



FIRST SESSION - TWENTY-FIFTH LEGISLATURE

of the

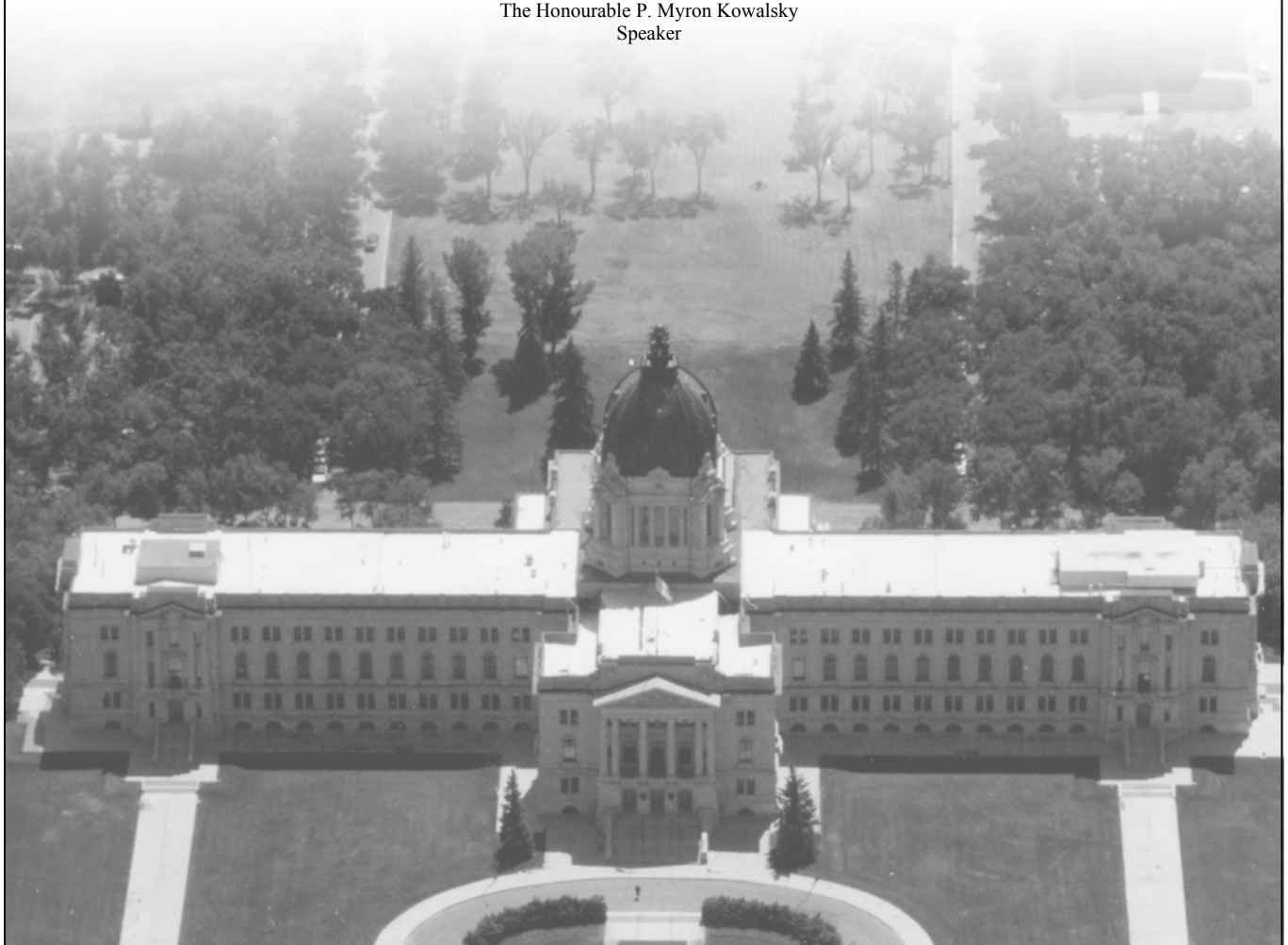
Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan

**DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS**

(HANSARD)

Published under the
authority of

The Honourable P. Myron Kowalsky
Speaker



MEMBERS OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF SASKATCHEWAN

Speaker — Hon. P. Myron Kowalsky
 Premier — Hon. Lorne Calvert
 Leader of the Opposition — Brad Wall

Name of Member	Political Affiliation	Constituency
Addley, Graham	NDP	Saskatoon Sutherland
Allchurch, Denis	SP	Rosthern-Shellbrook
Atkinson, Hon. Pat	NDP	Saskatoon Nutana
Bakken, Brenda	SP	Weyburn-Big Muddy
Beatty, Hon. Joan	NDP	Cumberland
Belanger, Hon. Buckley	NDP	Athabasca
Bjornerud, Bob	SP	Melville-Saltcoats
Borgerson, Lon	NDP	Saskatchewan Rivers
Brkich, Greg	SP	Arm River-Watrous
Calvert, Hon. Lorne	NDP	Saskatoon Riversdale
Cheveldayoff, Ken	SP	Saskatoon Silver Springs
Chisholm, Michael	SP	Cut Knife-Turtleford
Cline, Hon. Eric	NDP	Saskatoon Massey Place
Crofford, Hon. Joanne	NDP	Regina Rosemont
D'Autremont, Dan	SP	Cannington
Dearborn, Jason	SP	Kindersley
Draude, June	SP	Kelvington-Wadena
Eagles, Doreen	SP	Estevan
Elhard, Wayne	SP	Cypress Hills
Forbes, Hon. David	NDP	Saskatoon Centre
Gantfoer, Rod	SP	Melfort
Hagel, Glenn	NDP	Moose Jaw North
Hamilton, Doreen	NDP	Regina Wascana Plains
Harpauer, Donna	SP	Humboldt
Harper, Ron	NDP	Regina Northeast
Hart, Glen	SP	Last Mountain-Touchwood
Heppner, Ben	SP	Martensville
Hermanson, Elwin	SP	Rosetown-Elrose
Higgins, Hon. Deb	NDP	Moose Jaw Wakamow
Huyghebaert, Yogi	SP	Wood River
Iwanchuk, Andy	NDP	Saskatoon Fairview
Junor, Judy	NDP	Saskatoon Eastview
Kerpan, Allan	SP	Carrot River Valley
Kirsch, Delbert	SP	Batoche
Kowalsky, Hon. P. Myron	NDP	Prince Albert Carlton
Krawetz, Ken	SP	Canora-Pelly
Lautermilch, Eldon	NDP	Prince Albert Northcote
McCall, Warren	NDP	Regina Elphinstone-Centre
McMorris, Don	SP	Indian Head-Milestone
Merriman, Ted	SP	Saskatoon Northwest
Morgan, Don	SP	Saskatoon Southeast
Morin, Sandra	NDP	Regina Walsh Acres
Nilson, Hon. John	NDP	Regina Lakeview
Prebble, Hon. Peter	NDP	Saskatoon Greystone
Quennell, Hon. Frank	NDP	Saskatoon Meewasin
Serby, Hon. Clay	NDP	Yorkton
Sonntag, Hon. Maynard	NDP	Meadow Lake
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Taylor, Hon. Len	NDP	The Battlefords
Thomson, Hon. Andrew	NDP	Regina South
Toth, Don	SP	Moosomin
Trew, Kim	NDP	Regina Coronation Park
Van Mulligen, Hon. Harry	NDP	Regina Douglas Park
Wakefield, Milton	SP	Lloydminster
Wall, Brad	SP	Swift Current
Wartman, Hon. Mark	NDP	Regina Qu'Appelle Valley
Weekes, Randy	SP	Biggar
Yates, Kevin	NDP	Regina Dewdney

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, I rise today to present a petition on behalf of constituents from the area of Cypress Hills who are concerned about the increase in crop insurance premiums for yet another year, a third year in a row. And the prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the provincial government to take all necessary actions to reverse the increase in crop insurance premiums and the reduction in coverage.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

Mr. Speaker, this is signed by constituents from the communities of Abbey, Richmond, and a couple of other rural communities in the Southwest.

I so present.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Rosetown-Elrose.

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition signed by residents of my constituency of Rosetown-Elrose regarding recent changes to the crop insurance program that results in a large premium increase for insured farmers, while overall coverage is reduced. And the prayer reads, Mr. Speaker:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the provincial government to take all necessary actions to reverse the increase in crop insurance premiums and the reduction in coverage.

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

Mr. Speaker, the signatures on this petition are from the communities of Demaine, Beechy, and Lucky Lake.

I am pleased to present this petition on their behalf.

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

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, once again I rise in the Assembly with a petition from citizens of my constituency who are extremely concerned about the condition of Highway 43, and the petition reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to repair Highway 43 in order to address safety concerns and to facilitate growth in rural Saskatchewan.

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

And, Mr. Speaker, this is signed by good citizens of Lafleche, Glentworth, Gravelbourg, and Glenbain.

I so present.

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

Mr. Brkich: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition here where citizens outraged at the possible reductions of services at Davidson and Imperial health centres.

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to take the necessary steps to ensure that the Davidson and Imperial health centres be maintained at the current level of service at a minimum, with a 24-hour acute care, emergency, and doctor services available, as well as lab, public health, home care, and long-term care services available to users from the Davidson and Imperial areas and beyond.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

Signed by the good citizens from Davidson, Kenaston, La Ronge, and Melville.

I so present.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Kindersley.

Mr. Dearborn: — Mr. Speaker, I rise today in the House to present a petition on behalf of citizens from west central Saskatchewan concerned with the Unity seniors' lodge project. The prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to take the necessary steps to ensure the citizens of Unity and district remain in the community for this necessary service that will bridge the gap between independent living and long-term care.

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

Mr. Speaker, this petition is signed by the good folks from Unity, Saskatoon, and Tramping Lake.

I so present.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Last Mountain-Touchwood.

Mr. Hart: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I rise to present a petition on behalf of citizens that are concerned with Highway 22, particularly that section between Junction 6 and Junction 22. The prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to take

immediate action and make necessary repairs to Highway 22 in order to address safety and economic concerns.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

Mr. Speaker, signatures to this petition come from the communities of Earl Grey, Southey, Melfort, and Bulleya.

I so present.

READING AND RECEIVING PETITIONS

Deputy Clerk: — According to order the following petitions have been reviewed and are hereby read and received as addendums to previously tabled petitions being sessional papers nos. 47, 48, 69, and 73.

NOTICES OF MOTIONS AND QUESTIONS

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Martensville.

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

To the Minister of Highways and Transportation: with regard to the Highway 11 twinning project, what is the department's plan for accesses on this highway and the communities of Hague, Osler, and Rosthern? Has the department consulted with the councils in those communities about the number and location of these accesses? And what is the position of those communities about these accesses and how does that compare to that of the Department of Highway's plan?

Thank you.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it's a pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly some guests in your gallery. I ran into them leaving the Legislative Assembly at lunchtime. They are . . . I know this much. I don't know each of their names but they're students at SIAST (Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology) and they're here today to watch the proceedings of the Assembly.

And I'd ask all members to join with me in welcoming these students to their Legislative Assembly.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the legislature, 22 students from Connaught School who are seated in the west gallery. These are grade 7 and 8 students. Their teacher is Rosanne Fournier. And there are a couple of them that are related to the Assembly in that they're a granddaughter of one of our former members.

And I would also like to point out that the member sitting immediately behind me is a graduate of Connaught School, where he attended grades 1 to 8. And so what I would say on

behalf of all of us in the Assembly, we welcome all 22 of you to think seriously about a long, rewarding career in politics. Let's all welcome them.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Saskatoon Silver Springs.

Forum to Explore Saskatchewan's Economic Potential

Mr. Cheveldayoff: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Friday afternoon, April 2, the University of Saskatchewan College of Commerce held a forum entitled explore Saskatchewan's economic potential. This forum saw commerce students divided into three student governments comprised of 55 students each. Each government elected a premier and a cabinet. Each government presented their economic plan to grow Saskatchewan by 2010.

I repeat, Mr. Speaker, they all agreed it is necessary to grow Saskatchewan. Each team exhibited many fresh ideas, tremendous motivation, and youthful energy that was indeed refreshing.

Here are some of the ideas they came up with, Mr. Speaker: promoting Saskatoon as the medical mecca of Western Canada and allowing private companies such as the Mayo Clinic to invest in Saskatchewan health care; allowing private MRI (magnetic resonance imaging) and CT (computerized tomography) scan clinics to improve health care and standards in Saskatchewan; eliminate capital tax in the manufacturing and processing tax by 2012 and an immediate cut in the general corporate rate; shift individual tax rates towards a flat tax structure to keep high income earners in Saskatchewan; and decrease the education portion of property tax; and make tourism and Aboriginal tourism a priority.

Quite an ambitious policy agenda. We could learn from them, Mr. Speaker. This government could learn a lot. The Minister of Industry and Resources was there so I hope he picked up a few ideas. There was no wiener roast tax. The students wanted real balanced budgets and deficit reduction.

Congratulations to government policy course professor, Cathi Wilson-Loescher, and the three premiers: Jocelyn Krause from the Prairie Vision government, Jeff Danyliw from the Sask for Life government, and congratulations to Kristjan Hebert of the Sask Right government. Jeff Piercy from my constituency was on that team.

An election was held, Mr. Speaker, and the Sask Right government won. Their party colours were green and gold . . .

The Speaker: — I'm afraid the member's time has more than elapsed. I recognize the member for Regina Qu'Appelle Valley.

Special Olympics Western Canadian Curling Championship

Hon. Mr. Wartman: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker,

Special Olympics Saskatchewan is enriching the lives of people with disabilities through sport.

This weekend I had the pleasure of helping open the 2004 Special Olympics Western Canadian Curling Championship at the Highland Curling Club here in Regina. This event welcomed people from British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba, including 90 athletes, coaches, managers, mission staff and officials, and 30 volunteers.

And there was a very special team that threw the first rock. It was skipped by one of the Special Olympics curlers, and it had on it Marcia Gudereit, Joan McCusker, and Jan Betker. And I noticed just a quick toe as the rock was making its way up to the centre, and it made it right to the button, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, Special Olympics Saskatchewan offers a year-round program that provides athletes with a lifetime of learning. Through this organization athletes have the opportunity to participate in more than 100 programs at the local, provincial, national, and international level. From five-pin bowling to floor hockey, from snowing to rhythmic gymnastics . . . snowshoeing, pardon me. It's a new sport I think. Athletes can choose from a wide selection of sports that help to enhance their personal growth.

This weekend a team from Melfort finished first in the Division 2 category, and a team from Nipawin took first place in Division 3. Regina's team finished third in Division 3 category after beating Lethbridge 6 to 1.

Mr. Speaker, I acknowledge Special Olympics Saskatchewan for its dedication to providing athletes of all ability levels with quality sport training.

The Speaker: — The member's time has elapsed as well.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Moosomin.

Senior Couple Reunited

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, about three weeks ago students and residents in the Montmartre area raised a number of concerns regarding the conditions that Mr. and Mrs. Paul Shiplack have faced for the last four years. Paul and Marcia Shiplack have been married for 48 years. They have done everything together from managing a family farm and raising a family.

Mr. Speaker, the Shiplack's have been committed and dedicated to each other for all of their married lives. Unfortunately, for the last four years they've been forced to live apart due to failing health conditions. Mrs. Shiplack has been living in the Montmartre care home while her husband, Paul, has resided in subsidized housing across the street, even though he was assessed at a level 3 care in 1999.

Mr. Speaker, Mr. Shiplack served his country in the Second World War in order that we might enjoy the freedoms we take for granted today. But for the last four years he has been fighting another kind of battle — the right to enjoy his

remaining years at his wife's side.

I am pleased to say that, following discussions with Mr. Dwight Nelson, CEO (chief executive officer) of the Regina Health District, the district has reassessed Mr. Shiplack's condition and as of this past Friday, Paul and Marcia Shiplack were together again at the Montmartre care home.

Mr. Speaker, situations like that faced by Mr. and Mrs. Shiplack should not happen. Families should not have to raise media attention to have their concerns heard.

Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the students for raising their concerns to the Minister of Health. I am pleased to forward letters from the students and residents of Montmartre and hope that this type of circumstance does not happen to other families in the future.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Regina Coronation Park.

Making Education and Training a Priority

Mr. Trew: — Mr. Speaker, our government made a commitment to Saskatchewan people to build a future right here. And the people know that our government is following through with that commitment even in the face of challenging circumstances.

Mr. Speaker, our budget reinforces our commitment to provide students with high quality education and training opportunities. We've increased education funding by \$45 million to a record \$1.2 billion.

In keeping with our commitment to make Saskatchewan first choice for young people, we are increasing the post-secondary graduate tax credit to \$1,000 over the four years. This year the tax credit is going to go from \$350 to \$500. And also for our young people, Mr. Speaker, we are investing an additional \$500,000 into the Young Entrepreneurs of Saskatchewan program. Our contribution to post-secondary education and student supports totals almost half a billion dollars.

