kind of back to the '80s in terms of fiscal policy, and it's back to the 1970s in terms of economic policy, Mr. Speaker.

So now they come before the Assembly with a motion, the spirit of which, the intent of which is solid because opposition members will agree that the equalization formula as it exists today should be improved on Saskatchewan's behalf. And were we sitting on your right-hand side, Mr. Speaker, we would be also pushing the federal government for some changes and some redress on this issue in terms of the equalization formula.

But we would also be sure to let the federal government know that we were only doing it based on the facts of the issue, based on the merits of our argument — not as an excuse or some sort of an explanation to our own people for anything.

On the first day upon assuming these new duties, I did send a letter to the Premier in offering our support, and so we would want to do that today. We'd want to support the motion. I do want to make some things clear, Mr. Speaker. One thing we've made clear already; this is not an excuse for yet another NDP deficit budget.

And perhaps even more importantly, perhaps more importantly, what you don't hear from the NDP side, and what you will hear from our side on this whole issue of equalization is that we are not content. We will never be satisfied to simply negotiate a better deal for Saskatchewan as a have-not province. We want a plan for this province. We want to implement a plan for this province that will take us to being a have province. And that is all of the difference.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — Mr. Speaker, our vision, our dream one day is to not have to have this debate about whether or not we're getting enough welfare or enough assistance from the other provinces. We would rather not be having this debate at all.

This government seems to stop short — silent after asking for more assistance — but stops short of any plan or any indication that they've got a plan to take us to the next level. So there are some differences, some very key differences between this side of the House and that side of the House on some of the issues around equalization.

We also point out, as the member for Canora-Pelly did, that this situation that we agree with, this redress that needs to be done . . . The problem is exacerbated, Mr. Speaker, by the fact that

under this government we continue to lose population.

So there are some very, very key differences between our side and that side in terms of how this issue is advanced.

But, Mr. Speaker, on the issue of the need for this equalization formula to be changed to reflect the fact that frankly our oil and gas is, in many cases, is difficult to recover in the long-term as now what we're seeing being recovered in Atlantic Canada . . . And that's part of the rationale that the federal government has offered already for not making this change.

So today I encourage all the members to strengthen this motion by voting for the amendment moved by my colleague, the member for Canora-Pelly. And let me just read it again:

That the following be added following the words, "within the federation itself":

but that the Assembly recognizes that the equalization formula in itself is not the primary reason for the current financial difficulties being experienced by the provincial government and will not be used as an excuse for past or current budget deficits.

I'm happy to be able to support this amendment, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the Government House Leader.

Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just want to make a few comments. Much has been said by the previous speakers on this particular topic.

I want to, at the outset, just capture what I think is the essence of what it is that Dr. Courchene, the author of this report on confiscatory equalization . . . And I think the seed or the spark that has led to this debate in Saskatchewan about equalization and how it affects us is the following quote from Dr. Courchene in his report where he says, in referring to the Government of Saskatchewan — the Government of Saskatchewan, he states, quote, every dollar it makes, it and its citizens are worse off fiscally. Every dollar it makes, it and its citizens are worse off fiscally.

An Hon. Member: — How's that work?

Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen: — So the member asks, how does that work? Well what that means is that for every dollar that we generate in oil and gas and now in mineral resources, the federal government is taking more dollars out of Saskatchewan through reducing equalizations to the province than we are making off our own resources.

That captures, I think, captures the essence of what it is that Dr. Courchene is saying in his report. And I think it's the essence of the issue before us and why it is that we are so upset. And not just us, also Dr. Courchene.

If you go through the report — and remember that this is an academic dealing in a rather dry, arcane area of public administration and public policy — that he would, in his report

and without . . . without repeating any of the words that he uses, uses words such as: confiscatory, confiscated, astounding, inequity, expropriate, damaging, nightmarish, disturbing, voracious, stark, insult, expropriated, staggering, arbitrary, vanishing, intriguing, perverse, pervasive, dramatic, appropriated, transgressed, dilemma, problematic, saddling, not fair — that's two words — failure, cavalier, artificial, expropriating, patently unfair — two words — and finally, immiserizing, which pertains to economic impoverishment. So that when an academic uses words such as that, you begin to understand why it is that Saskatchewan politicians are rather upset when they read his report and begin to analyze what it is that the federal government is doing.

Well what does this mean to us in dollar terms, Mr. Speaker? In the year in question that Dr. Courchene looked at, the year 2000-2001, I think the total value that he felt that we would . . . should have received if we had received the same treatment as Newfoundland-Labrador and Nova Scotia, meant to Saskatchewan something in the neighbourhood of \$311 million.

Now the members of the opposition might say, well that's not really all that important and it's inconsequential and it really doesn't have any real impact on our budget. The fact of the matter is \$311 million is more than the Government of Saskatchewan spent that year on all of the highways in the department. So that may not be much to the members of the opposition, but it's a lot, a lot of money where I come from, Mr. Speaker.

My sense is that if you look forward into the future, it would mean roughly on average \$100 million a year, depending on what happens to resource royalties. But a reasonable estimate into the future would be \$100 million a year. And where I come from, Mr. Speaker, that's a lot of money.

Now again, the opposition might say that, oh we ought not take that to have . . . you know, to use that as any way to comment on our budgets and our financial position in Saskatchewan. But where I come from, \$100 million is a lot of money and \$100 million would have a significant impact on an annual basis on our budget. It would have a very significant impact on our budget, Mr. Speaker.

And I hasten . . . and I would not support, I would not support the opposition amendment because I bet — and I can rest assured — that the Minister of Finance and federal officials would take that amendment, throw it back at us, as they will with all of the comments that we made with the opposition that, oh well this is not a major issue, Mr. Speaker.

Well this is an endemic problem that we have in Saskatchewan with the opposition. You can always count on them to undermine the position of the Government of Saskatchewan when it comes to dealings with the federal government. It never fails. Whether it's agriculture, it doesn't matter what it is, you can always count on the opposition in Saskatchewan to undermine the position of the provincial government when it comes to dealing with Ottawa.