We've increased the budgets for SIAST, regional colleges, and the Apprenticeship and Trade Certification Commission. And to support research at both our universities, we've increased the Innovation and Science Fund by almost \$2 million.

(13:45)

Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan people made it clear that education is one of their top priorities. We listened and we have responded with a sustainable budget that delivers on what matters most to people.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Saskatoon Southeast.

Junior Achievement Awards in Saskatoon

Mr. Morgan: — Mr. Speaker, last week Thursday I had the privilege of attending the Junior Achievement Awards Banquet in Saskatoon. Junior Achievement is a program directed at high school students to promote and develop an awareness and understanding of entrepreneurial and business issues through a variety of programs, including the operation of small, student-run businesses.

I would like to ask the members to congratulate all participants and especially the winning competitors. The winning company that participated was a company called Blingabrite which manufactured decorated light bulbs and coasters and was highly successful.

There was in addition to that, Mr. Speaker, a number of individual winners, including the Spirit of Junior Achievement which was a tie between Lindsay Igin and Ryan Legge. The Achiever of the Year was Jen Nowoselski and Professional Leadership Award went to Justin Smith.

In addition to that, Mr. Speaker, there was an inductee into the Junior Achievement Hall of Fame and that was Wally Mah, who is a businessman in Saskatoon who operates North Ridge homes. I would be, Mr. Speaker, be prepared to table their shareholders report and listing of information.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Regina Rosemont.

Nobel Prize Winner Donates Money to Luther College

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, teachers in Saskatchewan make a difference every day in the lives of students.

Nobel Prize winner Henry Taube was so inspired by his former teacher at Luther College that he donated \$100,000 US (United States) to the school recently. And I'm pleased to say that Luther College is located in the constituency that I represent, Regina Rosemont.

The late Paul Liefeld taught chemistry at Luther for more than 40 years and took a special interest in Dr. Taube. It was this interest, Mr. Speaker, that encouraged him to pursue a bachelor's and master's degree at the University of Saskatchewan. He later went on to complete a Ph.D. (Doctor of Philosophy) at the University of California, Berkeley in 1940.

Mr. Taube has taught at Cornell University, the University of Chicago, and Stanford University and in 1983 he was awarded the Nobel Prize in chemistry for his work on the mechanisms of electron transfer reactions.

Mr. Speaker, Dr. Taube says he will always remember Mr. Liefeld's influence and I'm sure we all have teachers we can recollect in our school years that did that. He recalls thinking of Mr. Liefeld as a big brother and admired him very much.

The donation from Mr. Taube will go toward the Luther Spirit

Campaign to raise \$3 million to renovate and restore the Royal Street campus.

Mr. Speaker, I ask members to join me in acknowledging the profound impact that Mr. Liefeld and other teachers have on students such as Dr. Taube, and I also recognize Luther for its commitment to students, and ask everybody to join me in thanking Dr. Taube for his generous donation.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

National Wildlife Week

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. April 4 marked the beginning of National Wildlife Week in Canada. National Wildlife Week takes place each year in the week surrounding April 10, the birthday of Jack Miner, a pioneer of Canada's conservation movement.

Mr. Speaker, there's no better symbol of our commitment to preserving our wildlife and other natural treasures than the national and provincial park systems.

In Saskatchewan the provincial park system also is a huge draw for tourists. Growth in tourism is one of the limitless opportunities before Saskatchewan. Unfortunately like so many other opportunities here it is stymied by the short-sightedness of the NDP (New Democratic Party) government.

People throughout our province are completely baffled as to why this NDP government would make the decision to keep many of our provincial parks closed for an extra month when so little money will be saved.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to quote from a column in this morning's *Leader-Post*. Bob Hughes writes:

So, as I am driving through the park on my way home, gulping in the view that is laid out in the fading light of a wonderful . . . day, I am wondering how such a magnificent place (as) this could be asked to suffer the blunderings of this government we have running our lives.

He adds:

The stupidest thing I've ever seen a government do in any budget is what the NDP did . . . when it decided to hold off the opening day of the province's most popular campgrounds . . .

Mr. Hughes goes on to say:

This government consciously has ruined the enjoyment opportunities of the people it is supposed to be serving. And it is hammering businesses that depend on campers . . .

He concludes:

The government is acting as if it is brain dead and on life support. Somebody should pull the plug.

ORAL QUESTIONS

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Melfort.

Emergency Room Issues in Saskatoon

Mr. Gantefoer: — Mr. Speaker, my question is to the Premier. In January Dr. Jon Witt wrote a letter to the Minister of Health raising serious questions about understaffing and patient safety in the emergency room at Royal University Hospital. For that the NDP fired Dr. Witt as director of emergency medicine. The minister said Dr. Witt hadn't proven any patients actually died.

Mr. Speaker, the minister demanded evidence and now he has it. On Friday Dr. Witt confirmed he gave the government a list of 88 people who died within 48 hours of receiving care at the Royal University Hospital emergency. In every case the patient died after waiting longer in the ER (emergency room) than mandated by national guidelines.

Mr. Speaker, will the minister do the right thing, reinstate Dr. Witt as head of emergency medicine and launch an independent investigation into the sometimes deadly consequences of understaffing and overcrowding at the emergency department at RUH (Royal University Hospital)?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Health.

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, the Saskatoon Health Region issued a press release within the last hour or so and they set out some things that they are doing. It's quite lengthy but I think, practically, it . . . The first one is that they're acting on the recommendation of their chief of staff, Dr. Ronan Conlon, to refer to the College of Physicians and Surgeons all of the medical charts involved in the information — all those people who die within 48 hours of receiving care at RUH.

Second thing is the health region has engaged Dr. Larry Ohlhauser of Edmonton to chair an external expert review team of all emergency services operations in the three hospitals in Saskatoon. He's the former CEO, or registrar, of the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Alberta.

And the third thing is they've appointed Dr. Paul Hayes as the interim medical director of the RUH emergency department. He's a general surgeon with special care and experience in trauma.

And the fourth thing is the board has announced that they do support the decision to relieve Dr. Witt of his administrative duties.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Melfort.

Mr. Gantefoer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, a question to the Minister of Health. Minister, are you satisfied that this investigation that's being conducted is . . . Is the minister satisfied that this investigation is going to meet the requirements of independence so that the Saskatoon district

health association is simply not investigating itself, and that the terms and references are broad enough so that this can be done properly in regard to this entire incident?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Health.

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, the whole purpose of the College of Physicians and Surgeons is to be a professional review of the medical profession, with the main goal of making sure that the medical profession serves the public in a safe and consistent manner. They have a long history of doing a very good job and we are pleased that they are doing that.

The bigger issue of the emergency services in Saskatoon is being dealt with through an overall review where a report will come back by the end of June. We think that's appropriate. We think that they have gone and taken the appropriate steps to sort out and deal with the issues that are there.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Melfort.

Mr. Gantefoer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the minister, will the minister assure this House that the information that comes out of these reports, both the one by the independent doctor and the College of Physicians and Surgeons, are going to be made public so that the entire health system in Saskatchewan can know that this was done independently and properly, and that there are proper balances and checks put into place so this doesn't happen again?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Health.

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, I am absolutely certain that the people involved will follow the law of Saskatchewan as it relates to The Health Information Protection Act and all of the regional health authority legislation to make sure that the appropriate answers are given to the public of Saskatchewan, while also protecting the privacy of all the individual people involved.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Melfort.

Mr. Gantefoer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One final question to the minister, Mr. Speaker: will the minister assure this House that if the allegations and the concerns expressed by Dr. Jon Witt are substantiated, that he will indeed be reinstated as the head of emergency medicine at Royal University Hospital?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Health.

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, this goes to the core of the misinformation that the member opposite started with. I did not have anything to do with relieving Dr. Witt of his duties; that's something that's done in the Saskatoon Health Authority. If they, after all their investigations, show that there's an appropriate position for Dr. Witt in the system, I'm sure he will get it.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Saskatoon Southeast.

Whistle-Blower Protection

Mr. Morgan: — Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Premier. Dr. Jon Witt was fired for speaking up about the dangerous and potentially fatal situation in the emergency room at RUH. Now Dr. Witt is calling for effective whistle-blower legislation to protect health care professionals and other government workers from being fired when they tell the truth about serious problems in our health care system.

The Saskatchewan Union of Nurses is also calling for legislation to protect nurses from being fired when they speak out.

Mr. Speaker, right after the question period, the Saskatchewan Party will introduce strong new legislation to protect people like Dr. Jon Witt from being fired for speaking out. Will the Premier and his NDP government support the Saskatchewan Party's whistle-blower legislation?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Labour.

Hon. Ms. Higgins: — Mr. Speaker, thank you very much. I would be pleased to wait still another day or so till the opposition decides to table their piece of legislation to see what it actually says.

Section 74 of The Labour Standards Act actually provides whistle-blower protection, which as compared to other legislation across Canada, protects all employees, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Saskatoon Southeast.

Mr. Morgan: — Mr. Speaker, Dr. Jon Witt was fired by the NDP not because he made unfounded allegations or failed to provide proof. No, Dr. Witt was fired by the NDP because he had the courage to speak out about serious problems in the NDP's crumbling health care system. The Saskatchewan Party's whistle-blower's legislation will protect Dr. Witt and others like him who have the courage to speak up when they see serious problems with the actions of the provincial government.

Will the Premier join with the Saskatchewan Party today to protect employees from being fired for speaking out about wrongdoing in government? Will the Premier and his NDP government support the Saskatchewan Party's whistle-blower legislation?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Labour.

Hon. Ms. Higgins: — Mr. Speaker, it's my understanding that Dr. Witt is still practising medicine at RUH. So I'm not sure what this piece of legislation will do, but I'm anxiously waiting

to see it tabled so we can have a look at it and see what it does say.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Saskatoon Silver Springs.

Strike at the Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology

Mr. Cheveldayoff: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Learning. The labour dispute at SIAST has now escalated into a full-blown strike. All classes have been cancelled today, and all 12,000 students are sitting at home — well not all of them; some are in our gallery today — they're wondering if they're going to be able to complete their school year.

Mr. Speaker, this NDP government talks about the importance of educating our young people. But those words don't mean much when you have 12,000 students in danger of losing their school year. Mr. Speaker, this is absolutely unacceptable. What is the minister going to do to ensure that these students are able to complete their school year?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Learning.

Hon. Mr. Thomson: — Mr. Speaker, we are working to get a collective agreement with the employees at SIAST.

I can advise the House that on Saturday morning we provided an offer to the employees — not a final offer, but an offer that would move us forward in terms of dealing with wage parity issues, that would deal with salary increases, and would take a look at some of the other complexities that are at the table. The employees advised us at that point that they were not going to accept that particular proposal, and as such have escalated their job action.

I can tell also the members of this Assembly that this hour the president of SIAST is meeting with the student associations to advise them of the action that we are taking to deal with issues that they have raised. Individual students who are interested in knowing about some of the implications and some of the issues before them, we have set up a Web site at www.campusupdate.ca which will advise them of options available to them in dealing with provincial training allowance, student loans, and deal with some of the other issues.

I'm sure we'll have an opportunity to expand on this; I know members are interested, and of course we have a great deal to say about this.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Saskatoon Silver Springs.

Mr. Cheveldayoff: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well I'd like to thank the minister for finally addressing some of the students'

concerns. It's too bad it has to be on his timetable and not theirs.

Mr. Speaker, last week when we asked the minister about the SIAST strike, he told us to be patient. Wait for the budget, he said; the budget will fix everything. Well the budget fixed everything all right, Mr. Speaker. They went from rotating strikes to a full-blown strike, and now every student at SIAST is having his or her school year threatened.

Mr. Speaker, can the minister absolutely guarantee that every single SIAST student will be able to complete their academic year on time?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(14:00)

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Learning.

Hon. Mr. Thomson: — Mr. Speaker, I think it's important that all members be upfront and honest in terms of their approach in this House. I was very clear — and it was very clear to members of the media — that it was not my view that the budget or the mandate would immediately resolve this situation. This is a very complicated set of issues, and I was very clear to this Assembly on that. I want to tell members of the House that there are a number of different issues that are involved here, and I know that they'll be interested in hearing this.

We of course have been working with the Apprenticeship and Trade Certification Commission to make sure that apprentices who are working here will not see their situation jeopardized. SIAST has been in touch with the health regions to talk about the impact the job action may have on them.

I can assure students that we are taking a look on a program-by-program basis as to how we can deal with the possibility of a prolonged strike by the SIAST instructors, and that exam schedules and in fact the school year have been adjusted to compensate for the reduced preparatory time that students will have.

This is the first day of a full-scale walkout. It's very hard to say how long this may take. We are committed to making sure that SIAST maintains an open dialogue with the student associations, and the campus directors will serve as the primary student contact points.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Saskatoon Silver Springs.

Mr. Cheveldayoff: — Well, Mr. Speaker, the minister has come a long way from not wanting to discuss this on the floor of this legislature.

Mr. Speaker, this NDP government created this mess; now they have to fix it. It was the NDP government that let 38 out of 41 public sector contracts expire this year. It was the NDP government that ran this province so far into the hole they have no money to settle the contracts. It was the NDP government

that waited too long to bring in a conciliator, and now the SIAST strike has escalated into a full-blown strike just in time for final exams.

Mr. Speaker, the minister's job is to ensure students complete their classes on time. Do your job, Mr. Minister. What is the minister going to do to ensure every single SIAST student completes their classes on time?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Learning.

Hon. Mr. Thomson: — Mr. Speaker, I think it's important that all members understand how collective bargaining works. We brought in a conciliator when SGEU (Saskatchewan Government and General Employees' Union) asked for us to bring in a conciliator, when we thought that there was some use in doing that. The conciliator has been working with the parties. This was one of the ways that we got to what I believe was a workable option. It was presented to the bargaining committee on Saturday. I regret the fact that it has not met with their approval and as a result that they have walked out on a full-scale strike. This is very disruptive for students.

This is part of the process. What we now need to work our way through is how we can best address the needs of students and how we can make sure that they do not lose their class year. This will need to be done on a program-by-program basis and that is what the SIAST leadership team will deal with.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Utility Rates

Mr. Elhard: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, last fall the Premier made, as a centrepiece of his election campaign, a promise to provide the lowest basket of utility rates in the country. Mr. Speaker, in last Saturday's front page story in the *Leader-Post*, Gord Gunoff, the business manager for the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, said, among other things, that a senior official at SaskPower had told him that increases in the electrical power rates are likely in the not-too-distant future.

Mr. Speaker, will the minister confirm the worst suspicions of consumers in this province, that rates for electricity are going to be going up, contrary to the Premier's promise to provide the lowest basket of utility costs in the country?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the minister.

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Thank you. What I can assure the people in this province is that we are committed to having the lowest cost bundle of utilities in the country by the end of our term, Mr. Speaker. And we will meet, we will meet that commitment. Mr. Speaker, we anticipate that this information will be available to the public after we've had the opportunity to have it reviewed by a third party, independent validator. And

Mr. Speaker, I can assure the members that it is our government's intention to have the lowest bundle of utility rates in this country during our term in office.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Elhard: — Mr. Speaker, the promise of the lowest bundle of rates in the country over the next four years isn't what the people heard in the election campaign. They heard something much more immediate and much more specific.

Mr. Speaker, Mr. Gunoff continued in his newspaper quote that such increases in SaskPower rates would be unacceptable and without merit, and that he believes that ways could be found to save money and avoid power rate increases.

Mr. Speaker, to the minister: will the minister confirm that a rate increase application will be forthcoming and in what amount?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the minister responsible for the Crown Management Board.

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Mr. Speaker, as Chair of the board of the Crown Investments Corporation, along with my colleagues that sit on the board representing the various utilities in the province, I can indicate to the member that we have not received any application for a rate increase at SaskPower. What I can also confirm for the member is that it's our intention during this term of government to have the lowest bundle of utility rates in Canada.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Opening of Provincial Parks

Mr. Wall: — Well, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker, the truth of the matter is that is not what the NDP said in this election. And they are prepared to betray the consumers in the province of Saskatchewan as this budget has betrayed government workers, it's betraying seniors, and it's even betrayed campers, Mr. Speaker, and people who own businesses at the provincial parks — people who run golf courses, who operate stores, who sell fishing tackle. The NDP without any warning, and apparently without even the courtesy to consult with those businesses, took away up to a third of their summer season.

Mr. Speaker, the question to the Premier is this: people are furious about this NDP decision. Why is the NDP attacking those businesses in Saskatchewan parks and those thousands of Saskatchewan people that want to use those parks beginning with the May long weekend?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of the Environment.

Hon. Mr. Forbes: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. No doubt this year our budget was very tough. We set out a clear priority list for our government and this meets what the people of Saskatchewan wanted to do. So there are no easy answers, and the choices we made were not easily made or lightly made.

I want to say that the change in the start-up date reflects the customer demand for park usage. From the May long weekend to mid-June, 14 provincial parks right across this province will be open on the May long weekend.

I want to emphasize that 14 parks will be open. Discussions are taking place with the commercial lessees and others who will be affected by the parks. Now our parks have a great reputation for good customer service relations, and listening is part of that. And so we are listening to the concerns that the people are talking to us about.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Wall: — Mr. Speaker, the government is listening to the outcry from Saskatchewan people, but they don't want their parks to open until the middle of June. It's unbelievable, Mr. Speaker. Here's what some of the businesses are saying about this NDP decision to shorten summer.

Here's what they are saying, quote:

It's absolutely the most asinine decision I've ever heard . . . They're cutting one-third of our business.

Here's what the manager of the Good Spirit Golf Course had to say:

We've spent thousands with tourism and drawing people to this area. Keep people at home; keep people coming to Saskatchewan. This is a real blow.

Mr. Speaker, to the Premier. How in the world does this measure help tourism in the province? How does it help us to attract new dollars to Saskatchewan? And why didn't this government have the courtesy to at least consult, consult with those businesses that they would be damaging by this decision?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of the Environment.

Hon. Mr. Forbes: — Mr. Speaker, this is an important decision. I'm glad we're talking about this. Actually on the radio on Friday afternoon . . . I am really glad to hear that parks are important to people here in Saskatchewan. They are a crown jewel of what we do here, and it's important.

In the parks that with no services until June 18, day use will be available — especially for the boat launches and docks after spring thaw. But we're looking at all sorts of possibilities. The key point here is that we're trying to save money to make sure our parks are sustainable. We want to see a sustainable park system. And this is very important.

So we're looking at all things and we're talking to people. We're listening to all ideas. And I'd be very interested to hear what their ideas are in terms of how to make these parks sustainable into the future.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Wall: — Well, Mr. Speaker, I know it might be radical thinking but the Saskatchewan Party believes that when summer comes, the parks should open in the province of Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker, it's difficult to believe anything this minister or this Premier would have to say in light of the fact that they systematically are breaking all the promises that they made in their election platform. But now we can't even believe what the NDP have to say in the 2004 accommodation guide, the Saskatchewan accommodation guide. I've got a copy right here.

Here's what it says about Douglas Provincial Park — open year round, full services May 20 to September 6. Here's what it says about Good Spirit Provincial Park — open year round, full services May 20 to October 15. In fact every provincial park is supposed to be open from May 20 to October 15. But it's not true, since the Premier shortened summer.

And so the question to the Premier or the minister is this: how much money was spent printing this particular guide that is now inaccurate?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of the Environment.

Hon. Mr. Forbes: — Mr. Speaker, as I said, there are tough choices and they were not easily made or lightly taken. And I appreciate the comments from everyone.

And what I especially would like to hear is, how do we make these parks sustainable? We have 34 wonderful parks in this province, a very key piece of our green and prosperous economy plan, and we want to make sure they're sustainable into the future for the next generation.

And what is their platform? What is their policy around the parks? What did they say last fall?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Wall: — Mr. Speaker, to the minister. The minister's decision was made . . . Apparently he would have been at the cabinet meetings that decided to not open these parks in the province of Saskatchewan. They would have discussed how much they were going to save. There is a, there is a guide that the government would have paid for, or helped pay for, that tells people that all the parks would be open on the May long

weekend — which they are not.

To the minister: how much money was, did the government spend on printing this inaccurate camping guide?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of the Environment.

Hon. Mr. Forbes: — Mr. Speaker, the budget before us, the budget debate today and this afternoon, is a very tough one. And we have some really important issues before us in terms of health and education, and those are the priorities for this government.

Tourism is a very key piece for the Department of Environment. We know that the out-of-province people come to our parks later in June and in July and August — that's the key time for these people to come. And so that's why we planned this, this savings at this point.

But I am still really anxious to hear what those folks would do, over on that side.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Wall: — Mr. Speaker, the minister can't answer the basic question about the campground guideline. It's been difficult for people phoning in to open-line shows even to get answers, or the media to get answers from the minister about how this new policy will work.

On Friday, callers to a phone-in show seemed to know more about it than the minister did. First the minister said the parks are going to be open on the May long weekend — just no services — but then a caller called in and said that the park manager at Douglas Park had told him, no, they're going to be putting a big rock in front of the entrance to keep, to keep people from coming in, Mr. Speaker. A big rock to keep people from coming in.

Well, Mr. Speaker, how did this get by the Premier or cabinet? How did they come to this decision? What did they say — here's the plan, Mr. Premier, we're going to shorten summer and we're going to use rocks to keep people out of their parks, Mr. Speaker? And then when they finally do get in we're going to charge them three bucks every time they want to have a wiener roast. How did that happen?

Was there a cabinet meeting that decided this? Would the Premier please stand up and explain to Saskatchewan people how — as the member quoted earlier — how this, the stupidest park policy ever, could have come to be in the province of Saskatchewan?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of the Environment.

Hon. Mr. Forbes: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the question. And around the rocks, there won't be rocks on the road. And if he heard that same radio show, I did say that every penny counts in how we operate our parks, and

this is very important. Every penny counts.

And it was a very informative radio show program because people really had some concerns about tourism. And I said what we will do, as good customer relations, is listen to people's concerns, and especially the people with businesses. We will make sure that we hear their issues, and this is very important.

But again, Mr. Speaker, this is not an easy budget to take.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(14:15)

Mr. Wall: — Well, Mr. Speaker, when will the minister actually listen to what the people are saying about the parks because I think the people are being pretty clear? Is the minister going to be on one side of the rock at the park entrance and the people on the other and he'll be listening to how angry they are?

And will he just simply clarify for the people of the province, will these parks be open? Will they in fact be open with no services or will there be large NDP rocks in front of the parks and people can't access them?

I mean I think that's a pretty important question as the May long weekend approaches. Would the minister please clarify exactly what this policy means for hundreds of Saskatchewan people that like to go camping on the May long weekend?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Forbes: — Mr. Speaker, clearly on the May long weekend there will be 14 parks open with full services. On the first day of summer, all the parks will be open. And that's very important — all parks will be open on the first day of summer.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 201 — The Whistleblower Protection Act

The Speaker: — Order. I recognize the member for Saskatoon Southeast.

Mr. Morgan: — Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 201, The Whistleblower Protection Act be now introduced and read a first time.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — It has been moved by the member for Saskatoon Southeast that Bill No. 201, The Whistleblower Protection Act be now introduced and read for the first time. Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — The motion is carried.

Deputy Clerk: — First reading of this Bill.

The Speaker: — When shall the Bill be read a second time?

Mr. Morgan: — Next sitting of the House.

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

TABLING OF CORRESPONDENCE

Board of Internal Economy

The Speaker: — Members, before orders of the day, it's my pleasure to table correspondence from Her Honour Lynda Haverstock, the Lieutenant Governor of Saskatchewan, with respect to the membership on the Board of Internal Economy.

Before orders of the day, I recognize the Government House Leader.

Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen: — Mr. Speaker, before orders of the day I would ask for leave to move a motion with respect to sitting hours of the House.

The Speaker: — The Government House Leader has requested leave to move a motion with respect to hours of sitting.

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — The member may proceed.

MOTION

Hours of Sitting

Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen: — Mr. Speaker, I would move:

That, notwithstanding rule 3(1) of the *Rules and Procedures* of this Assembly, that when this Assembly meets on Thursday, May 20, it shall meet from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.; and when the House adjourns on Thursday, May 20, it do stand adjourned until Wednesday, May 26 at 1:30 p.m.

I move, seconded by the member for Melfort.

The Speaker: — It has been moved by the member for Douglas Park and seconded by the member for Melfort:

That, notwithstanding rule 3(1) of the *Rules and Procedures* of this Assembly, that when this Assembly meets on Thursday, May 20, it shall meet from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.; and when the House adjourns on Thursday, May 20, it do stand adjourned until Wednesday, May 26 at 1:30 pm.

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

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — The motion is carried.

Motion agreed to.

ORDERS OF THE DAY**WRITTEN QUESTIONS**

The Speaker: — I recognize the Government Whip.

Mr. Yates: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm extremely pleased to stand on behalf of the government and table responses to written questions no. 40 through 45 inclusive.

The Speaker: — Responses to questions 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, and 45 have been submitted.

I recognize the Government Whip.

Mr. Yates: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm extremely pleased to stand on behalf of the government and convert for debates returnable questions no. 46 through 58 inclusive.

The Speaker: — Questions 46 through to 58 have been converted to orders for return (debatable).

SPECIAL ORDER**ADJOURNED DEBATES****MOTION FOR APPROVAL OF BUDGETARY POLICY
(BUDGET DEBATE)**

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen, that the Assembly approves in general the budgetary policy of the government, and the proposed amendment thereto moved by Mr. Krawetz.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for The Battlefords.

Hon. Mr. Taylor: — Thank you. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Taylor: — I appreciate the opportunity to be able to continue my remarks that I left off on April 1, Mr. Speaker.

At that time I had begun my remarks talking about the importance of the budget to the people of Saskatchewan and the benefits that I was able to see as the budget rolled out.

Mr. Speaker, I had mentioned at that time, on Thursday last, that there was a recognition in the delivery of this budget, the development and the delivery of the budget, that these are indeed difficult and challenging times for the province of Saskatchewan, but that the Minister of Finance and this government's approach to all of the issues in front of us with a great deal of compassion despite the fact that the difficult choices have to be made.

Mr. Speaker, I had also indicated that — and some of this has been substantiated in meetings that I've had subsequent to the rollout of the budget on Wednesday and my remarks on Thursday — but it's very . . . it strikes me, Mr. Speaker, that it's very easy to be able to criticize individual items in this budget, Mr. Speaker, as we're seeing daily in the media, as we're

hearing about daily in the question period here.

It's very easy to address individual items, taken out of context from the overall approach that the government has taken in developing a fiscal plan for the province of Saskatchewan. Easy, Mr. Speaker, because of course nobody likes taxes; nobody likes the idea of increasing taxes. Nobody likes the idea of having to lay off people who are working for the people. Nobody likes the implication that service will be changed or affected. Nobody likes the idea of debt increasing. Obviously nobody likes the idea of closing parks or charging extra money for various services.

Nobody likes these ideas, Mr. Speaker, but obviously we have a significant challenge in the province of Saskatchewan in meeting the needs of the people of this province and with the resources available to us.

I had indicated in my remarks that the government's intention here is to focus very much on one of the first priorities of the people of Saskatchewan. First priority of the people as expressed is quality health care delivered to meet the needs of the people of the province. Second, Mr. Speaker: quality education delivered to meet the needs of the people of the province.

And on top of that, Mr. Speaker: commitment to continued support for agriculture and, Mr. Speaker, commitment to support our rural municipalities, our urban municipalities who are also tax collectors, and who impose taxes on municipality taxpayers.

So, Mr. Speaker, we have set some very specific priorities, and I just want to set the context in which the budget was developed. I think it goes without saying that there was challenges in the system. The health care since 1999, Mr. Speaker, has been increasing at a rate of roughly 6 to 8 per cent per year since 1999. Revenues in the province are increasing on natural basis of about 2 per cent per year. General expenditures across the province increasing at approximately 3 per cent per year. So there's a growing debt gap, Mr. Speaker, gap that needs to be addressed. And this budget goes a long way in addressing that, closing that gap that exists between revenues and expenditures.

But, Mr. Speaker, some other things that I've discovered in talking with people across the province — and I've now met with several chambers of commerce for a discussion of the budget, I've met with individuals on coffee row and collectively in meeting rooms — and there are some things that a lot of the people in Saskatchewan haven't really gained full understanding and knowledge of. And I just want to point out a couple of things, Mr. Speaker. Copies of the budget documents are available across the province and I would very much like members of the public to get their hands on the, on the budget, Mr. Speaker, and take a look at the revenue and expenditure side.

In particular, Mr. Speaker, I want to stress that when we look at the schedule of revenue for the province we take a look at the taxes collected by the, by the province of Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker. And the total amount of the tax collected in Saskatchewan is \$3.5 billion, 3.5 billion. If we take a look at the

total revenue collected by the province of Saskatchewan, it's \$6.5 billion.

So, Mr. Speaker, when you look at taxes versus all the revenue, we see that 53.8 per cent of all the revenue collected is from the taxes in this province. Individual income tax is at 1.2 billion; sales taxes collect in this budget, Mr. Speaker, just \$1 billion; corporate capital, corporate income, fuel, tobacco, and other taxes collected represent only 53 per cent of total revenues for this province. So that's a very important number to keep in mind, Mr. Speaker — 50 per cent of taxes . . . 50 per cent of revenues is taxes from the people of Saskatchewan.

On the expenditure side, Mr. Speaker, we are spending in this budget a record \$2.7 billion on health care. And we are spending an increased amount on education — \$1 billion. So together, Mr. Speaker, health care and education are costing this province \$3.7 billion.

So back to those numbers I said on revenue side, Mr. Speaker. We collect 3.5 billion from all the taxes — individual, sales, and corporate taxes — in this province, fuel and tobacco included. So we don't collect enough money in taxes in this province to pay for current spending on education and health care. Let's keep in mind, health care alone is increasing between 6 and 8 per cent per year. There is an unsustainable ability of this province to keep up with education and health care, but the commitment of this government shown in this budget to be true to the people's needs, the people's priorities, in funding health care — 6 per cent increase in health care in this budget alone, Mr. Speaker — indicates that we're willing to do what is necessary to keep up with that.

So what are we doing in health care, Mr. Speaker? Let's just take a look at that. Right now on 2.7 million . . . Pardon me. That health care budget, Mr. Speaker, if we break it down, essentially is \$7 million per day is what health care costs us. We talked about the provincial parks earlier in question period. Mr. Speaker, we're spending about \$14 million on parks currently. We could shut down the parks entirely . . . And don't get me wrong; I don't want to be quoted on that out-of-context statement, Mr. Speaker. We could close down the parks — not that we would want to and not that we ever would — but if we were to close down the parks, we would fund health care for two days, Mr. Speaker, less than two days.

So therefore, Mr. Speaker, it is . . . And you will see, Mr. Speaker, how often the opposition wants to quote us out of context. I made it very clear in my remarks what I was trying to say, and the opposition wants to take it out of context, as they have with so many other things both during the election campaign and today.

Mr. Speaker, in 2004-05, the current budget year, we are going to spend 160 million new dollars — new dollars, Mr. Speaker — on health care. That's a 6 per cent increase. Keep in mind that the PST increase that was in this budget will raise approximately \$130 million. So, Mr. Speaker, every single penny plus more from the rise in the PST is going to spend, going to pay for the increases in health care — every single penny plus more going to be spent on new dollars in health care. That's new MRIs, that's better diagnostics, that's better access to surgeries, reduced waiting lists — all of the things that

we've been told are very important, Mr. Speaker. Seventy-one per cent of all new operating costs, that's what health care is taking from this budget — 71 per cent of all new operating costs, 85 per cent of net new spending.

Health care has been increasing, as I said, Mr. Speaker, at 6 to 8 per cent since 1999, obviously unsustainable at the current rate. So obviously, Mr. Speaker, we have to find new opportunities in revenue generation in this province if we're going to keep up to it. The provincial tax base, every single dollar collected on individual sales tax and individual income tax and corporate tax does not even meet the needs of the health care system currently, Mr. Speaker.

(14:30)

And then education — 45 million new dollars in education this year, Mr. Speaker, increasing that spending by 3.8 per cent. And 5 per cent, Mr. Speaker, new agriculture spending.

So when we look at our priorities, where's the new spending, Mr. Speaker? Number one, health care at 6 per cent. Number two, agriculture at 5 per cent. Number three, education at 3 per cent, Mr. Speaker — very important for our funding priorities.

I am very pleased, Mr. Speaker, as the minister responsible for Government Relations, to have overseen some increased support to the municipal sector this year. During the election campaign and prior to that in last year's budget, this government committed to spending \$10 million additional money into the municipal sector to ensure that and help the municipal governments deliver their services to their taxpayers without further addressing the tax needs at the municipal sector.

Mr. Speaker, on budget day that \$10 million was . . . that commitment was maintained. But also, Mr. Speaker, we broke that down into how is that money going to be delivered — rural municipalities, urban municipalities, and the North? Mr. Speaker, that \$10 million: 7.4 million was committed to the urban pool, 1.6 million committed to the rural municipality pool, and \$1 million committed to the North, Mr. Speaker.

Now there's been some criticism about the rural share being less than the urban share. Well, Mr. Speaker, I did some further breakdowns. And out of the urban pool, Mr. Speaker — that urban pool, remember at 7.4 million — out of that urban pool the towns and villages, which are certainly a part of rural Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, the towns and villages got 2.1 million. When you add that together with the rural municipality pool of 1.6 million, we have an additional \$3.7 million going into rural Saskatchewan. Three point seven, Mr. Speaker, just happens to be exactly 50 per cent of the urban pool of 7.4 million.

So, Mr. Speaker, we have committed in this budget to rural Saskatchewan an additional \$3.7 million in revenue sharing, reducing the need for those municipalities, urban and rural, to be able to commit further liabilities on the property tax sectors.