Again petty, petty politics . . .

The Speaker: — Order, please. Order. I recognize the

Government House Leader.

Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen: — Mr. Speaker, again, again as we've seen in the past, petty politics trumps solidarity — petty politics trumps the well-being and what should be a unanimous position of the people of Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker. A new leader — same old approach, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, if I can just simply deal with one issue and that is the question of our ability to provide services at a reasonable rate of taxation. And at the essence, I mean that's what equalization's supposed to be all about. When you look at, for example, the Boughen report and the appendices to the Boughen report, and you look at appendix A, and you look at page 130 where the Boughen Commission . . . And it refers to the source of its data as being Statistics Canada so it's not our statistics; these are the statistics that are published by the federal government.

And when they look at that and they look at the question of provincial expenditures as a percentage of the gross domestic product, okay, the GDP, GDP which more or less provides some sense of your ability to raise revenues — and you would think then that given our GDP and our ability to raise revenues that we should have more or less an adequate level of services, you know, relative to the taxes that we impose on ourselves — when you look at that, their conclusion is that Saskatchewan's expenditures at 20.9 per cent of GDP is the lowest, the lowest of all of the provinces that receive equalization.

And when it comes to important and vital public services such as health, Saskatchewan's expenditure, based on GDP, is lower than all of these other provinces that receive equalization; lower, as it is also with education; lower than all these other provinces that receive equalization. Dr. Courchene says that the purpose of equalization is to ensure that citizens of every province have access to reasonably comparable public services at reasonably comparable tax rates — reasonably comparable public services at reasonably comparable tax rates.

Now the members opposite are always complaining about how our tax rates are not comparable and higher than all the other jurisdictions, and we would differ with that. But even if you accept for a moment that our tax rates are comparable to other jurisdictions, given the level of public expenditures — and we certainly would take credit for any administrative efficiencies that we've been able to achieve over time which has resulted in a lower per capita expenditure on areas such as health care — but the fact of the matter is that when you look at the Boughen report, it is very obvious that we're not able to provide the level of public services that other provinces that receive health care are able to provide in Canada. Something is wrong here. Equalization is not working for the people of Saskatchewan.

It's time we sent a message. We should not support the amendment. We should support the motion and make our position clear to Ottawa that equalization is not working for Saskatchewan, full stop, period.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(15:45)

The Speaker: — I recognize . . . The questions before the Assembly are the main motion moved by the member for Saskatoon Riversdale, seconded by the member for Saskatoon Massey Place; and the amendment to the main motion moved by the member for Canora-Pelly, and seconded by the member for Swift Current.

We will vote first on the amendment to the first motion, to the main motion. Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the amendment?

Those in favour of the amendment say aye.

Some Hon. Members: — Aye.

The Speaker: — Those opposed to the amendment say no.

Some Hon. Members: — No.

The Speaker: — Call in the members for a standing vote.

The division bells rang from 15:46 until 15:53.

The Speaker: — Order. The motion before the Assembly is the amendment to the main motion moved by the member for Canora-Pelly, seconded by the member for Swift Current:

That the following be added following the words, "within the federation itself":

but that the Assembly recognizes that the equalization formula itself is not the primary reason for the current financial difficulties being experienced by the provincial government and will not be used as an excuse for past or current budget deficits.

Those in favour of the motion, please rise.

An Hon. Member: — Amendment.

The Speaker: — Of the amendment, please rise.

Yeas — 26

Wall	Elhard	Heppner
D'Autremont	Krawetz	Draude
Hermanson	Bjornerud	Stewart
Wakefield	Morgan	McMorris
Eagles	Gantefoer	Harpauer
Bakken	Cheveldayoff	Huyghebaert
Allchurch	Brkich	Weekes
Kerpan	Merriman	Hart
Dearborn	Chisholm	

The Speaker: — Those opposed to the amendment, please rise.

Nays — 28

Calvert	Addley	Lautermilch
Hagel	Van Mulligen	Atkinson
Cline	Sonntag	Crofford
Prebble	Forbes	Wartman
Belanger	Higgins	Thomson

Nilson	Beatty	Hamilton
Junor	Harper	Iwanchuk
McCall	Quennell	Trew
Yates	Taylor	Morin
Borgerson		

So, Mr. Speaker, I feel that even though it has taken me a while to get to this esteemed Chamber, I am very happy to be here today.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Order. Order, please. I declare the amendment defeated.

Hon. Mr. Taylor: — I appreciate the support of my colleagues, Mr. Speaker. I am going to work hard to ensure that I continue to earn that support throughout the term of this office.

Amendment negated.

I am also proud, Mr. Speaker, to have the confidence of the people of the Battlefords, and I thank them for expressing that confidence in the most recent election. As I indicated in my introduction, Mr. Speaker, I have worked fairly hard with the people of the Battlefords, and I am grateful that by a good majority they have said that they respect and trust the work that I have done, and that they will respect and trust the work that I am about to do. I am very flattered and humbled by their continued trust and I commit myself to maintaining that trust for as long as I am privileged to sit in this place.

The Speaker: — Debate resumes on the main motion.

I know that that won't always be very easy, Mr. Speaker, because I, like every other member in this Chamber, have to make decisions every day. Every day that we are here we have to make decisions. And making decisions means making choices. And our choices aren't always the same, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: — Question.

The Speaker: — Question has been called. On the main motion moved by the member for Saskatoon Riversdale, seconded by the member from Saskatoon Massey Place. Will the members take it as read?

By the end of the day however I trust that I will keep the confidence of my constituency and the people of Saskatchewan when they assess the choices that I am about to make. I've done a lot of work in the community, throughout the province, and I have very few regrets over the time that I have served my community.

Some Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Speaker: — Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

(16:00)

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

Over the years I've made a lot of choices both for my community and for myself and I have very few regrets related to those choices. But, Mr. Speaker, I do have a couple of regrets that in my opening remarks to the legislature I'd like to refer to.