And today, Mr. Speaker, I had the benefit of announcing new Canada-Saskatchewan infrastructure project funding. The province of Saskatchewan today, Mr. Speaker, announced a further \$11 million into the municipal sector for rural and urban

water, waste water, and transportation projects.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Taylor: — Mr. Speaker, of this new eleven and a half million dollars from the province of Saskatchewan, fully 50 per cent of that, 5.8 million — fully 50 per cent of that — was earmarked for rural Saskatchewan, RMs (rural municipality), towns, and villages.

That's, added together — 5.8 million, \$3.7 million, Mr. Speaker, from the Canada-Saskatchewan Infrastructure Program, and the rural and urban revenue-sharing projects, Mr. Speaker, with this budget, this year's commitments, the province of Saskatchewan is committing a brand new \$9.5 million for rural Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, on infrastructure and rural revenue-sharing.

This is brand new money and represents a significant commitment from this government to sharing in the costs of delivering water, sewage treatment, road building, landfill costs, all the things that rural Saskatchewan has said are our priority and we were able to deliver on that, Mr. Speaker.

So there's some significant priorities. We have health, agriculture, education, and municipalities, Mr. Speaker. This government was able to, despite difficult, challenging times, to find new dollars to support those important initiatives throughout the province of Saskatchewan.

The most important part of all of that, Mr. Speaker, that we can't forget is that health care demands so much attention that we have to be there to support that.

Now, Mr. Speaker, there are a few other things that I wanted to mention while I was on my feet. Last week, Mr. Speaker, I had the opportunity to speak to the chamber of commerce in the city of North Battleford. I was a director of the chamber of commerce for six years in the city of North Battleford. These people are . . . continued to work for the business community in the city.

And they have a few messages for the legislature, for the Government of Saskatchewan, for the Minister of Finance, and for their MLA (Member of the Legislative Assembly). And, Mr. Speaker, I want to acknowledge here in the Chamber to everyone that I have recognized and understood the challenges that are presented to communities along the Alberta border when we're dealing with increased PST, provincial sales tax. Yes there are significant challenges facing people who have the Alberta tax-free zone very close to us.

The chamber of commerce in North Battleford wanted to make very clear that there are challenges like in the city of North Battleford, like in the city of Swift Current, but, Mr. Speaker, they also realized that the delivery of health care in the province of Saskatchewan is very critical. And when you break down the cost of the current 1 per cent increase in the PST (provincial sales tax), basically \$136 per person per year on this basis, Mr. Speaker, the majority of the people that I talked to indicated that \$136 is not a great deal of money to pay for the . . . to insure that health care can be provided to the people of this province.

This morning, Mr. Speaker, I was in the city of Lloydminster. I spoke with the chamber of commerce over breakfast in the city of Lloydminster. They had some concerns as well, Mr. Speaker, obviously not with the PST. The exemption for the people in the city of North Battleford remains in place.

But the concerns in the city of Lloydminster did deal with the delivery of service to rural people around Lloydminster and at the same time their concerns also dealt with the continued twinning of the Yellowhead highway to ensure that there's safe travel along the most used highway system in the province of Saskatchewan. And, Mr. Speaker, they were pleased to know that we are continuing our commitment to twinning the Yellowhead highway. We are continuing to put the dollars that are necessary into that important project for them.

They were also very pleased to know the royalty rates on oil and gas would continue, that the ethanol program would continue, because there are net benefits there for the people of the city of Lloydminster and the business community. And the budget was reasonably well received in that community.

Mr. Speaker, I wanted to conclude my remarks today simply by indicating that while it is easy to pick on some of the individual matters in this budget, because overall it's impossible to criticize a government that has made its priorities health care, education, and municipalities and agriculture, Mr. Speaker. And it's hard to criticize a government who's put their priorities there. But it's very easy to criticize some of these little matters.

But, Mr. Speaker, some of the other matters that deserve some positive attention include some of the things that are being done in health care, Mr. Speaker: \$115 million, \$115 million, Mr. Speaker, to ensure that the salaries, benefits, medical fees for service to help attract and retain qualified health professionals in our province is there in place; \$46 million in facilities and equipment including 27 million in capital and 19 million in diagnostic equipment, like a new MRI, Mr. Speaker.

How many times have we heard the need for a new MRI in the province? And this budget ensures that there will be another MRI in this province. Very, very, very good news, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Taylor: — Let's not forget the budget puts \$6.6 million more to the Saskatchewan Cancer Agency, Mr. Speaker, important money to ensure that we can get through some crisis, personal family crisis, in a lot better way; \$1 million for prevention projects including enhanced diagnostic and assessment for fetal alcohol spectrum disorder. This is something, Mr. Speaker, that deserves applause throughout the entire community, and this commitment from this government will continue into future years. And I think, more importantly, Mr. Speaker, 72 more training seats in nursing education program. These things here are going to assist us in dealing with the future crisis in this province.

Mr. Speaker, I also want to commend the government for maintaining its commitment to highways — 295 million to fix the roads and build better highways.

Mr. Speaker, let's keep a couple of things into perspective here.

When we look at the total value on the revenue and expense pages — the total value of money collected on the fuel tax versus the total amount of money that's spent on delivery of roads in the province and heavy-haul roads through the Department of Agriculture and road money in industry—virtually, Mr. Speaker, the revenue collected on road tax and the money spent on highways virtually evens out, Mr. Speaker. We are spending the money collected on the fuel tax; we are spending it on roads and highways.

Unlike the federal government, Mr. Speaker, which is collecting some \$200 million in fuel tax revenues from this province and putting virtually none back into the province of Saskatchewan. Less than 10 per cent, I'm told, Mr. Speaker. And that of course is on some of the major tourist routes that take people right through the province. We need greater support from the federal government on that.

And let's not forget the \$1 billion commitment, Mr. Speaker, in provincial support for the agriculture policy framework and income support program; \$1 million is a lot of money from a province of this size, Mr. Speaker. That commitment to agriculture is certainly a significant commitment over the term of that agreement.

And, Mr. Speaker, I think for communities all across this province, and particularly some of the urban communities like North Battleford — \$12.6 million for affordable housing construction under the provincial housing policy framework.

Mr. Speaker, the housing industry has met with this government on several occasions. The housing industry over the years has always said the more money you put into housing, the healthier your economy is going to be. We have met that challenge, Mr. Speaker, putting more money into affordable housing construction, increasing the ability of our municipalities to be able to support a better lifestyle throughout the community.

So, Mr. Speaker, there are a lot of positive things in this budget. Easy to dwell on some of the negatives, but it's been a challenge. Making difficult choices to preserve the delivery of health care and other programs in this province has made it difficult.

But Mr. Speaker, I want in closing just to say one more time, as I did in my opening remarks on Thursday, I want to say that I am extremely pleased to have been able to sit at the table with the Minister of Finance, looking at the overall package and saying, how do we close the gap? How do we be more transparent in the documents that we deliver? How do we ensure that the future of this province is protected by dealing with some of our challenges today?

It will take courage to meet the challenges. The Minister of Finance has done that. And I'm very proud to stand in the House today to say I support the Minister of Finance. I support this government, as difficult as the decisions have been. And I look forward to working in the coming years so that the people of Saskatchewan a year from now, when they look back at 12 months of growth and development in this province, that they will say the government had tough choices to make, but the government made the right choices. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. McMorris: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it's a privilege to rise in the House today and respond to the budget speech. I didn't have a chance to respond to the Speech from the Throne; I had a lot of thoughts on that and would have liked to have. But unfortunately because of time constraints, this is my first chance standing.

So there are a number of thank yous I want to express first of all, as well as some congratulations. And the first congratulations would be to you, Mr. Speaker, for winning the most recent election held in the province, and that was for Speaker of the Chair. I think it's always a good sign when a person is re-elected back into a position that they were . . . that they held prior. It tends to show that people had faith in the job that they were doing. And whether it's any of the members here or yourself, it certainly is a feather in the cap.

I'd also like to congratulate all the new members that were elected. We have five on our side, and I believe there were five on the government side, for their recent election. I remember back in '99 when I was elected for the first time and again also in 2003, what an absolutely humbling experience it is, and what an honour it is to win a constituency in any election, but in a provincial election. And for the newly elected members, it's probably a night that you'll never forget.

I've certainly had the opportunity to listen to most of the new members speak. And as many of the colleagues have mentioned before myself, what a wonderful job they have done in their maiden speeches. I listened, I think, to all of them. And some of them from the government side I wouldn't necessarily agree with, but I would say that they expressed their views very, very well and congratulations to them.

(14:45)

Members on our side . . . I was very, very impressed with all five of our members and the speeches that they gave. As they were standing speaking, I was thinking back to my maiden speech, and I'm quite positive it didn't sound anything like what they were able to perform. And I have a few of my colleagues agreeing with me on that. So congratulations.

A number of thank yous — you know of course you never get to this House to be able to stand in your place, or our places, by ourselves. There's always a number of people that are behind to help one get elected, and I guess I'm no different than anybody else. I was absolutely honoured and flattered to have a very strong campaign team that helped me win the constituency of Indian Head-Milestone. And it was a team. My campaign manager, business manager, fundraiser, all worked very, very well together.

In fact during the campaign, we would have a meeting every Sunday. We wouldn't campaign on Sundays. We wouldn't door knock on Sundays, but we'd have our campaign team meeting. And frankly that was probably the most enjoyable day of the week for me, to hear what everybody had been up to and what

they were doing, and really how everybody had pulled together to put a strong campaign together.

I'd also like to thank the people of Indian Head-Milestone for electing me. Of course, we all went through boundary changes. I think every constituency, except for the two northern constituencies, saw some changes in their boundaries. And of course the Indian Head-Milestone constituency was no different.

I lost some communities that I . . . over the four years you tend to build up some real strong relationships with . . . and you're, you know, a little sad to see them go, if that's the case. And you know communities like Montmartre and Fillmore and Yellow Grass were communities on the east side of my constituency that, with redesigning the boundaries, I ended up losing those communities. But I guess with every loss comes a gain. And I certainly gained a number of communities that I really enjoy, have had experience with before, and over the last four months of representing them have started that relationship of making contacts and building relationships with those communities.

Probably the biggest community that I was able to . . . that I received after the redistribution was Balgonie, is Balgonie. And it's interesting, you know, because as I travel through my constituency there are 21 or 22 small urban centres in the constituency, and they're all struggling a little bit with the same thing. They're all struggling with maintaining their services, trying to keep their communities viable.

But the one community that is, it's a little different than all the rest, is Balgonie. It's close to the city here in Regina, and it has been growing. The houses that are going up in Balgonie are amazing. They've got a brand new community centre and a multiplex centre. The schools are continually being added on to. So it's one of the communities that, when you drive in, they have an issue with growth as opposed to decline. And that is so seldomly found in rural Saskatchewan.

Other communities that I inherited, I guess, through distribution would be communities like Rouleau, Avonlea, and Briercrest — areas that I had spent a fair amount of time in, in my many years prior.

In Avonlea, I had taught in Avonlea for about 10 years. But prior to that, I played a lot of sports. Now I don't know if that was a good thing because I remember some real rivalries with some of the people that I was knocking on the door. I'd knock on the door, and I'd look at them, and they'd look at me, and we'd kind of remember hockey games back 15 to 20 years ago. But we were able to get off the hockey subject and get on to the politics and the problems with the NDP government, and then we kind of found a bond again which is kind of nice.

The other people that I would like to thank of course would be my direct family. Without them you . . . There is no person that gets involved with politics that doesn't need a lot of support from the direct family. And quite often other members have mentioned, you know, the support of spouse and immediate family. Well I am certainly no different. The support that I received for the four years of being elected since '99 and also of course through the writ campaign and since is . . . you just can't thank them enough.

And I guess I would question how a person could get through this life without support behind the scenes. I don't know whether a person really could. So thank you to my direct family: Cindy and the boys and also my parents and Cindy's mom and dad and brothers and sisters that all helped on the campaign.

One person that hasn't sat in this House for the last two and a half weeks, that I would wish best wishes to, is the member from Yorkton, and the battle that he's going through. I think . . . You know it all puts everything that we talk about in here in perspective of what is really important, and that truly is our health.

And I guess if he must be feeling not well to have to sit and listen to the Chamber and the proceedings in here . . . I hear he listens to it quite often. So best wishes from not only myself and my family, and all our colleagues. Although it makes the House even, quite frankly we miss your debating skills and hope to see you back in this House as soon as possible.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McMorris: — When I looked at the Throne Speech and I had listened to the debate on that . . . and I've been listening to the debate on the budget. You know the Throne Speech has a lot of good ideas, but unfortunately I just can't believe it.

The budget, I just can't believe it either, that you would go in that direction. It's two documents that kind of set out a direction, supposed direction, of government, and frankly there has been no direction, especially with this budget.

A lot of people have come out and said that, you know, it's short-term pain. Some people have said it's short-term pain for long-term pain. I would say that it's short-term pain for long-term hurt — a hurt that this province may not get over for many, many years. And the hurt is people leaving this province. The west side of this province does not need an increase in the PST, and that's exactly what this government has done. So it's not pain. It's not like it's just going to go away, because who knows what's going to happen next year. It's hurt. It's people leaving our province, and that is a situation that we just will not get over in our province.

I heard the speaker before talking about how much we bring in on income tax. The fact of the matter is we continue to lose the people that we need in our economy to produce and to pay tax in our economy. We're losing the population from 20 to 60, and that's the population we need to retain. And this budget does absolutely nothing to retain it.

I had the opportunity earlier today, about 10:30 or 11:00, to go over to the Institute of Public Policy, and they were debating the budget. There was four speakers: Murray Mandryk from the star leader . . . the *Leader-Post*; Rosalee Longmoore from SUN (Saskatchewan Union of Nurses); there was Marilyn Braun-Pollon from CFIB (Canadian Federation of Independent Business); and Dr. Rasmussen from the university . . . were the four people that were debating it, as well as Dr. John Allan.

And I thought the very last statement that was made by Dr. John Allan was very, very fitting. The very last statement, when they

were talking about the budget, Dr. John Allan said, well I think there must have been a room full of males that wrote the budget because they're obviously lost and wouldn't stop and ask for direction.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McMorris: — And I thought that was so true because there is no real direction with this budget. You know, it's not like . . . And it was talked an awful lot at that debate, when they were going through the budget, about the early '90s, and the direction that the government had to go in in the early '90s. In the early '90s of course, the numbers weren't good in the province. We were running huge deficits. And when the government came in and set forward a game plan, it was short-term pain for hopefully long-term gain.

And we started to see that gain by the end of the two terms of the NDP government. We were running surpluses. And along came the now-sitting Premier, and it turned all that work that had happened in the '90s and turned it over and started running deficit budgets. It was interesting because not one of the panel — not one of the panel today — would agree that it's been 11 years of consecutive balanced budgets because that's not what it is. These last three years have been deficit budgets, Mr. Speaker.

And they say they use the Fiscal Stabilization Fund to balance it. But in any other household, if you operated a balanced budget like that, you'd run into the same problem that this government is running into, and that's adding to a debt by . . . they've added to the debt 1.4 billion over the last three years. Now if you can tell me how that is balancing budgets, it's not there.

But I guess the most frustrating part of the whole debate over the last two weeks is that in the 1990s when we were going through short-term pain for long-term gain, we saw the direction of the government. We knew what the problem was.

We just went through a 28-day election campaign. And I've sat in this House for the last two weeks and listened to members from the other side say, things are good; quit being so negative; quit looking at the negative side. Well if things are so good, why would you introduce a budget like this? They went around the province for 28 days and said everything is wonderful. You know, we're on track. We're doing exactly what we want to be doing. Everything is wonderful. Health care is fine. Education is fine. Our parks are fine. Everything is in perfect shape, until they get in and — what? — they opened up the books, and they saw the numbers for the first time. They've got a government that's been here for 11 years.

It's not like they came in '92 and didn't know what the financial picture of this province was. They knew exactly what the financial picture of this province was when they were elected in 2003. The reason why they knew the exact financial picture of this province is because they were the artists of the financial picture that we have in our province, Mr. Speaker. And that picture has been deficit budgets. It has been declining population. It has been the worst job growth in Canada.

And because of that, Mr. Speaker, we find ourselves in the

same position as what I talked about earlier. So many communities are struggling with decline, and that's exactly what our provincial government is struggling with.

Managing growth has its problems, but managing or forcing to . . . looking at decline creates a whole new set of problems, and that's where we are today with this NDP government, Mr. Speaker. And we don't see anything in the budget that's going to turn that around. We don't see any long-term plans to turn that around.

Every year in January, February — this year it was in March — what I do is I do a tour of my constituency. I rent space in every — I guess this year there was 18 different communities — in their local hall, their seniors' complex. We advertise it in the papers. We advertise it in their mailboxes. And we have . . . just tell people that we'll be in . . . Whether it's in Sedley, Saskatchewan or Francis, Saskatchewan or wherever it might be, we'll rent space in the local hall and invite people to come out and talk about the concerns they may have in their local communities.