The Speaker: — Motion is carried.

I regret that I didn't have this job in mind when I got married two years ago. I'm sorry that I imposed this new lifestyle on my wonderful spouse, Cheryl. Two years ago we got married here in Regina. However she stood by my side throughout the entire election campaign and for the past three months as I've prepared for my cabinet responsibilities here in Regina. I thank her very much for being so caring and so wonderful and I want her to know that despite the kilometres difference between us, I will feel her warmth and her support always while I am here.

Motion agreed to.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

SPECIAL ORDER

ADJOURNED DEBATES

ADDRESS IN REPLY

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the address in reply which was moved by Ms. Morin, seconded by Mr. Borgerson.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Recognize the member from The Battlefords.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Taylor: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's certainly a real pleasure to be able to be here in the provincial legislature on this the third day of sitting and in response to the Throne Speech of the government.

Hon. Mr. Taylor: — And, Mr. Speaker, I also regret that my father is not with us any more to see what I have achieved on behalf of my family and my community. My father was always a great influence on me and throughout my life, and I don't think I ever took the time to tell him how much the way he lived his life influenced the way that I have wanted to live mine.

I think members will know that I have taken a fairly roundabout route to come to this Chamber — sitting on city council; sitting in the Parliament of Canada, Mr. Speaker; being elected to the chamber of commerce on two occasions in the Battlefords; and working with numerous community groups throughout the area. In between times when I wasn't serving the public in elected capacity, Mr. Speaker, I represented the community in the media, writing on political issues, writing on issues relating to agriculture, writing on issues relating to business throughout the community.

My father was active in our community. He loved his family and he was a very, very good and caring individual. We didn't always share the same political beliefs, but he always

encouraged me in whatever I was doing.

We lost my father in the last days of the election campaign. One of his last activities was repairing one of my election signs on his back fence. I know he would have been proud to have seen the results of the election evening on November 5, and he would have been very pleased to see my subsequent appointment to cabinet.

And I want him — because I know he's watching today — and my mother back in North Battleford, I want them to know that when I make any decision here in this Chamber, that I will ask myself two questions: number one, what would my dad do in this situation; and number two, what would my dad think of this decision.

He worked hard to build a good reputation for the Taylor family in the Battlefords and I will work hard to uphold that reputation and serve the people of The Battlefords in this Chamber.

While we're talking about losses, Mr. Speaker, I want to take just a moment to recognize the most recent loss in The Battlefords of Harry Dekker, a Hall of Fame broadcaster from the city of North Battleford. And my condolences to the Dekker family on their loss.

I know what they're going through. The Dekker family was in the hospital on another matter the night that my father passed away, and they were very helpful in helping my mother and myself deal with that loss that evening. And when I heard that Mr. Dekker had passed away this weekend my heart sank. And my heart goes out to that family as they deal with the consequences of this very tragic loss, personal loss. The community of the Battlefords will also suffer a great loss in the loss of Mr. Dekker.

Speaking of The Battlefords, Mr. Speaker — and I want to do that today as well — I'm very proud to represent the people of this constituency which has so much to be proud of.

Mr. Speaker, on February 19 of this year, the Battlefords Regional Economic Development Authority, our REDA, engaged all economic development stakeholders in the Battlefords region to identify their strengths, limitations, opportunities, and challenges through a co-operative and collaborative process.

I was pleased to be able to attend that meeting, as were members of city council, as were members of the town council in the town of Battleford, as were representatives of the chamber of commerce, the economic development authority itself, the city's economic development office, the tribal council, and others who have an interest in the Battlefords.

And much of what the Battlefords is capable of achieving will be enhanced, Mr. Speaker, by the vision that has been set out in the Throne Speech, but more on that in a couple of minutes.

Some of the strengths identified by our regional economic development authority, Mr. Speaker — primarily tourism, business friendliness, entrepreneurial capacity, strengthened services, and resources.

Mr. Speaker, in tourism alone, the Battlefords is accessible from every part of this province, thanks to some great highways that were built by this government in co-operation with the federal government as well. We are the hub of five major highways, including the Yellowhead, that travel through that part of the country. We are a gateway to the North, to the West, to the East.

We live in an area that is esthetically pleasing, a very pleasant place to live and raise a family along the North Saskatchewan River with the rolling hills. We are on the edge of the parkland and very close to the lakes in the North. Our access to fishing, hunting, summer and winter sports, Mr. Speaker, makes the Battlefords a very pleasant place to live.

Of course, we have an abundance of historic sites. We all are aware, very much aware, Mr. Speaker, of Battleford being one of the oldest settlements in Western Canada, and of course the other historic sites in the area, Cut Knife, Frenchman Butte, those sorts of communities that carry a tremendous amount of history forward.

Mr. Speaker, I should mention at this point, town of Battleford this year, 2004, celebrating its 100th anniversary as incorporated as a town — 100th anniversary, Mr. Speaker, this year, town of Battleford. I welcome . . .

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Taylor: — I welcome every member of this legislature and any person in the province of Saskatchewan and elsewhere who wishes to travel to the town of Battleford this summer for the celebrations that are going to take place. By all means get in your car, your recreational vehicle, bring your boat, bring your golf clubs — come and join us in the celebration of 100 years.

Also while you're there, recognize and realize the tragic loss in the town of Battleford last year with the loss of old Government House, the first seat of government of the territories in this part of the country. We have to find a way, municipal governments, provincial governments, federal governments, to in the very near future recognize the value of that old Government House, its property, and what we can do.

I also want to recognize, Mr. Speaker, the fact that a tourism promotion in the town of Battleford this weekend was very successful in an awards program. The Battlefords Chamber of Commerce in conjunction with Battlefords tourism ran a program called Battlefords passport program. This welcome to the Battlefords passport program was recognized as an award winner in the Saskatchewan Tourism awards of excellence in the 2003 promotional marketing campaign award of excellence. So we . . . that took place March 19, just this past weekend, at a very special meeting in Saskatoon. So my congratulations to them.

We are a very creative community, Mr. Speaker. We have an awful lot to be proud of there. We have an awful lot to support.

I could go on, Mr. Speaker, but I know that with the time flying the way it is that I want to, I want to move on to a number of other things that I think are important as we carry on here.

Mr. Speaker, during the election campaign, the election campaign that brought me to this place, that brought all of the members in this Chamber to this place, very hard fought campaign, Mr. Speaker, a campaign that was settled on a number of very important issues, a number of important commitments made by this government — what did the people hear during that election campaign? Well number one, they heard that we want to make this an affordable province, Mr. Speaker, with the lowest utility bundle rates . . . bundle of rates in Canada. They heard that we want to have quality health care for every citizen of this province. They heard that we want to have a green and prosperous economy. They also heard we want to have this place for youth, for young people in the province.

On Friday, Mr. Speaker, just before I was planning on saying a few words to the Chamber — as I'm now continuing to do so today — on Friday, Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition made quite a speech on how we, that is the New Democratic Party, were breaking our promises already with regards to some of those commitments to the people of Saskatchewan. Well I don't know what crystal ball the member was looking at, but here we are, Mr. Speaker. It's the third day of this sitting, this legislative sitting, and I can assure you, Mr. Speaker, I can assure the Leader of the Opposition and the people of Saskatchewan that our commitment to those goals set out in that election campaign and others remain as strong as ever.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Taylor: — Thank you. We will deliver to the people of Saskatchewan what we said we would deliver. This government has integrity, but more important, Mr. Speaker, this government has vision. The public said during the campaign that they wanted change. And, Mr. Speaker, they said they wanted us to manage that change.

Well, Mr. Speaker, we can be trusted to manage that change. And a lot of what was said in the Throne Speech gives us the direction and shows the people of Saskatchewan the vision that in fact there is some change. We accept the challenge, Mr. Speaker. And even though there will be tough spots for all of us to get through together, we will get through them. And at the end of our current mandate we will see change, we will see progress, and we will see a better Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Taylor: — I'm proud to . . . Or pardon me, Mr. Speaker. The Throne Speech identified clearly the long-term vision of the government. This will be a province of greater opportunity, greater wealth, greater prosperity, and greater understanding than at any other time in our history. I'm proud to be a citizen of this great province. And with the challenges that we face, I'm proud to be a part of this great government.

Some of the things that we have done leading up to the election campaign have led to an improvement in the Saskatchewan economy, Mr. Speaker. And I want to refer members of the opposition and members of the Saskatchewan community, I want to refer them to the back page of the *Saskatchewan Business* magazine, December 2003/January 2004 — a two-month combined issue.

The back page, written by Saskatchewan's Paul Martin, speaking quite often on behalf of the Saskatchewan Chamber of Commerce, speaking on behalf of those who value growth in the province of Saskatchewan. Paul Martin is an individual who has worked hard to recognize how growth is important in this province. Page 30, the back page of *Saskatchewan Business* magazine, Mr. Martin quotes the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Saskatchewan as saying that intangibles . . . Just a minute.

The Institute of Chartered Accountants of Saskatchewan . . . waded into the (waded into the) debate over the province's future with a detailed assessment of the numbers — the indicators showing how Saskatchewan stacks up. Called Saskatchewan Check-Up, it provides an objective examination of . . . (the reality in Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker.)

And what did ICAS (Institute of Chartered Accountants of Saskatchewan) find? Mr. Martin writes in this check-up:

From 1993 to 2002, corporate profits in this province rose by an impressive 154 per cent. That compares to 155 per cent in Alberta and (only) 101 per cent for Canada. British Columbia (profits) rose . . . only (by) 82 per cent, Ontario by a measly 47 per cent and Manitoba by 127 (per cent).

We were, in terms of business profits for those years '93 to 2002:

We were number two in the nation . . . (only slightly) behind (the province of) Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, this is the place to be, the place to be.

From 2001 to 2002 — . . . (Saskatchewan) actually surpassed everyone, posting a 17 per cent gain in corporate profits compared to Alberta's 16 per cent and just over nine per cent nationally.

Taxpayer supported debt — something the business community has long raised as a deterrent to investment — declined as Saskatchewan posted the best performance in Canada over the 1993-2002 period. In 1993 our public debt was 50 per cent higher than Manitoba's. Today, we're tied with Manitoba with a debt-to-GDP ratio of just over 20 per cent, compared to more than 46 per cent a decade earlier.

Mr. Speaker, we are a province on the verge of significant progress, and what Mr. Martin says; it's attitude, Mr. Speaker. The naysayers should recognize the reality and support the future of this province.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(16:15)

Hon. Mr. Taylor: — And I guess the only other thing about our economy I should mention, Mr. Speaker, is the latest numbers that came out here just shortly. Saskatchewan job numbers increased in February — 1,500 more people employed February of this year over February of last year. And of course

the latest 2004 KPMG competitiveness study continues to rank Saskatchewan's major cities highly throughout the midwest, definitely the place to be.

So, Mr. Speaker, despite the challenges of financing of government, providing services and programs to the people of Saskatchewan, I am very excited about the future of this province. I'm excited to be here in this place where we can have such an influence on our future.

My father worked hard all of his life, was respected, was successful, and was very happy. Mr. Speaker, I have been blessed because despite all of the challenges I think that I too have been successful. I hope that I'm respected but I know for sure, Mr. Speaker, that I'm very happy. And if we can achieve all that we set out, my son, your son, your daughter, your grandchildren, Mr. Speaker, they will have the opportunity to be successful, to earn respect, and to be happy for many, many years in our province.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Taylor: — On the day of the Throne Speech, Mr. Speaker, I had a tear in my eye as the group of young people from St. Michael's College in Yorkton sat in this gallery — actually stood in this gallery — and sang a song with the words:

Open your eyes and look towards the future; open your eyes and find discovery.