And so we did it again this past year. And it's really quite interesting because although you go from community to community, although you travel hundreds and hundreds of miles from one corner to the . . . or a hundred miles from one corner to the other, the problems are the same. And I think you could probably find that throughout the province. And health care continues to be a major concern to people throughout the province.

And I know the government has said that it's its number one priority. And I'm glad to hear that. And they have put some money into health care. Will it fix it? Do we know that this is going to be sustainable on into the future? And the question I really think and I think the people of Saskatchewan have is that no, it's not sustainable at the rate we're going. Health care inflation is so, is so great at 10 and 12 per cent that can we sustain a budget that feeds health care?

It was interesting, the last speaker talked about an MRI and putting in a new MRI and touting the virtues of that. Frankly, I mean I'm not going to knock adding another MRI. But what health care is, is a people business. We don't have the people in the places to operate the equipment that we have.

There have been a number of examples where, you know, it's a veterinarian can get an . . . can get work done, an MRI done on animals before we can on human beings. So we've got to look at the human part of health care. We just simply don't have enough health care professionals.

And unfortunately we have been far too slow in reacting to that problem. If this was the first time that problem had been raised and the government starts to work towards it, that would be one thing. But I remember being in this . . . standing in my place four years ago, talking about the very same thing. And I think if you would go back to debate on health care over the last ten years, you'd find people on the opposition side saying we need more health care professionals to deal with the needs of health care. And unfortunately this government is very . . . been very slow to react, slower than any other province. And that's why we see . . . find the situation that we're in.

I think also it was, I guess maybe whether it was a trial balloon or whatever, when the Finance minister talked about there could be possible health care closures and closures of long-term care beds, I had the opportunity of meeting with a couple . . . one gentleman, actually, in Fort Qu'Appelle that is in a long-term care facility. And when I was asked to go meet with him, he said well, there will be a number of people here that want to voice their concerns with long-term care fees, the cost of them, and the future of long-term care.

(15:00)

So when I got there, there was only one gentleman that came and met with me. And one of the reasons he said is that there was I think a number of other residents that were just not sure they wanted to make this a political issue. They were scared of being kicked out of the facilities that they were in even though it is a huge concern because we are not meeting the demand that's out there. And then when you hear our government talking about closing long-term care beds, it is very disconcerting.

I guess the most frustrating part was when I was campaigning in October and November and we heard some of the fear tactics that were being delivered, perhaps by some of the members but certainly, if it wasn't by the members that were elected, certainly by a lot of their ground troop. And it was unbelievable some of the horror stories that we heard. And seniors being phoned up and saying, if you vote for the Sask Party, you're going to be kicked out of your long-term care bed.

Well the absolute hypocrisy of this government to be spreading rumours like that and then shortly after, five months later, be talking about closing long-term care beds, Mr. Speaker. It is shameful and it's . . . There are so many examples of the hypocrisy from the election to where we are today.

One of the subjects that . . . or one of the facilities that is going to be hard hit after the budget is the Fort San or Echo Valley Conference Centre which is right close to Fort Qu'Appelle. The facility itself is outside of my constituency, but the people that are impacted and the businesses that will be impacted by this announcement are for the most part around the Fort Qu'Appelle area and mostly in my constituency.

In the paper on Friday it says that layoff notices went out today to eight full-time employees and 43 part-time employees. It goes on to say another 31 employees at SPMC (Saskatchewan Property Management Corporation) got notices that same day telling that their jobs are being eliminated and that it was not a very happy day around the offices of SPMC.

Well you know, I know the one thing that I heard over and over again during the election campaign from the NDP — and again some of it was from the members that were running but a lot of it was from their ground troop — if the Sask Party is elected, you're all going to lose your jobs; everybody is going to lose their job in the province.

The absolute hypocrisy again of that statement and those statements that were made over and over again during the election, and then you go five months later and the layoff notices are coming and they have just only began.

I think as one colleague said . . . I mean the next day after the election a number of employees from ISC (Information Services Corporation of Saskatchewan) were fired, even though that was the exact opposite or the one thing that this government was trying to put into the minds of so many voters in this province was the fear factor of people losing their jobs. And that's exactly what they have gone and done.

But you know, losing the jobs in this example of Echo Valley centre is one part. It's the amount of spinoff jobs and dollars that comes into that Fort Qu'Appelle region because of this centre. You know I . . . Does the government have to own this centre? Perhaps not. But what I would urge the government to do, is to do everything in its power to make sure that there is a purchaser, that they find a purchaser and make it easy for the purchaser to then continue on.

This Fort San houses the navy cadets in the area for each summer. It's a huge, huge contract. It's a huge shot in the arm for the area, and to lose it would be devastating for that area.

While I'm on that area, there's one other issue that I need to bring up, and that's the water level on the Qu'Appelle Valley. It was interesting that so many of the parks aren't opening until June. One of the parks they are going to open is the Echo Valley Provincial Park which is a great idea, but they better get the water situation solved.

He was talking about using the boat launches. Well it's great to use the boat launches if you've got enough water in the lake. And right now, with the way that dispute is going and it seems to . . . hasn't come to a final solution yet, I would urge the minister to continue on with the negotiations and do everything that they can do to get an interim agreement so that the water level's returned to normal for the upcoming summer. Because last year, quite frankly, the water level by the middle of June and July, the middle of July and into August was so low that the lakes really weren't quite . . . weren't safe.

The boat launches weren't safe. We happen to have a cottage right close to where the provincial boat launch is and you would see trucks back out into the water. They'd have to get so far out there to be able to get their boat launched or off that then they were getting stuck and there'd be two or three vehicles pulling it out. I know of stories where . . . where there was pot-holes. They'd be pulling their boat out and the boat trailer would bounce down into a pot-hole and rip axles off the boat trailers. It was an absolute disgrace.

You know when you've got the government going around and talking about how beautiful this province is — and it is — and then you allow a situation like that in southern Saskatchewan. You invite people out to use our facilities and our lakes and then you allow a situation like that to happen. But more importantly, if it continues it will be again a huge economic disaster for that whole Qu'Appelle Valley region. So I would urge the minister to make sure that that is solved within the next couple of weeks to three weeks. Because if it isn't, the boards need to go in and the water level needs to return. It's a huge, huge issue.

Flipping back to health care, I talked about the need for professionals. The other issue that comes up is when you hear

this government talk about health — hospital closures or conversions — and the concern that that raises in so many communities.

And why that raises concern in so many communities is because we went through that in the 1990s. We saw 53 health care facilities either closed or converted. And I think if you talk to a number of the members that were on that side at that time — government members that were on that side — and asked them was that the solution at that time . . . Perhaps some had to be closed. And I know a lot of members, and I don't have it in front of me, but I even believe that the former premier questions whether they maybe had gone too far.

Well I would really hazard this government to even look at hospital closures in rural Saskatchewan. They have been . . . 53 of them have — well I guess 52 rural and the Plains hospital would be 53 — have been closed. It's been rationalized and I would question that any further rationalization would only hurt our health care system.

Right now we have waiting lists. So many of those facilities are not being utilized as it is. If they would . . . I just use the example of Indian Head — it's an absolutely beautiful facility. They've got a health care foundation there that does a pile of work. They've put in a new X-ray machine. They've put a pile of money in, local money that they have raised to upgrade their hospital. And it's a great facility. What they need is now . . . is this government to make sure that that facility remains open and remains to serve the people in that area.

And it's certainly not just in the Indian Head area; it's in the greater area. It's right on the No. 1 Highway, and unfortunately we have a number of traffic accidents up and down there and it's great to have a facility that can stabilize and treat, if necessary, or stabilize and move on, if that's necessary as well.

Agriculture of course is always an issue that came up and it continued to come up as I travelled the constituency. We in our constituency have been relatively lucky in that the drought didn't hit us two years ago; we certainly saw it last year somewhat. But between drought, between low commodity prices and between BSE (bovine spongiform encephalopathy), agriculture is being affected greatly.

And you know the one area that I think so many producers were hoping to see some relief on was the property tax, the education portion especially of property tax, and we see absolutely no relief from that at all in this budget.

It's an area that I know I've had . . . I remember just after being elected in 1999, the tax revolt meetings were starting up. And I think almost every year I've talked about this. But I went to tax revolt meeting after tax revolt meeting in my constituency where RMs (rural municipality) would vote and they were voting in the 80s to 90 per cent range to withhold taxes if something didn't change on the amount that they were paying, and especially on the education portion.

Well the government I guess did listen a little bit. Because what they did is they put in, I believe it was \$50 million over two years and people could apply and get some of that money back — 25 per cent it was to get some money back, some relief on

the property tax issue. But then after two years that program was done. And they have done nothing to backfill; there's been nothing to deal with that issue. And it continues on.

I know . . . Well of course SARM (Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities) is talking about having an emergency meeting some time in April because not a word was mentioned during the budget.

And that's obviously . . . I don't know. It can't be reflective of the rural-urban divide that we have because when I was door knocking in, whether it was Regina here for other candidates or in my own communities, property tax was an issue, whether it's urban or rural, and this government has completely missed the mark. It has failed to address that at all.

I'm going to be very interested to hear what the Minister of Learning has to say coming up in the next couple months . . . well actually in the next couple weeks, probably. He's saying that we're going to have changes in the education system that we haven't seen since the 1940s, which is a little scary, you know, because some of the changes that this government has implemented over the last couple years, or 10 years of its mandate, 12 years, have not been that positive, especially for rural Saskatchewan. And so we're going to be very interested and tracking the minister as to his ideas with regard to education and property tax.

I know as I travelled my constituency, amalgamation of school divisions is a big issue, and so many divisions have been looking and amalgamating. And so it was interesting, because the minister about five, four years ago said we want to see 25 per cent fewer school divisions in our province. Well that's right where we've got to. We were at 120 divisions and we're down to about 80. So we've hit that 25 per cent mark. So it will be interesting to see what this minister, now that the boards of education have done what the minister has asked, what their reward will be. And so it will be interesting. I'm not saying that there isn't more room for amalgamation or restructuring, but it seems like the school divisions have taken that seriously and gone on their own and done what this minister had asked them to do.

Mr. Speaker, there are many other issues that I would like to talk about regarding this budget. Unfortunately I don't have a whole lot more time. But I guess the most important issue that comes up over and over and over again, and it doesn't matter which group you talk to.

As I said, I was at SIPP (Saskatchewan Institute of Public Policy) from 11 till about 12 or 12:30 listening to those four people debate the budget. And every one of them, every one of them realize, every one of them on . . . every one of the members on our side realize that none of the questions get answered until we deal with the question of how do we grow this province. How do we grow our economy?

And unfortunately without a vision, without a plan, that growth will not happen. We have seen population decline for 18 quarters; we have seen the worst job growth. And until this government looks at a plan to grow our economy, we're going to continue to see that. Until we see a government looks at getting out of the economy and being a direct investor

continually in our economy, we're going to have more examples like Broe industries, Mr. Speaker.

And so often the government says, well what are we going to . . . how can we raise, how can we have the money for this? I heard the Minister of Environment talking about, well it's \$100,000 roughly if we don't open the parks until the middle of June. Well, Tell Us Again, the advertisement the government took out just to talk to the federal government who the minister happens to live here in Regina. Here's how you keep the parks open; here's how you would open the parks.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McMorris: — Mr. Speaker, there are examples, there are pages of examples where this government has wasted money. And then they look at over at us and say, well how could we finance it? Where would the money come from?

Mr. Speaker, you know, it doesn't matter whether it's the bingo issue from last year, where we're lost, what, 10 to \$11 million on that; whether it was \$11 million dollars on an insurance company in Ontario; or whether it's \$28 million dollars in SPUDCO (Saskatchewan Potato Utility Development Company) — the money has been there. The problem is this government has mismanaged it over and over and over again.

So when we get to a budget like this, and they throw up their hands and say, we just don't have the money. It's not that they didn't have it. It's that they didn't know what to do with it, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McMorris: — So, Mr. Speaker, I will be supporting the amendment that talks about a budget that has no direction, that has no vision for the province in the future. I'll be supporting the amendment, and I won't be supporting the budget. And I would ask a couple of members on that side of the House, that have had to have received as many phone calls as we have over the last couple of days, to do the same.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(15:15)

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Saskatoon Centre, the Minister of the Environment.

Hon. Mr. Forbes: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Before I start talking about the budget and that debate, I want to first add my congratulations to you in your election, that's very important, and to the Deputy Speaker as well, and to the member from Wascana Plains, who made it into a race and gave us all that time to reflect on the importance of the role of this Speaker in the House. That's very important.

And as well my congratulations to all the members who are elected — it's an honour to be here — and to the new members as well. And I want to say as well, the member from Saskatoon Northwest talked about working together on issues and I appreciated him mentioning that, and that's a very important issue and I hope we can do more like that.

I want to take a minute just before I start to reflect on a couple of past members and some of the things that we do in this House that I hope happens over the next few years. I was very fortunate to have a wonderful seatmate, Carolyn Jones, and she really helped me a lot in terms of understanding the role of the House and things we do here, and so it's very important that people who are in the House here act as mentors to new people. And it was a big thing for me, and I appreciated the good work she did looking after me and helping me understand the important things we do here.

Carolyn had quite a few achievements in the House. She was a wonderful caucus chair. I think one of her most exciting days was that one day she gave a wonderful speech that went on for a little while. She was proud of her filibuster. And it was really an important day and she felt, felt very good about it. So Carolyn was a wonderful, wonderful member. Our new member from Meewasin though will do a wonderful job in her place, and I appreciate that.

The other one was Keith Goulet from Saskatoon Cumberland . . . Saskatchewan Cumberland. And he was just a real role model in terms of helping us all understand the importance of the North, and as well as a learner. He was just an exciting guy to watch give his speeches and I appreciated that.

Again we have an outstanding member . . . real . . . that's from Cumberland that was elected here. And I'm hoping that she serves very well, and I have all the confidence in the world that she will.

So I wanted to say that before we started and also to reflect on my new riding. I was Saskatoon Idylwyld and now I'm Saskatoon Centre. There's been a few changes. The biggest one was the addition of a big chunk of Mount Royal neighbourhood, and that was ably represented by the former member of Mount Royal, now the member for Massey Place. And he has a special attachment to that neighbourhood and when I went around knocking on doors people often remarked on his leadership and his great representation in the House, and so I hope to live up to that.

Saskatoon Centre is a very interesting riding because it's probably one of the most urban ridings in this province and there are a lot of challenges. It has three large high schools in it which makes it really unique. And those high schools reflect the issues that face young people in this province today.

And as well, a big chunk of seniors live in the riding as well, and so issues that face seniors are there and it's very important.

And as well, Mr. Speaker, one of the things that we take a lot of pride in, in our green and prosperous strategy, is around tourism. And as you know, downtown Saskatoon hosts many festivals — the children's festival, the jazz festival and so on. And so tourism is a major part of our economy in Saskatoon Centre.

Now, and as well I want to take a moment to recognize my constituency staff back in Saskatoon, Francine and Janine, who've been with me since the start and the good work they do; my ministerial staff, Joan and Sherry, Margret, Linsay, and Perry. They do an outstanding job of getting me ready each day,

and our work there.

And my own family and my mother. And my wife and kids who . . . It's always interesting when you're in the House and the challenges that you face and it's an important thing.

Two of my children actually have quite a connection with the environment. Cam, our oldest, has been a tree planter five years and so she has a lot of experience in that area. I don't know how many thousands of trees she's planted. And it is in the thousands, if not hundreds of thousands.

And as well, my second daughter is just graduating this year with a degree in environmental sciences on hydrology, and so when we talk about water she really knows water.

In fact, actually our family has a little experience with water-borne diseases and Alison actually had giardia when I was a teacher in a small village in the central part of . . . north-central part of Saskatchewan. So we know what it feels like when a community faces those challenges and when families face that challenge. And so we take that very seriously when we deal with water issues.

So in our budget that I'm getting involved in the discussion here today, we think — I believe strongly and I will be supporting the budget — that we've presented a well-thought-out financial plan for this province.

Saskatchewan Environment, along with the rest of government, were asked to do our share to deliver this balanced budget, and I'm proud to say our department was up to this challenge. And we had to make some difficult choices, Mr. Speaker, and we believe we did it in a way that made sense for this province and for the people of Saskatchewan, for our environment and our resources.

Now, Mr. Speaker, unfortunately as a result of this need to reduce expenditures, we also had to reduce staff and this was not an easy decision to make, and the people who work in our public service are competent, capable, and committed to serving the public.

Mr. Speaker, I want to express my concern and sympathy for those people and their families. I know this was not an easy time for those affected, and I wish this didn't have to happen. But in order to govern effectively, we had to have responsible finances and not to back down from these difficult choices.

Mr. Speaker, our challenge was to ensure that we developed a plan that would deliver our government's commitment to a green and prosperous economy within today's financial reality. As a result of our own critical review of the programs and services we provide, we've reorganized our department so it is better positioned to meet the environmental and resource management challenges of today and of the future.