I think those words set out the future for Saskatchewan and I was very, very pleased to hear their beautiful voices singing those wonderful words here in this Chamber.

Mr. Speaker, we have the enthusiasm in this province; we have the drive, the opportunity, and the courage. If we can find a way to work together we will achieve our goals and Saskatchewan will indeed be the home we have always dreamed that it could be.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I want to quote the president of the Battlefords Chamber of Commerce. In his most recent newsletter to the business community in the Battlefords, Mr. Keith Bossaer of the Battlefords Chamber of Commerce writes:

At a recent President's Banquet you will have heard me say, "If your dreams are bigger than your fears, you will always come out on top!"

That's the quote from the president of the chamber.

Mr. Speaker, let's not be afraid to dream and let's not let the fears of the opposition dampen our ability to dream. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Recognize the member for Saskatoon Southeast.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Morgan: — Mr. Speaker, this is my first opportunity to rise and speak in this House and I would like to congratulate

you on your recent election as Speaker and through you would like to congratulate all of the MLAs (Member of the Legislative Assembly) who were elected and re-elected on November 5. And I would like, Mr. Speaker, to take this opportunity to thank the citizens of Saskatoon Southeast who had the confidence and chose to elect me on that day.

I recognize as well that the tradition of the House is not to heckle members on their first time up in the House and would like to share with the other members some of the camaraderie that existed during the orientation session that we had earlier in this session.

I was commiserating with some of my fellow Saskatchewan Party MLAs at the orientation session. I was speaking with Mr. Merriman and Mr. Cheveldayoff and was mentioning to them that I felt there was something wrong with my office, that it was . . .

The Speaker: — Order. I just want to bring to the member's attention that it's customary for us to refer to other members by their constituencies or by their titles. I invite the member for Saskatoon Southeast to continue.

Mr. Morgan: — I apologize, Mr. Speaker. I should have referred to them in the correct sense, the other members from Saskatoon, and was mentioning that I felt my office was perhaps issued to me in error; that it was too small and lacked a fireplace and lacked certain other amenities such as size and large, oval-shaped windows. Unbeknownst to me, the hon. member from Saskatoon Meewasin was two steps behind me and leaned back over his shoulder and said, perhaps it's because I've got your office.

And to that hon. member, I say touché. Perhaps the citizens of that constituency will have a chance to correct the error of their ways and give me a better, a better office at some point in the future, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Morgan: — I would like to tell you a little bit about Saskatoon Southeast, Mr. Speaker. This constituency consists of three city neighbourhoods, Lakeview, Lakeridge, and Brierwood. It also contains most of the car dealerships. It surrounds the city on the east side. It extends south to Dundurn and includes the White Cap First Nation, as well as the Dundurn military base and all of the acreages south of the city.

The challenges that exist in that constituency include highway location as they build new bridges and, in particular, Highway 219 which extends south through White Cap and south to the area around Outlook for a recreation area. And of course, property tax assessment in that area is something of . . . (inaudible) . . . but I will speak more about that later.

The constituency, Mr. Speaker, has some six golf courses, one of them being Moon Lake which has 36 holes. It has two driving ranges and only five schools. One of my constituents pointed out to me that perhaps there is a greater affinity for recreation than for procreation in the constituency. The reality in fact is that there is a greater need for schools than there is for golf courses, but we've been more successful at developing golf

courses than schools.

One of my roles as MLA for that area will be to lobby the Minister of Education to build schools and develop schools in that area. They are long overdue and needed. Mr. Speaker, this constituency was previously represented by Pat Lorjé, a colourful and unique individual who is no longer here.

And, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to move on and tell you briefly a little bit about myself. I was born and raised in Saskatoon. My father was an electrical contractor. He operated his business in early days out of the garage behind our house and later out of a converted hardware store on 20th Street.

During the time that I was in early public school, the employees of that electrical contracting firm were certified by IBEW (International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers) who, shortly after that, went on strike, not just against my father's business but against the entire industry.

One of my earlier dealings with trade unions was having to cross the picket line in front of our house on my way to school. There was a lot of jeering and shouting the first morning that I went out and my mother watched this through the window. And later on in the morning, she went out with warm muffins and coffee, served them up to the strikers that were there. And after they'd had their fill of muffins and coffee she said, I'll have more of those this afternoon and I'll have more of those tomorrow and each and every day that you're out there, but you leave my kids out of this.

The next morning there was about twice as many picketers and the picketers offered us a ride to school and, Mr. Speaker, we only had to go three blocks to school, unlike many of my colleagues on this side who had to go to school, I think, 10 or 12 miles each way and it was uphill both ways. So we went a very short distance and we were chauffeured by the strikers who quickly wanted to get back for my mother's baking.

I relate this not to tell you about trade unions or how to negotiate with trade unions, but rather to tell you a little bit about my mother.

Mr. Speaker, my wife, Sandy, and I do not have children of our own, but we do have a host of nieces and nephews that we spoil and act as surrogate parents for. We enjoy spoiling them and we enjoy babysitting. Uncle Don and Auntie Sandy's is a house where there is no bedtimes, you can eat pizza pops for breakfast, and enjoy life as you should.

When one of my nephews would say to me, we can't do that at our house, dad says this, we can't do this, we can't do that; I would usually reply by saying, your dad won't let you; there must be something wrong with your dad; you tell him that I said this.

So I was very, very popular with the nephews and nieces, at the top of their list for babysitting. But certainly not at the top of my brother's list who had to spend several days afterwards trying to straighten out his children when they were returned.

I went to the University of Saskatchewan, attended law school there, and during the summer before I started law school, Mr.

Speaker, I worked on buildings and grounds in the U of S (University of Saskatchewan) campus.

At that time, the university employees were an affiliate of the Canadian Labour Congress and were going through the process to leave the CLC and join a specific union. They were considering joining three different unions, one of them being CUPE (Canadian Union of Public Employees). And I was, during that summer, a proud, founding member of CUPE Local 1975.