Mr. Speaker, we developed a plan for the department, our 2004-2005 performance plan that was released last week with the budget. It establishes the foundation for new, more effective, and progressive environmental and resource management programs.

This plan identifies shifts in the management focus and activities towards a greater emphasis of continuous improvement in environmental stewardship across all sources of pollution. It's a new risk-based approach that will be used to focus and prioritize environmental monitoring, compliance, and enforcement activities.

A new integrated monitoring unit will be established. This will enable the department to focus monitoring activities across the province on strategic issues such as cumulative effects of environmental impacts on ecosystems.

A specialized enforcement unit will also be created to concentrate on longer term, more complex investigations of significant environmental damage or resources abuse. New ways to enhance compliance through partnerships, education, and communication will also be examined.

Key actions in the department performance plan will help move the department in new directions on an emphasis on best practices. The department organization is significantly changed from last year. This realignment of the department programs and reporting structures will be used to facilitate implementation of these new directions.

Now, Mr. Speaker, my department has been reorganized to deliver the services that are most important to people and most critical to the health of our environment. While this involves some decreases in staff and program spending, it does not, Mr. Speaker, indicate a lessening in the government's commitment to the environment.

Mr. Speaker, my department will continue to maintain the environmental impact assessment process, a key prevention program that identifies and helps mitigate the effects of proposed government and private projects.

In the area of drinking water quality, Mr. Speaker, there will be no compromises. Mr. Speaker, I would like to point out that all the recommendations of the North Battleford commission of inquiry directed at the Government of Saskatchewan have been completed or are being addressed. Mr. Speaker, the watershed . . . the Saskatchewan Watershed Authority will play a key role in this as it continues to develop watershed management plans, educational programs, and other initiatives to help protect our source waters.

My department, Mr. Speaker, will also support the government's push for a green and prosperous economy here in Saskatchewan. To this end, Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan Environment will be working with departments, Crown agencies, and other stakeholders to develop a green strategy with the aim of establishing environmental stewardship as an integral part of all government agencies and planning.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the Office of Energy Conservation will continue to develop and support provincial programs that will help us reduce the use of energy. The office, along with other important sectors, will play an important role in the province's response to addressing the challenge of climate change and reducing our emission of greenhouse gases.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I have some interesting stats about our

program. One of our tax cuts that was announced in December . . . And it was very interesting because here we have, since we announced the PST elimination on ENERGY STAR appliances, there has been — and this up to March 1, so we have another month there — over 600 refrigerators have been sold, 400 clothes washers, 500 dishwashers, for about 1,600 items. Mr. Speaker, do you realize that this means that we've eliminated 437 tonnes of CO₂ since we announced this program in mid-December. So I think this is an outstanding response to the people of Saskatchewan. We are very happy about that.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Forbes: — Now, Mr. Speaker, to maximize the benefits of environmental compliance activities, a risk-based approach will be adopted that annually focuses the department's efforts in the most needed areas and then measure success. These compliance-related activities will focus on clean air, water, and land, with healthy wildlife, fisheries, and forest resources.

Mr. Speaker, my department will also continue to co-operate and work together with Aboriginal groups on environmental and resource matters to ensure a healthier environment.

Over the last five years, Mr. Speaker, our expenditures on forest fires suppression on average has been about \$75 million a year. This investment protects communities and people. It also helps protect the forest which supports our forest industry and an important foundation of our economy. This budget, Mr. Speaker, recognizes the necessity of these expenditures, and as a result the forest fire program has been budgeted to increase by \$28 million. We've also taken steps to review the wildfire program to ensure that expenditures are managed appropriately and that fire suppression activities are more closely aligned with the values that people want us to protect.

Fire, Mr. Speaker, is a natural element in the boreal landscape, forest landscape. It has helped shape our northern forest, and it provides important ecological benefits. It also helps ensure that a range of young and old forest growth that provides an important habitat for a wider variety of species. Fire also helps control insect and diseases and reduces the buildup of combustible matter on the forest floor so that the fire's intensity is not as severe or as damaging.

So, Mr. Speaker, it's important that we understand the natural role a fire plays in our landscape, and that for us to put out every fire that starts is not sustainable for the forest or for the provincial budget. Escalating costs in wildfire management agencies across Canada and the world have shown us that. Saskatchewan's wildfire management program has been reorganized around the objectives of protecting what is most important to people, reducing the likelihood of cost overruns, allowing fire to play a more active and beneficial role on the landscape. So to assist this, to assist in this effort, funding has been identified to help educate people to reduce their wildfire risks and to decrease the number of human-caused wildfires.

Now, Mr. Speaker, through tourism, provincial parks have an economic impact of well over \$68 million annually. The almost 2.5 million visitors to our 34 provincial parks enjoy some of the greatest outdoor recreational opportunities this province has to

offer. And this is an important feature of our plan this year, and we hope people have a great time out in the parks this summer.

(15:30)

Now, Mr. Speaker, you may be interested in this. In the area of forestry, Saskatchewan's forest ecosystem program was recently . . . received International Standards Organization ISO 14001 certification. That means that the quality of our province's forestry program has received international recognition for identifying and minimizing its effect on the environment.

Now this is a first in Canada for a province-wide government program. This is an outstanding accomplishment, but also one that takes a great deal of ongoing work to maintain including external audits to verify . . .

The Speaker: — Order please. Why is the member from Rosetown-Elrose on his feet?

Mr. Hermanson: — With leave to introduce a guest, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: — The member has requested leave for introductions. Is leave granted?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — Leave has been granted.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And I thank the member on the other side for allowing me to take this minute to introduce a neighbour and good friend of mine, Ben Hofer, from the Beechy Hutterite colony. Ben is sitting in our gallery.

Ben's father is in the hospital here in Regina, and so he's wanting to be close to his father, but he's had some time to come by and see the deliberations of the Assembly. He and his friends are very astute followers of politics in Saskatchewan. Not too much escapes their attention. They're watching very closely, and we appreciate that, and we welcome you to our Assembly today.

Would you please welcome Ben.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Why is the member from Prince Albert Northcote on his feet?

Mr. Lautermilch: — Leave to introduce a guest, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: — The member for Prince Albert Northcote has also requested leave for introductions. Is leave granted?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — Member may proceed.

Mr. Lautermilch: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd

like to join with my colleague in introducing a friend of mine as well who is watching the proceedings of the legislature this afternoon, Mr. Verdun Jeancart, who is a long-time employee of the city of Prince Albert, who is as well very interested in the political scene of this province, and who has been very helpful on many occasions I would want to say for the people of Saskatchewan because of his political activity.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to ask you and all members of the Assembly to join with us in giving a warm welcome to Verdun Jeancart.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

SPECIAL ORDER

ADJOURNED DEBATES

MOTION FOR APPROVAL OF BUDGETARY POLICY (BUDGET DEBATE)

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen that the Assembly approves in general the budgetary policy of the government, and the proposed amendment thereto moved by Mr. Krawetz.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Saskatoon Centre.

Hon. Mr. Forbes: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the budget this year also includes a new initiative — the Green Team — which will provide an opportunity for Saskatchewan students to gain work experience and training in the environmental sector.

This is a summer employment program of Culture, Youth and Recreation in partnership with Saskatchewan Environment. Now this program has earmarked \$200,000 in funding for this summer and will target students at least 16 years old who are interested in environmental management and energy conservation, and will be returning to an educational institute in the fall of 2004.

The important role that our young people have in protecting our environment and natural resources cannot be underestimated, and so I'm really, really excited about this program. As a former teacher, I know that our youth are concerned about the environment and about the future of this province and the world. My department will be looking at expanding the opportunities for our youth to have a greater role and say in environmental decision-making processes.

Now before I wind up my remarks, I just wanted to make one comment, and that is about the equalization concerns. I think that we always have to reflect on this, and I appreciated the comments made by members opposite around the priority for this, and I would only hope that they could join in with our fight for fair equalization . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. I would ask members just to allow proceedings to proceed here. And the member for Saskatoon Centre has the floor, and I would ask members to respect that.

Hon. Mr. Forbes: — Okay. So, Mr. Speaker, we've heard the Manitoba comparison. We get about \$120 million, and they would get \$1.2 billion in equalization transfers. And how anyone can say that is fair or will let that go is beyond me. And it seems to me, it seems odd to me that the opposition here just sort of glosses over that fact and can focus more on the advertising and not join in and say we actually need more efforts in that area.

That's very important that we get the word out about things that really are big issues, and I think this equalization issue is important. It's very critical, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that it's fair and equitable, and we all need to be on the same side, and we need to be on the side of Saskatchewan people on this issue and not be partisan about this and not cheapen it. This is very, very important, and I think that we need to have a good long work on equalization. This is very, very important.

So, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I will be supporting the budget motion, and I will not be supporting the amendment. I think the amendment is weak and short-sighted and . . . But the budget itself, there are no easy answers. It was a tough one, and I will be more than happy to support that. Those are my words today. Thank you very much.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Deputy Speaker: — I recognize the member for Last Mountain-Touchwood.

Mr. Hart: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hart: — Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'm certainly pleased to be able to enter into the budget speech debate. As you may know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'm one of those fortunate members who live within commuting distance of Regina, and so I commute back and forth fairly often through the week, Mr. Speaker.

And what I find is while I'm either driving into Regina or driving home, I get some time to kind of think about some of the things I might want to say in the Assembly, and last Friday was one of those occasions. I knew that I would probably be speaking to the budget this afternoon, so I was giving a bit of thought as to how I would organize my presentation and so on.

And I turned the radio on and there happened to be a talk show on and the subject that afternoon was, name this year's budget. And I don't pay particular attention to titles on budget books and that sort of thing, so I didn't really realize that there wasn't a name for this year's budget.

And I found it kind of interesting, some of the suggestions, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that some of the callers had for this year's budget. One of the suggestions was a no-name budget, and I mean that would be quite apt because if you do look at the budget there is no name on it. And so perhaps no-name budget perhaps would be very apt.

One of the ones I liked is, our pockets are wide open — that name for that budget. I thought that was particularly apt also with all the tax increases and fee increases. I think that would

be a fitting name for this budget.

But there was another suggestion, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I think perhaps that's more appropriate in light of a recent election campaign that we had and the . . . no talk of any tax increases or hospital closures or reduction in the number of government offices and the firing of 500 civil servants. There was none of that in the NDP's election platform. And so I think perhaps the betrayal budget would be more appropriate, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Now if you look back at . . . This kind of piqued my interest, so this morning when I got back into the office, I looked back at some of the budgets of the past and just for interest's sake, the one budget back in 2002 was called *Connecting to the Future*. We have *Meeting the Challenge for Saskatchewan People* and *Building for the Future*. And as I said, this year there's nothing. It's a blank.

And was this merely an oversight that the NDP cabinet ministers and their staff were so busy preparing and scrambling at the last minute to prepare this budget that they forgot about a name, or is this an indication of a more serious problem? And I think, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that it indicates a much more serious problem. I think those people on the opposite side of the House, this NDP government, really didn't have any idea what they were going to do if the people should re-elect them, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

And I'm not the only one that has come to that conclusion. In last Saturday's *Leader-Post*, one of the journalists, Murray Mandryk, writes this, and I quote:

. . . the New Democrats didn't expect to win last fall's election and made unrealistic promises in order to win. And now they don't have a clue on how to deal with the mess they weren't honest with us about in the campaign.

And I think that's precisely the situation that we have here. So therefore we have a whole hodgepodge of measures to try and come up with what this government tells us, \$100,000 surplus budget, which is like saying a household with a \$67,000 income might have a 1-cent budget at the . . . surplus at the end of the year. I mean it's just ludicrous, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

And what do they do to try and convince the people that it's not their fault? I've been in this House — this will be my fifth term or fifth year, Mr. Deputy Speaker, my second term — and all I've heard from those people on the opposite side is that it's never their fault, it's always somebody else's fault. It's the federal government's fault because they're not stepping up to the plate, whether it be in agriculture or health care or municipal services; it's the farmers' fault because they don't produce a big enough crop to get this economy going; it's always someone else's fault.

I think it's time they start taking responsibility for their actions, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and the people of this province certainly know whose fault it is for the type of budget that we have this year, Mr. Deputy Speaker. These people have been in government for some 10 or 11 or 12 years and they can no longer blame the '80s and the Devine government. People have moved along past that excuse. And every once in a while you

still hear that 1980s blues coming from that side of the House, but it's been off the hit parade for the last five or six years, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The Minister of the Environment during question period and in his speech said, well if times are tough and we have to do everything we can to balance the budget and manage with meagre resources or reduced revenue and increased demands. And during question period he asked, well what would we do when he was questioned about why some of the parks aren't opening till some time in June. And as my colleague from Indian Head-Milestone said, one of the things we wouldn't do is spend \$75,000 on silly ads like Tell us again.

And then I noticed in Saturday's paper we have another ad, and I'm not sure what this one costs. I would suggest it would cost them considerably more than \$75,000 to tell the people about this year's budget and mention only those things that they felt the people of Saskatchewan would like to hear and view favourably, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

But I can tell you I was out at a couple of major events in my constituency this weekend and their version of this budget isn't resonating with the people of this province. I walked in . . . On Saturday night I was at a function where oh, some over 200 people were attending, and I wasn't in that hall for two minutes and I had people coming up to me and giving me advice as to what we should do with this government. And I can tell you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, none of it, none of it was favourable to the members on that side of the House, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

So let's have a look at this most recent ad and see what it mentions. It mentions here that we're going to spend \$2.7 billion on health care this year. But it doesn't mention that back in 1992-93 that we only spent \$1.6 billion on health care. They closed 53 hospitals, and it doesn't mention that they are looking at closing more hospitals and more long-term care beds. And have health services got better in this province? I would say that if you asked the average citizen on the street, they would say a resounding no. In fact they've got worse, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

One thing I must give this government a bit of credit because it seems . . . There's a saying that it's an ill will that blows no one any good. And there is perhaps one or two items in the budget that I commend the government on.

Dealing with fetal alcohol syndrome disorder, Mr. Deputy Speaker. This is a serious problem in our province, not only in our province but in our country, but that we see the effects of it here in Saskatchewan. And there's a paltry \$1 million going towards this. At least it's . . . perhaps it's \$1 million more than what we've had in the past, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And I would say if we had a growing economy we could devote more revenues to that, to that problem.

And in fact if we had a growing economy many of those young people that are the root cause of fetal alcohol syndrome disorder would have gainful employments, have jobs that they could go to on a daily basis, and perhaps we would see a lessening of that particular problem in our society, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

On the second page the ad goes on to talk about focusing on children, youth, and opportunity; and this government's proud

to advertise that they're spending more money on education — \$1.2 billion.

(15:45)

Well what's that going to do — the new money, a 3.8 per cent increase? Well in last week's *Leader-Post* reaction on budget day, I believe the president of the Saskatchewan School Trustees . . . School Boards Association — I understand they changed their name — said that the increase in funding in the K to 12 (kindergarten to grade 12) system would only look after the increase in teachers' salary up until August 31. He said that there's no mention and it does nothing to address the long-term problems in funding the K to 12 system. It doesn't address the heavy burden of education tax on property, and so it's at very best a stop-gap measure.

But this government spends thousands of dollars, tens of thousands of dollars trying to convince the people of this province that they're actually making some headways in this area.

The University of Saskatchewan have said that the increase in their operating grant comes nowhere near close to covering their increased costs. And so what that will most likely mean, I would suggest, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is that our post-secondary students will be seeing higher tuition fees come next year.

So this bit of money that these folks are putting towards education, Mr. Deputy Speaker, when you look at it in real terms and the real differences that it's going to make, it helps a bit but it's not going to do a lot to alleviate the hurt.

And then we have a section called supporting communities, and they talk about an additional \$10 million in revenue-sharing grants to municipalities. And I believe the Premier announced that at the SUMA (Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association) convention. Well if we look at the way that is being broken down, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I believe in the past there was a more . . . there was an equitable sharing of new monies between SARM and SUMA, and a lesser amount to northern municipalities and municipal governments.

Well this year there's been quite a change in that. And I mean I'm not begrudging the cities of getting \$7.4 million. But if you do some comparisons, the city of Regina's getting \$1.65 million and all the rural municipalities are getting 1.6. It seems to me perhaps, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that there is a bit of an attempt by this government to widen that rural-urban split that we have in this province.

And that's really unfortunate, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because we're a small province of only 1 million people and we can't afford to use those type of splits for our own political advantage, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We're too small; we need to work together; we need to co-operate. And when a government is so blatant in using the differences between one sector of our province versus another, I think it's really regrettable and it does a lot of long-term damage, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

What I noticed in this particular ad is that there was no mention of increased vehicle registration fees. There was no increase in SaskTel fees. And I might relate to you a phone call that I had

yesterday afternoon. It was from a rural resident in my constituency who had just got his most recent SaskTel bill. And to say that this individual was upset would be understating his demeanour, Mr. Deputy Speaker. He was very upset at the fact that his basic service charge was going up by \$10 a month. He subscribes to a bundling package and that was going up \$10 a month and there was a brand new fee there of an administration fee of \$1.95 per month, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Now I haven't had the time to investigate to see whether these new charges apply equally across the board or are they again, once again, targeted at those people in rural Saskatchewan. In an area where sometimes people living across the road from you — because you happen to be on the divide, the division between one community and another — you have to use long-distance and those rural residents are now being charged an additional \$10 on their bundling costs.

There was no mention of increased of park and fishing licences, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And there was no mention of a whole host of other fees that we have seen listed in government news releases and in, more particular, in the media, Mr. Deputy Speaker. No, no mention of increased fees for birth certificates and death certificates. No mention of increased water testing fees. No mention of a number of fee increases that I see, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, there was certainly no mention on the very brutal attack on rural Saskatchewan that this budget presents. There was no . . . This government and one of the . . . I believe it was the member from North Battleford mentioned that there's an increase in this year's Department of Agriculture budget, some \$13 million I believe it is.

Well that in fact is true. But let's take a little bit longer term look at what the Department of Agriculture budgets have been in the past. In fact, if you go back to the Agriculture budget in '01-02, it was some \$333 million. This year it's \$264 million, a difference of about \$69 million less than it was back in '01-02, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The only reason that this year's budget is increased over last year is because on the national front we are moving from one program, the AIDA (Agricultural Income Disaster Assistance), CFIP (Canadian Farm Income Program) programs to the agricultural policy framework in which the Canadian Agricultural Income Stabilization Program is kicking in and the federal government put up \$600 million in each year for two years to help fund that transition. And the province could have added their 40 per cent but this NDP government chose not to add their 40 per cent. And therefore we see their budget last year in Agriculture was lower than what it, significantly lower than what it was in past years.

We heard the Minister of Agriculture, in his reply to the budget address, talk about closure of some 22 rural service centres in this province. Well in fact that again is very typical of the way these, this NDP government likes to deceive and . . . the people of this province and only tell half-truths as such, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because in fact there are 31 rural service centres that are closing. There are 31 extension agronomists that will be out of their jobs at the end of April.

And they are going to set up nine regional service centres — not service centres, information centres I believe they call them or some such name. But in reality the 31 extension agrologists that are currently in offices across this province at the end of April will be losing their jobs. And they won't . . . I would imagine that most of them will not be rehired for any of these service or call centres, as such. They were going to set up a new call centre in Moose Jaw, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Their ad doesn't talk about reduction in the farm fuel rebate program. It doesn't talk about the elimination of the conservation cover program. It doesn't talk about the elimination of the short-term hog loan. And it doesn't talk about the 13 per cent increase in policing costs that the rural municipalities are going to have to pick up this year, Mr. Deputy Speaker. There is no mention; I haven't heard one member on that side of the House mention that.

And it seems . . . I am sure, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that more things . . . As time goes on we'll learn about more increases and more cuts that this government has in this budget that they're not willing to talk about at this time.

But I think, Mr. Deputy Speaker, if I had to pick one statement out of this year's budget that is perhaps the most worrisome to all of the citizens of this province, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it would be from their news release on budget day entitled, Health budget combines new investment with sustainable measures.

And there's one sentence in here, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I think that is a dark cloud on the horizon of many health facilities in this province. And I quote, it says from the news release:

Although these are significant increases, changes in health delivery are required and will include further administrative efficiencies, changes in staff mix, facility closures or conversions, and reductions in long-term care bed numbers.

And I think that pretty well says it all. I know already that the people in Balcarres in my constituency are very concerned about their hospital. They are very concerned that it may be closed or converted. They have a new long-term care facility attached to that hospital. They're asking how many beds will we lose?

The same goes for the people in Ituna. In fact in Ituna we saw recently that there has already been a reduction in services there. Up until last week citizens could walk . . . patients could walk into the health care clinic and receive basic nursing services. On the day before the budget the health authority put in some new regulations saying that only individuals . . . the only individuals that can receive nursing care, nursing services out of this health centre are long-term care residents or those people who are being referred by a doctor. So people who have been going there for many years having their blood pressure checked can't do that any longer, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

And I think that's just the beginning of many cuts that we're going to see. And we're going to see, I would suggest, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'm afraid we're going to see some significant cuts in health care facilities and closures of long-term beds, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And there was no mention nowhere in any of

this advertising of any of this . . . of those sorts of things, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that lack of being honest with the people of the province, Mr. Deputy Speaker, probably was brought home to me more dramatically a couple of Saturdays ago, than anything else that I have seen. And it was in a bit of an unusual way, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We had a . . . one of our grandchildren were doing their first Communion, I guess is . . . I'm not a Roman, a member of the Roman Catholic Church, but my grandson is. And he invited us to witness his first Communion at a church here in Regina. And the church . . . There was a whole host, I believe there was about 60 young people that were receiving their first Communion and of course the church was overflowing with parents and relatives and grandparents and great-grandparents and so on. And there is a . . . in their order of service, Mr. Deputy Speaker, there is a time where they either . . . they call it the prayers of the faithful where the commentator goes to the mike and leads the congregation in prayer.

And what struck me, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and it's something that kept coming back to me over and over again, the first prayer was, and I quote:

That provincial politicians keep their campaign promises for the good of all.

And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for some reason I just couldn't get that out of my head. It just kept coming back over and over and over again, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And it made me think about, we quite often in this House we will . . . if we're here for awhile we think that we're the only ones that are paying attention and we say things that sometimes we perhaps don't support fully and so on and we banter back and forth.

But when we're out on the campaign trail people are paying attention, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And I guess I would have to wonder how those people that were attending that church that Saturday afternoon would view this government particularly after this budget, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I think that those people would agree with those callers to that call . . . talk show where they would call this the betrayal budget, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

And one other comment that was made to me by a constituent, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that again has stuck with me and keeps coming back to me. It was on an occasion I happened to be in one of the coffee shops in my constituency and I ran into an individual — this was shortly after the election — who I am pretty certain didn't support me in the election. And we got talking about campaign promises and that sort of thing. And this individual asked me this question, and he was referring to the Premier, he said to me, he said, would a man of the cloth lie? And I couldn't answer that question, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but I would like to go and visit with that individual now and see what kind of an answer he would give me, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

So for all those reasons, for those people in that church in Regina here a couple of Saturdays ago, and for those people in my constituency who are looking to government to bring forward programs and budgets that will grow this province and so that their children will have a future, for all those people, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I can simply . . . I cannot support the motion,

Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I will be supporting the amendment.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(16:00)

The Deputy Speaker: — I recognize the member for Regina Lakeview.

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, it's a great pleasure this afternoon to stand and speak in favour of this budget and the hard work that all members of this government caucus have done to prepare a plan not just for this year, but for the next four years.

And I think that's the key message for everybody in this province, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is that we have to plan for the long term. And to go . . . When you plan for the long term means that you have to have some clear idea of the direction that you want and the fact that you provide for the revenues to match the expenses in a four-year plan.

And our Minister of Finance has presented that plan here in this legislature, and we are working towards how we can implement that to provide the services that are needed.

It's very clear in that plan that health care and education and agriculture are very important parts of the plan. If you notice in this budget, there are three areas that have substantial increases in the amount of money that's available, and those are the three areas.

The highest increase percentage-wise is in health, \$160 million. Second-highest increase is in agriculture, \$12 million dollar. And the third-highest increase is in the whole area of education. All of these amounts are extremely important because they reflect the concerns of the people of the province.

As it relates to the aspects of the budget that relate to some of our resource industries — oil and gas and mining and other things — you will see in the budget a very stable perspective that affirms a number of the policy decisions that have been made over the last number of months.

But before I go and talk a little bit more about health care, I just want to congratulate the Speaker on his election. I especially want to welcome all the new members in the legislature who were elected in this last election.

There are many times when the debate gets very heated in this place, but there are also many times when we have good conversations and discussions about family, friends, our constituents, issues that are of concern to all of us as Saskatchewan people, especially as we go from Saskatchewan together sometimes to present the position of the province.

I'd also like to say a few words about the constituency that I represent. Regina Lakeview has been kind enough to elect me now for the third time. This particular time, I ended up with a change in boundaries, so that I ended up losing all my friends who were east of Albert Street in Hillsdale and over to the university, but I gained many new friends north of me into the Cathedral area, and up to 13th Avenue.

And what one finds when one represents an area of Regina like I do, is that you end up with the responsibility of representing some of the most vulnerable people in our society, some of the ones that need the most help, at the same time as you represent many of the decision-makers, policy-makers, business leaders, who can actually make a difference in how our province runs. And that becomes a challenge, but it's also a huge opportunity.

And I want to thank all of the people in my riding who continually provide me with advice and suggestions and who remind me why it is that I am standing here on their behalf in this legislature.

There are a few things that I just want to emphasize about the Regina Lakeview riding. And they relate to some of the community activities that happen in that particular part of our city. I think I'll start right off with the Cathedral Village Arts Festival, which is going to be happening in the in the spring now. And that event, in and of itself, provides a huge focal point — not just for the member for Regina Lakeview, but also the other members who are in close proximity — because it becomes a focal point of how a community can work together to provide a celebration, fun, merchandise sales, partying, music, arts, and do it in a way that it becomes a renewable, ongoing part of the community.

Another activity that's extremely important right through the whole of Regina, but especially in Regina Lakeview, relates to all of the activities of our sports-minded people. And we have many, many athletes that come from Regina in general, but many of them are based in my particular constituency. And I very much appreciate the chance to go and see them compete, but also show the leadership as our province moves forward to hosting the 2005 Canada Summer Games next year.

And many of the activities that we've seen taking place in Regina the last number of months, including the digging of Wascana Lake, relate to the preparation for the Canada Summer Games.

We have an incredible facility that is being built at the University of Regina that will provide basketball and volleyball venues. We have a new facility that is going to be built at the Regina Exhibition Park related to soccer and many other activities. We have the renewal of the tennis courts right here on the legislative grounds as a base for the tennis activities. And clearly with Wascana Lake, we have this amazing rowing facility will be here. There are many other things that I haven't mentioned but all of it is, becomes sort of a culmination of much community effort and fundraising and clearly participation from all three levels of government in making sure that the facilities are available.

Now as many members know from the times that I get up in this legislature to give member statements, we're very proud in Regina Lakeview to have an abundance of writers and others, artists who add to the life of not only Saskatchewan, but also Canada. And that ability to provide the imagination and the ideas and the stories that become our plays and then our movies and other things is a gift that we need to keep nurturing and keep rewarding. And you can do that in many different ways, but practically you end up ultimately having to be a user of books, of films, of artwork in your home. All of these things

become an important part of how your life is enriched.

And so I encourage all people to go and read a Saskatchewan book today. Go and purchase artwork by a Saskatchewan artist; listen to Saskatchewan music; listen and participate in the plays and the drama, in the movies, all the things that happen in Saskatchewan because there is an incredible number of people who work in the whole arts world and they end up generating many, many more activities of a commercial nature that then provide for the richness of our life in Saskatchewan.

A little later I'm going to talk some more about books in Saskatchewan because we have some interesting aspects as it relates to books.

But before I do that I want to just say a few words about health care in Saskatchewan. And the reason that I want to do that is I want to take a slight look backwards over the past year and then a little bit of a look forwards into the next year.

This past year in Saskatchewan in health care has a number of sort of highlights that I think are worth reminding people of. On January 28 of this year, just a couple of months ago, we released a survey that had been done of all the people in Saskatchewan; 5,100 people were surveyed in Saskatchewan, and 80 per cent of the people who were surveyed agreed or strongly agreed that they were fairly treated by the health system and that they had confidence in the health system.

This was an especially positive diagnosis. It actually confirmed some of the information that we received in the *Maclean's* magazine survey of Canadian health care. Saskatoon and Regina health authorities were among the country's best, with Saskatoon ranking fourth and Regina Qu'Appelle health being numbered as 16 out of 57.

Now another aspect of this last year which I think has been sort of a quiet but important feature of what we've been doing relates to our whole primary health care initiative. As many know, we set out in our action plan to have primary health care clinics in communities right across the province. We now have 25 and more coming. We end up in that whole primary health care initiative to establish other things that support that.

And one of the supports that we've been pleased to work on is the opening of the HealthLine which was officially launched last September. Since it started up in August, there have been thousands and thousands of people who have received the information and advice that they need which allows them to either go in immediately to a hospital for help or go and see their doctor later or deal with some of the issues in a knowledgeable way themselves.

And this is the kind of thing that is there. We all know and have those numbers posted and until you're in a time of need, you kind of forget that it's there as a positive part of your community. And it's located in Regina in I think member from Coronation Park's constituency, and it's doing very well.

Another aspect that relates to public health is our whole initiative around the reduction in the use of tobacco. And this happens on a whole number of different ways. As set out in the Throne Speech and as affirmed in some of our budget plans, we

plan to move forward with a smoke-free Saskatchewan by January 1, 2005.

But this is just one other piece of a broader strategy that we have. As many know, our legislation from a couple of years ago brought in the 60 per cent no smoking seats effective January 1, 2004.

But some of the things that others don't know so much about include our year two of our Young Spirits: Proud to be Tobacco Free. We have a whole program that works with young people in grades 5 to 9 who celebrate a tobacco-free lifestyle. And it's really in those grades 5 to 9 where tobacco companies focus their attention, so we need to focus our attention to show that living without tobacco is clearly the best choice for them as a young person.

We also have a Kids First program which has been dealing with many of young at-risk kids by working together with their families. And it's in this area that our new budget will supplement some of this work as it relates to fetal alcohol syndrome disorder by continuing our work in building to make sure that this very preventable malady can be dealt with by prevention rather than having to deal with a lot of the challenges that we have.

I was also pleased in the last year to have substantial numbers, or substantial expansion and review of the cancer screening that we do. And we launched a new cancer, cervical cancer screening program. This is a kind of thing that ends up being, once again, something that's not extremely public but it becomes a lifesaver for many, many people who have issues dealt with sooner and therefore have less suffering for themselves and also for their families.

Another area that's not always emphasized relates to our northern health strategy. We have a strategy where we've been working together with the Inter-Tribal Health Authority, Health Canada, our three northern health regions, and all of the people there working together have been dealing with some of the specific challenges of how you provide health care in the North. This is once again something that often is quite quiet but ends up doing a very, very effective job.

(16:15)

Now there are many things that I can say about health education, all of the kinds of things that are happening there. But I think I will just say that we've been working very hard with Learning and with all of our educational institutions to provide the kind of education that our young people need, and also so that we can provide the workers that we need in our system as it moves into the future.

Now there have been a few announcements that relate to access to services that I think remind ourselves of and talk about some of the things that we're going to do. Last September we announced the renal dialysis services for Moose Jaw and area, and they are working hard to get that in place and we hope to have the opening sometime this fall. We also had previously announced the renal dialysis in the Battlefords area, and I was pleased to be able to go up there and make that announcement and actually see the place in operation because they have been

able to get all their work done.

Also we've been working hard on our whole area of access to surgery. And our Surgical Care Network was launched just about two years ago. It had a whole bunch of initiatives in it and many of these ones are now coming to fruition.

Last summer we announced that we would have a standardized patient assessment process. This announcement was on July 23 in Moose Jaw because Moose Jaw had been piloting this work. And Saskatchewan is the first province in Canada to implement a standardized patient assessment process for all surgical specialities and we are now using that assessment process. This is then . . . The scores that come out of the assessment are integrated into the province-wide surgical patient registry.

As we have been able to get information — and this is a very difficult area to get all the information we need — we have been now moving forward to the announcement that was made two weeks ago around target time frames for surgery. We're the first jurisdiction in Canada which has set out the goals that we have as to when people can get surgery and when they can expect to get the surgery. And that is something that is funded in this budget that I'm in support of, and we look forward to seeing how all of this moves forward to improve care for people in our province.

Last year our Saskatchewan drug plan was expanded to include 107 new products. This drug plan includes about 3,500 products, and it subsidizes the cost of prescription drugs for about 113,000 families.

Last year we were also able to expand our vaccination program — and were not able to do quite all the things that we want to do — but we were able to add the pertussis vaccine to our immunization program so approximately 16,000 grade 8 students will receive protection against pertussis, or whooping cough.

We're looking forward to some of the federal money in this whole area that will allow us to further expand some of the things that we are doing.

Last August we announced that we were able to have nutritional products in the drug plan, and this was a long-standing concern of ours that these kinds of expensive foods would be available for those people that are . . . needed them. There's about 120 people that'll benefit from the program — most of them are children. And so we're very pleased about that.

Last May we were able to announce that diabetic supplies were also to be added to the drug plan and that we're looking forward to having a full year of experience with that to see what other kinds of things that we can do.

Now in health care it's continually a challenge to obtain sufficient resources, and I want to, here in this legislature, personally thank all of my colleagues from . . . who are ministers in other departments who have had to make some fairly tough choices this year to make sure that we have sufficient funds in health care.