We went through an extensive process of selection from those unions. We had a secret ballot. We heard representations from the . . . And during that process, I developed a great deal of respect for the process that took place, for the professionalism of the union organizers, and the competence and dedication of the unions in that process.

But most of all, I developed a respect for the workers that were there. And, Mr. Speaker, those workers wanted exactly the same thing and had the same values that I wanted — a fair wage, a level playing field, and respect and appreciation for the hard work that they did.

I carry that respect today, Mr. Speaker, and I also carry a strong and biding respect for the right to bargain collectively and have a fair and level playing field for unions. And I will work my best to try and ensure that that takes place in this province.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to go on and tell you a little bit about my candidacy and election in Saskatoon Southeast. I was the first Saskatchewan Party candidate to be nominated. My nomination took place June 5 of 2002. So I actually had a 17-month, gruelling process through the election.

After I was elected, I wanted to decide how to go about campaigning and used the same kind of methodology that I used when I had ran for the school board before. Don Atchison, who is currently the mayor of Saskatoon, had originally ran as a city councillor by using a campaigning method where he would stand on the street corners and wave vigorously to the traffic. So I thought it worked for him there, so I bought a new necktie and when out and followed his example and waved in the traffic both times when I ran for school board and again this time.

So if you can imagine, 17 months of waving by the side of the road. And, Mr. Speaker, if there's one thing I get out this, I want a commitment from all of the members in this House that the next election will be held in the summer so I don't freeze my feet off waving early in the morning. It did immeasurable damage, Mr. Speaker, to my relationship with my spouse who was out there with me.

During that period of time, Mr. Speaker, I knocked on doors in the city, on farms, on acreages, and on the reserve. I met with business people, health care professionals, teachers, farmers, doctors, lawyers, and yes, even an Indian chief.

They all told me the same message and the same thing: they wanted jobs, they wanted economic growth, they wanted careers, they wanted hope, and they wanted to find a way to keep their children here in this province. They wanted to know that they would have opportunities for their children to stay in

this province.

They did not want to see their children continue to leave. They did not want to have to move after their children, so that they could visit their children and their grandchildren. We are seeing a multi-generational loss of our population as they leave, and these are our best and brightest people. These are the ones that actually spin the economy, create growth, generate taxes, and the ones that make it a great place to stay.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Morgan: — Mr. Speaker, I will work hard to hold this government accountable to ensure that they will take every step possible to bring about economic growth and prosperity. They will have to ensure that there is a fair and equitable tax structure, and a regulatory system that will protect the environment and protect the health and safety of workers without becoming a millstone on the back of business.

I look to them to provide fair and adequate trade legislation that can be respected by both business and trade unionists alike. Mr. Speaker, I will take every step to try and support that type of legislation as it passes through the province.

Mr. Speaker, earlier I mentioned the burden of property tax. That is the single item that I heard the most about was property tax, and in particular the education component of property tax. I have many constituents paying 3 to \$6,000 a year in property tax and some as much as \$12,000 per year in property tax.

In many homes the cost of property tax exceeds the cost of all other utilities combined. People recognize the need for education; they're willing to pay for education. But this, Mr. Speaker, is the most regressive way of funding education. This tax affects seniors and other homeowners in a very serious and profound way. It destroys the incentive to own property. It destroys the incentive to build and develop property.

(16:30)

Mr. Speaker, having said that, I do not wish to see the PST raised or spread to meals. During the Throne Speech I noticed a large number of people here in white suits. These, Mr. Speaker, were chefs and restaurateurs here to express their concern that PST may be expanded to include restaurant meals. This will have dire and serious consequences on the young people who work in the hospitality industry and a direct effect on small business and families that wish to eat out.

Mr. Speaker, one other thing that I wish to mention — during the election I met with Treaty Commissioner David Arnot. After I met with him I did some reading on treaties and did a significant amount of studying and talked to a lot of people. I was troubled by the lack of education and the lack of understanding that people have about treaties.

There was a poll recently that's . . . that came out that said two-thirds of the people in this province do not support the treaties. Well I don't know why the poll question was ever phrased: do you support treaties? We can no more do away with treaties than we can do away with night following day. The treaties are an entrenched part of the constitution of this

province and this country, and we have to do more work to develop understanding between First Nations people and other people in this province.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Morgan: — We have to, Mr. Speaker, develop an agenda of respect and understanding. We have to ensure that people that are not Natives learn about treaties. We have to develop and work with First Nations to develop business opportunities and partnership. We have to focus on their educational needs and requirements — things like School^{PLUS} and other steps that we have to take to ensure an adequate and proper education for First Nations people. We also need to take great steps to ensure that treaties are taught at an early age in schools.

Mr. Speaker, I heard the Throne Speech and I was troubled by the things that were not in the Throne Speech. I was troubled by the fact that there was no plan to grow the economy, no plan to retain young people. It was the same rhetoric that were in the previous throne speeches for this government. There was no plan, no vision, no method of dealing with technology innovation.

The ethanol announcement that took place in this province happened a few weeks ago in spite of — not because of — any actions that were taken by this government.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Morgan: — Mr. Speaker, I've been a proud citizen of this province all my life. For me this is my home and always will be. We have a wonderful province. It is rich in resources and economic potential. But the best asset that we have in this province, Mr. Speaker, is the citizens. They have an incredible warmth and sense of community. The hardships of drought and tough times have bonded those people together and they've got incredible vigour and vibrancy to them that we have to foster, develop, and do everything we can. We can't afford to develop another province by shipping those people out. Those people are the very backbone of this province.

Mr. Speaker, I will be calling on this government to do everything they can to try and ensure that this takes place in the most vigorous possible method. Mr. Speaker, that concludes my remarks.

The hon. member from Saskatchewan Rivers and . . . concluded his remarks last week by singing a portion of his . . . And I had discussions with my wife that perhaps I would, I would want to sing Kumbaya and ask my colleagues to join arms with me and start a new tradition. But, Mr. Speaker, my wife pointed out to me that my singing abilities are on par with my ability to be on time for important legislative meetings.

So with that, Mr. Speaker, I will sit down and wish to advise you I will not be supporting the Throne Speech.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Recognize the member for Regina Coronation Park.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Trew: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, I want to begin my remarks by congratulating all of the first-time members that I've heard so far, on both the government side and now the member for Saskatoon Southeast on the opposition side, for their very thoughtful speeches. I think it bodes well for the people of this great province of ours that there is such clear talent.

I was just so very proud when the hon. member for Regina Walsh Acres was delivering her response, moving the Speech from the Throne — or seconding it — and then the hon. member for Saskatchewan Rivers, who did just such a terrific job following up with the seconding. And the good speeches just continue.

Mr. Speaker, my first words are those of congratulations to you on your election, or re-election, as Speaker. I think that I know you will serve this Legislative Chamber as honourably as you have in the past and I look forward to your continued service in that capacity.

I want to acknowledge and thank the hon. member for Regina Wascana Plains for allowing us to have an election and making that such a good pursuit. It gave a choice to all members in the Chamber, and it was very welcome, and thank you very much to the member for Regina Wascana Plains.

My next words are those of thanks, this being my first opportunity to thank my constituents, the constituents in Regina Coronation Park, that north end Regina constituency that is bordered by Pasqua Street on the west border, south to the Canadian National rail line, and then it goes east all the way to Winnipeg Street, follows north on Winnipeg Street to Ring Road, and then comes back west all the way to No. 6 Highway, or the corner of Albert and 6, and then jogs out so that it includes Argyle Park. That's the simplest way I can describe the constituency of Regina north geographically.

But a wonderful constituency it is, Mr. Speaker. I represent a working constituency. My constituents are not naive in any sense. We acknowledge the past. We live in the presence, and we welcome the future.

We know who worked on Regina's office buildings and shopping centres. We know who built them: it's us. We know who works in the offices as professionals, as support staff, and as maintenance workers: it's us. We know who volunteers in all manner of great and important and necessary organizations throughout Regina, Mr. Speaker, organizations from our schools, to Cubs and Guides, church groups, and even to SaskTel Pioneers and much more: it's us.

We know our actions do make a difference. We know our values make a solid foundation for today and for the future.

We've done some good work, Mr. Speaker, and we look forward to continuing that good work into the future. My constituents are very proud of Saskatchewan past and its present, and as I've mentioned, we are very much looking forward to the future. And we know where we've got to go.

Mr. Speaker, we have experienced in Saskatchewan, we've experienced drought. We've experienced floods. We've experienced grasshoppers and rust, rail-line abandonment, and a host of other character-building challenges. And now we know about BSE, and we know about a federal equalization formula that doesn't work well.

Mr. Speaker, we've had enough character-building references to know where we've been, where we are. And not only do we know where we want to go — the better Saskatchewan, the Saskatchewan that is youth friendly, the Saskatchewan that opens up and makes this great province a first choice in opportunity for all of our young people — we know much of the things that we have to do to make that happen.

But my constituents also have good memories, Mr. Speaker. And they remember things like the 1980s when the now Leader of the Opposition was a cabinet ministerial assistant serving the cabinet of Grant Devine. We know of things in the '80s like Hi R Doors, and Supercart fiasco, Eagle buses of Texas. We know about a pulp mill that was given away. We know about a potash company that was essentially given away. Many of us remember GigaText and JoyTec.

We remember the office of public participation. I am sitting, Mr. Speaker . . . or not sitting, I'm standing fairly close to the hon. member for North Battleford, and I remember his predecessor who coined a phrase that, if you throw a coin in the dark and you hear a yelp, you likely hit a dog.

Well, Mr. Speaker, it's interesting to hear the yelping from the members opposite. The office of Public Participation that my constituents remember, that they remember all too well, was Tory code words for the office of privatization, and they know exactly what that's about.

Mr. Speaker, my constituents don't want to live in the past. They want to remember things from the past so that we don't repeat those mistakes. My constituents live firmly today, and they have wonderful expectations for the future. My constituents and all of the people of this wonderful province know we are just at a turning point. We are just about to celebrate Saskatchewan's 100th birthday, Mr. Speaker, and what a wonderful time that will be. One hundred years — relatively young, but it's still a hundred years — and I think of all the things that we have built. Our grandparents, our parents, and even we've had a hand at building some of this, Mr. Speaker. How well we've built this province.

My constituents have built medicare, where Saskatchewan led Canada. Imagine that — little old Saskatchewan. We now have 4 per cent of the population, roughly, of Canada, and yet we were the first province that put together a health care system where you could go and see a doctor and not have to pay for it, where you could go into the hospital and not have to pay for it. That was right here in Saskatchewan. That was one of our proudest gifts to all of Canada, Mr. Speaker.

In education we've built well, whether we're talking from kindergarten to grade 12, or whether we're talking about a tremendous SIAST (Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology) instructional system, or if we're talking about the community college system that we're all so very proud of

right throughout the province, or our two great universities. In education, Saskatchewan has built very well. We've got the foundations, and we're continuing with expansions at both of our universities. Every year there's school updates; there's things being done with infrastructure. And things just continue to get better and better, Mr. Speaker.

In social programs we've built well. Saskatchewan above all provinces is notorious and noted for leading in social programs, Mr. Speaker. The list is huge. But from daycares, to affordable housing, to our national child action plan, our nation-leading, right here in Saskatchewan . . . the child action plan which started first in Saskatchewan and then expanded to all of Canada. And that was our legacy, our gift.

Mr. Speaker, we've done much in Saskatchewan in the past, leading to a very good present. In highways we've built to the point where we have more kilometres of highway per capita, per person, more kilometres of highway than anywhere else in the world. I'm told we've got enough roads and highways in this province to stretch around the equator of the earth three and a half times. That's a lot of roads and a lot of highway — three and a half times around the centre of the earth.

Mr. Speaker, we hear . . . and it's pothole season soon, soon going to be pothole season. Soon we're going to hear about the potholes which come every year in the spring. It happens. We have freeze-up in the winter and we have a thaw in the spring, and there's frost boils and there's pavement that simply breaks up and it needs to be repaired. And, Mr. Speaker, the history of our Highways department in our province is we fix these roads as they need to be fixed. Unfortunately we can't fix them in a heartbeat that we all wish we could.

(16:45)

Mr. Speaker, it's interesting again. I hear opposition members speaking from their seats about the highways, but what is really interesting is that none of them are talking about the great highways that we've got today, the winter highways where we don't have the potholes. And I'm not telling you there's no potholes in this province but I am going to tell you that I've travelled the highways extensively this winter and I'm very, very pleased with the state of Saskatchewan's highways. You go hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of kilometres without seeing a pothole. And I'm very, very pleased about that, very pleased about that.

Mr. Speaker, in Saskatchewan we have built an infrastructure very well. We have Crown corporations that deliver amongst the lowest utility rates, the best service anywhere in the world.

We have got Crown corporations like SGI (Saskatchewan Government Insurance), which SGI started, amongst other things, because farmers could not buy basic fire insurance. The private insurance companies of the day refused to sell it. They were too far from a fire department was what the argument went. Well, Mr. Speaker, we set up SGI so we could have things like fire insurance for farmers. Farm pak. They invented, led the way by putting together Tenant Pak, that sort of thing.

Today SGI has two major arms. One is the insurance business that competes with private insurers, and that's fine. That's

good. It's nice to have choice. It's nice to have the jobs at SGI here in Saskatchewan, but it's nice to have choice. We can buy from SGI, the Saskatchewan company, our private insurance needs, or we can buy from an insurance company based out of Saskatchewan, somewhere else. But it's nice to have that choice.

We have the other side of SGI which is the Auto Pak side, the public auto insurance side where, Mr. Speaker, we've got amongst the very lowest automobile insurance premium rates in the world, and we have amongst the very finest coverage available in the world, whether we're talking coverage for . . . (inaudible) . . . or for people. And we've got a dispute mechanism that helps people through when there is a dispute. I'd love to tell you that all of the disputes are settled to everyone's satisfaction but in the real world that just is not possible. It's not possible with any, any insurer in the world. But I am very proud of the job that SGI does overall.

Mr. Speaker, we've got SaskTel, the great little telco that can. For much of my life I have heard that SaskTel is too small a little telephone company, that it shouldn't survive, it can't survive in the long term. And every year this little telco that can't, not only does, but it seems to thrive.

It's in Canada's top 50 companies to work for, is our little SaskTel. One of the finest companies in the entire country of Canada to work with, for, and at, is SaskTel. SaskTel has got some absolutely wonderful leading edge products and they offer these up at very, very good prices. And the people of Saskatchewan — my constituents, Mr. Speaker, and others — respond to it.

When you look at the rate of . . . Even though we have long-distance competition and you look at the rate that SaskTel has been able to maintain its, its long-distance service . . . The last time I heard it was somewhere still above 90 per cent of us use SaskTel for our long-distance services, and that speaks very well.

And again, Mr. Speaker, we welcome the jobs that SaskTel provides. Earlier in my speech I talked a bit about the SaskTel Pioneers being a great organization that does some very worthwhile and meaningful things. I point out to anyone that cares to listen, that the SaskTel Pioneers are there because we have SaskTel. And as long as we have SaskTel I predict that the SaskTel Pioneers will continue to do much of their wonderful work that they do right across Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, we've got SaskPower and SaskEnergy, two other utility Crowns that deliver terrific service. We've not been necessarily blessed with the best hydrology in the universe. That is, we can't generate all of the electricity we'd like to from water, which is lower cost than coal. But despite that our utility rates are very, very competitive. And we enjoy all of the jobs and I'm very proud of what our Crowns are doing. I'm proud of the past.

Mr. Speaker, the Throne Speech that we're debating today, the Speech from the Throne, sets out a futuristic plan — a plan that is youth friendly; a plan that has a CareerStart program to help prepare our young people for jobs right here in Saskatchewan. This Throne Speech has a youth recruitment component for in

our Crowns and in the broader public service. Young people deserve their opportunity to shine. Young people deserve to be part of our future here in Saskatchewan. And they deserve to be the leaders of that future as quickly as we can pass the baton.

The Assembly adjourned at 16:55.

Mr. Speaker, this Speech from the Throne speaks of a green and prosperous economy. We know that oil and forestry and mining, mining where Saskatchewan enjoys the third highest dollar amount of mining of any of the provinces in Canada — we've moved from number four to number three in the last couple of years — we know that those things are going to be important. But we also know from this futuristic Speech from the Throne that we're going to be paying attention increasingly to above-the-ground resources like solar and wind, biomass, biofuels, hydrogen, those sorts of things.

Mr. Speaker, I was very proud the day that the speech was presented. We had St. Michael's School from Yorkton in the west gallery singing two lovely songs for us, and right next to them was students from the Huda School in Regina Coronation Park.

And I was so proud of them because I had an opportunity to meet with them both before and after. Their questions were interesting and great. Their enthusiasm was wonderful. And I so much appreciated the students from the Huda School being so supportive of the St. Michael's School before, during, and after their song. And it was just such a treat for me to share that special day of the Speech from the Throne with the Huda School students from my constituency.

Mr. Speaker, I'm getting nicely warmed up and I clearly will be supporting the Speech from the Throne. I think this is a wonderful document, a wonderful blueprint for the future. Because I'm just nicely warmed up but recognizing the time drawing later and later, I now would move that we adjourn the debate.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — It has been moved by the member for Regina Coronation Park that debate be now adjourned. Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — Motion is carried.

Motion agreed to.

The Speaker: — I recognize the Government House Leader.

Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen: — Mr. Speaker, I move the House do now adjourn.

The Speaker: — It has been moved by the Government House Leader that the House do now adjourn. Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — Motion is carried. This House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 1:30 p.m.

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