The challenge is that we'll be also being . . . grappling with the

amounts of resources we have in health care. And what it means for all of us in Saskatchewan is that we have to look at, how do we use our dollars to the best and most efficient way? How do we make sure that care is there for everybody when they need it? How do we fit into a national scheme which clearly has a goal of providing health care for all of us?

I look forward to representing Saskatchewan, along with the Minister of Finance, in the discussions that are going to be taking place over the next few months as we prepare the background for the Prime Minister and first ministers when they have their health care conference. And that's clearly, clearly a challenge.

Now, Mr. Speaker, just before I sit down, I want to talk a little more about books. In Regina we have some challenges with the library and all of the issues that are there, and I think it's very important that the city council and the mayor, who are part of the whole process of sorting out what citizens want, listen very carefully to the citizens of Regina. And it's not going to be an easy task to come up with a solution, but it's very clear that books and access to books is an important part of what happens here in this city.

So I encourage all people who are concerned about libraries and access to information to be part of this discussion and make sure that voices are heard which will allow us to build on a very, very strong record in Saskatchewan.

Now just before I sit down I want to talk about one other institution in Saskatchewan which has been around now since 1993; that's called the Saskatchewan Book Awards. And I thought it would be a very nice way to end my speech and have a little bit of fun, to give a book to each of the members opposite, which is a book that's won a prize in the Saskatchewan Book Awards.

And so I thought I'd start out with the member from Swift Current, the Leader of the Opposition. I am going to give him the 1999 book by Ted Godwin called *Messages From The Real World*.

Then for the member of Cannington, the Book of the Year in 2003 is my gift to the member from Cannington, a book by Donald Ward called *Nobody Goes To Earth Any More*.

For the member from Melville-Saltcoats, I'm going to be giving him a book by Bill Waiser called *All Hell Can't Stop Us*.

And, Mr. Speaker, I'm giving these books to them figuratively, because I'm actually encouraging them to go and buy their own books so they can see what they are.

And, Mr. Speaker, the member from Rosetown-Elrose is concerned about which book I would give him, and it just happens that he's next on the list. And the book for him is a book that won the award for fiction this year by J. Jill Robinson called *Residual Desire*.

Mr. Speaker, the next member to figuratively receive a book is the member from Cypress Hills, and it's a very straightforward book by Michael Hetherington called *Grasslands*.

For the member from Martensville, the 2003 sort of . . . book that won the award for scholarly writing is a book by Judge Ross Green and Kearney Healy called *Tough On Kids*. I thought you would like that one.

For the member from Canora-Pelly, the book of the year last year, 2002, was the book by Guy Vanderhaeghe called *The Last Crossing* and I thought that might be appropriate for him.

And for the member from Biggar, a poetry book that won the poetry award in 2001. It's a book by Ken Howe of Regina called *Household Hints for the End of Time*. And for the member of Estevan, a book that was written by Randy Burton's wife, Katherine Lawrence, and won a first-book award; it's called *Ring Finger Left Hand*.

For the member from Kelvington-Wadena, a book that won an award in the year 2000, and it's by Maggie Siggins, and it's called *In Her Own Time*. For the member from Wood River, this is a book that won an award for children's literature in the year 2000, by Beth Goobie; it's called *Before Wings*.

For the member from Carrot River Valley, a book that was a book of the year in '99 by Tim Lilburn, *To The River*. And then for the book for the member from Weyburn-Big Muddy, it's by another Brenda, Brenda Baker; and it's called *The Maleness of God*. The book for the member for Moosomin, it's another book by Tim Lilburn; It's called *Living in the World As If It Were Home*.

And, Mr. Speaker, the reason I'm doing all of this is just to remind people of just the rich array of very interesting books that win awards in Saskatchewan out of the hundreds that are nominated each year.

Now the book for the member for Last Mountain-Touchwood is a book of poetry by Hilary Clark called *More Light*. The book for the member from Batoche is a book, children's literature, by David Richards, called *The Lady at Batoche*. I thought that would be appropriate for him. And for the member for Indian Head-Milestone, a book of scholarly writing by William Stahl called *God and the Chip*.

For the member from Lloydminster, a book published by the MacKenzie Art Gallery called *The Man Who Waits and Sleeps While I Dream*. And for the member of Saskatoon Silver Springs, this is a book that was a first-book award in 1998; it's called *The Lavender Child*.

Mr. Speaker, for the member from Saskatoon Northwest, it's a book that won the award for fiction in 1997, *In the Misleading Absence of Light*.

And then for the member from Saskatoon Southeast, a book by Anne Szumigalski called *Sermons on Stones*. And for the member from Kindersley, a book that won the award for first book in 1996 by David Little, called *Catching the Wind in a Net*. And for the member from Cut Knife-Turtleford, a book by Connie Gault called *Inspection of a Small Village*.

And a book for the member from Melfort who's the House Leader, won the award for non-fiction in 1995, it's called, Connie Sampson, *Buried in the Silence*. And another, a book for

the member from Humboldt, his seatmate the Deputy House Leader, won an award for publishing and it's called *Waiting for the Light*.

And the book for the member from, oh I guess it's the from Saskatoon Northwest, the book of the year 1994 by Bonnie Burnard, *Casino and Other Stories*.

And I think I've just got a couple more left, Mr. Speaker. The member from Thunder Creek gets a book that was quite an interesting one from 1994. It was the first book written by Terry Jordan, and the title of the book is, *It's a Hard Cow*.

And finally the last book, the book of the year in 1993, and this goes to the hon. master of words and the member from Arm River-Watrous, and that's the book by Dianne Warren called *Bad Luck Dog*.

So I'd like to encourage all members of the Assembly, all members of Saskatchewan to get on the Saskatchewan Book Awards Web site and go in and take a look at all of these incredible stories and ideas that have been prepared in Saskatchewan.

And what I would also like to say is that the budget that we're presenting this year is part of what it means to be Saskatchewan, in the same way that all these books are part of what it means to be Saskatchewan, and that's to be practical, prudent, and have a plan that works in the four-year and 10-year range. And that's what we're doing and so that's why I'm speaking in support of this budget.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Carrot River Valley.

Mr. Kerpan: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I was sitting here and becoming enlightened about all the past winners of awards in the literary world, and I was thinking of one I might use for the member who just finished spoken. But I thought that there was probably something more that I could come up with that maybe lent more to the debate on the budget. And then I started thinking about books, and of course I became concerned and started to think about the books that really concern me the most which are the budget books.

(16:30)

And I started to think that, you know, we all sit here as members on both sides of the House and our politics lends us to be partisan in the way we look at things, Mr. Speaker. I've had a life in politics — federal politics prior to this one — and I've watched seven other budgets come down from the federal government and this is my first in this House, Mr. Speaker.

And what I've noticed over the years in every budget that I've sat through or listened to or watched, and I've been on the opposition side on every one so that gives me only the one perspective, but what I've noticed on every budget that I've seen and especially those that come directly after a general election — especially those that follow an election — such as the one we listened to last week, they're generally always filled

or at least they contain some sort of a new idea, some sort of plan for the future, some sort of an idea that that particular government might have for growth of the province or the country or even a municipality.

And even when I listened to seven federal budgets, Mr. Speaker, even though I didn't always agree with all those budgets, they generally always had something in them, even if it was a small thing.

And I remember the one time the federal government came down with a budget and they introduced the synchrotron project for Saskatoon, which is one that we all certainly know about here in Saskatchewan and know about in this Chamber.

You know even if it was just that one particular item that was good for this province that came from the federal government, it was something that you could work on. It was something that you could build on. It was something that you could look forward to in that you'd had some hope for the future for Saskatoon and for Saskatchewan and, indeed, in fact for the country.

Sadly I didn't see that . . . anything that would lead me to believe, Mr. Speaker, in last Wednesday's budget that there was any real hope for the future. I didn't pick any one small item out of that budget that I could take to my constituents in Carrot River Valley and say, hey you know what, I didn't like this, I didn't like this, or I didn't like that, but I really liked something, some small aspect about that budget.

Mr. Speaker, I didn't see anything. It's a budget that manages decline, and that word's been used before — it's not my idea. It really manages the decline of Saskatchewan. I see no hope from the NDP government that would make me think that we are going to move ahead, Mr. Speaker.

I talked to a constituent of mine on the weekend, as I was driving home to Carrot River Valley, and she may have put it the best when she said that Saskatchewan is now, in her words, in a state of emergency.

And they come from a farm family, Mr. Speaker. They operate a farm at just in between Carrot River and Arborfield. They run really a successful outfitting business, and the outfitting business is really booming in northeastern Saskatchewan. They're good folks; they're hard workers. And here they are saying, you know, she says to me this is a state of emergency that we are in in Saskatchewan.

And I don't think it's a far stretch that whether you're in agriculture, whether you're in business, whether you're in labour, whether you're a teacher or a doctor or work in the health care field or any other type of business or industry that you might be involved in, I think that everybody sort of felt the same way after last Wednesday's budget.

They felt betrayed. They felt as though the government had no plan for the future, for their particular business or particular career that they were involved in. And that's what really is, what really is the sadness or the shame, you know, involved with the budget of last Wednesday.

I think what this budget comes down to — maybe more so than any other that I've seen — is the one word, credibility. The members opposite are going to try to go out and convince the public that they're right, and that they have a vision, that they don't really have a deficit and that they balanced the budget on some fund that is either imaginary or real depending on how you look at it. So that's going to be their approach.

On our side of the House we're going to be doing the same thing in opposite. We're going to be trying to convince the public and the media and anybody else who will listen to us, frankly, that we're right and that there is a deficit and that we are about a billion-plus dollars in larger debt than we had three years ago. And it comes down to who the people are going to believe on this budget.

Well the reaction that has come out in the last few days since the budget has come out, it's pretty simple who they believe — they believe the truth. The truth of the fact . . . the truth of the matter is, Mr. Speaker, is that we are a billion and a half dollars further in debt than we were three years ago.

The truth is we . . . This government during the election campaign of last November stated very clearly that they had no intention, no desire, there was no mandate to raise the PST. Unless I heard wrong last Wednesday, Mr. Speaker, the PST went up one point. I mean there is a direct turnaround on what the government said in their election campaign. They talked about being . . . They talk about always, they talk about being the protectors of the people. This is the birthplace of medicare and this is the place that we will stand on the foundations that medicare was built on. And they speak a real good line, Mr. Speaker, whether it's in this Chamber or in the public or in the media.

And yet we know there are going to be hospital closures — more. They said it. They said they were going to change the way health care is delivered. They said there's going to be change to long-term care beds and changes to hospitals.

Well, Mr. Speaker, rightfully or wrongfully maybe we're lucky, maybe we're not, but those of us who live in Carrot River Valley are probably maybe going to be a bit lucky here because we don't have any more hospitals to close. They closed ours already. Truly we're down to two hospitals in Carrot River Valley, one in Nipawin and one in Tisdale. Well I think maybe they'll leave . . . hopefully they'll leave us alone. They've closed all the rest . . . Hudson Bay, I apologize — three.

But I just, I'm waiting for the other shoe to drop, Mr. Speaker, and I'm not sure what to expect next. We've seen the complete reversal on so many of the things and so many of the policies that the NDP government has come out with.

I want to talk for a minute, Mr. Speaker, about agriculture. Obviously it's a huge area of interest in Carrot River Valley. We have some tremendously good land, some very highly assessed land and some very rich land in Carrot River Valley. And we're very proud of that and we're proud of the fact that farmers in that area and right across Saskatchewan have been able over the last number of years to overcome world markets and world adversities and droughts and crop, droughts and grasshoppers and other issues that we've had to overcome. And

they've done a tremendously good job about it.

Now we listen to the budget and they close rural service centres, Mr. Speaker. Again, we in Carrot River Valley don't have a tremendous amount of rural service centres left or even in place. We did lose the one in Nipawin and that's certainly going to be a factor. My question that I got from some of my constituents over the weekend was, who is going to, how are they going to service the crop insurance when the service centres are closed — the crop insurance program, Mr. Speaker. And what are they going to do with the buildings, the physical brick and mortar that's going to be left, in my case, in Nipawin? What's going to happen to that rural service centre building? I'd like to have an answer to that, Mr. Speaker, and I'm not getting one.

We talk about, you know, the CFIP program. And the Minister of Agriculture, you know, stood up last week and talked about how wonderful a job that he and his government had done as it relates to agriculture. Our member, the critic for Agriculture, last week, I believe it was, stood up and asked some questions about CFIP, and the minister said that that was it, there was no more money to put in.

Again, Mr. Speaker, the government made commitments to the farmers, to agriculture, to Saskatchewan that they are not . . . they are reneging on, Mr. Speaker, less than six months from the time they made those promises. And that's what people are going to remember.

Mr. Speaker, when you talk to people about the budget — and we all do of course on the weekends and when we're not in session here — I don't believe, I don't believe it's the things that they don't physically see that are going to affect people as much as the things they do physically see.

And the things that, what I'm talking about, Mr. Speaker, is that you can talk about a 1 per cent increase in PST, and I know it's hard on business, I know it's hard on labour, I know it's hard on taxpayers. It puts pressure on everybody in this province. But what it really comes down . . . You don't see that. It's not a tangible thing.

What you see though, Mr. Speaker, is when you want to go to the park on the long weekend in May and you can't go because it's not open. That's what you see. You see the rural service centres that you're going to drive by and you've been driving by for years and years — the ones in Davidson and Outlook and Nipawin and I could go on and on and on, Mr. Speaker — and they're closed. On the May 1 they'll be closed.

Those are things that you tangibly see. And those are the things that will remind the taxpayers and the voters of this province every day that they can no longer — and perhaps never could — trust the government of the day. Those are the things that they're going to see.

Mr. Speaker, last Friday my colleague from Saskatoon Silver Springs in members' statements talked about the U of S (University of Saskatchewan) Commerce department in their government studies class put together a program — it's really a mock government — where they come up with and they produced budgets. There were three groups. And I was there

that day as well, Mr. Speaker, and I listened very carefully, but there was three groups of students. Mr. Speaker, I have with me today copies of those budgets that I would like for anybody to have a look at if they're interested in it.

What I found tremendously overwhelming in listening to those young people for the three hours that I was there is the fact that a very few people, less than two dozen in each group, with a budget of zero and five weeks of time put together, in my mind, some awfully good ideas. They presented a budget that probably would, in my opinion at least, politically would certainly rival the one that we saw last Wednesday from the government across the way.

An Hon. Member: — That wouldn't take much.

Mr. Kerpan: — That's true, it wouldn't take much. But the difference, Mr. Speaker, the point I'm trying to make here is that we had less than two dozen people, with a budget of nothing, in five weeks time put together a budget that I think is better than the one that took the government millions of dollars, hundreds of people, the whole year to put together. Mr. Speaker, there's no comparison in my mind. The Minister of Industry was there that day. I know he was in the, in the audience as well, and I hope he paid attention to the budgets that came through with these three young groups. The politics of those budgets, Mr. Speaker, were certainly ones that are near and dear to my type of politics.

And that got me to thinking, Mr. Speaker, you know, that maybe the NDP government has a plan. Maybe their plan is, maybe their plan is that when they see all these bright young people that we've educated in our universities coming forward with what I consider politically sound ideas, such as the ones that were put forward in their budgets, maybe they want these young people to leave the province. Maybe they want them to go to Alberta or to the United States or to other provinces so that they never have to worry about them down the road.

Because these are the people, Mr. Speaker, the young people that are talking with a vision. These are 19- and 20- and 21- and 22-year-old young people who have an idea, who have a vision, who have a plan for the province to grow Saskatchewan. And their budgets, Mr. Speaker, are full of good, solid, sound political ideas. They are. So maybe I'm, maybe that's . . . the only people the NDP government would like to remain in Saskatchewan are their supporters so that they'll be in power forever. But you know what, Mr. Speaker? I think the people are going to trick them. I think they're going to send them a real strong message in the next, at the very first opportunity that they get.

Mr. Speaker, I wanted to . . . And it may not be very long, as one of my colleagues just mentioned. Mr. Speaker, I wanted to talk for just a couple of minutes about SERM (Saskatchewan Environment and Resource Management), about the Department of Environment. Obviously again, if you live in Carrot River Valley, SERM issues are important because we have the forestry, we have a really strong outfitters business. And I think it's just . . . we're really on the edge of some excellent things.

But when I, when I got the news release dated last Wednesday,

March 31 from the Department of Environment . . . I wanted to quote to the House, and this tells me a lot about what they're, how much the government really thinks or believes in or trusts the forest fringe area. And I want to quote from that, from that news release. And I quote, Mr. Speaker:

The province's wildfire management program is being reorganized to focus protection on the things that are most important to people, and to allow fire to play a more natural role in the forest.

Mr. Speaker, what I take that to mean is that we're going to let the forests burn when they start. And again, that's supported by evidence of downsizing in forest fighting on the ground forces — with the closure of SERM offices; with the downsizing of people who are with SERM personnel in general, who really do play a huge, important role in the forest.

I think back to when the forest fires were burning just outside of Nipawin two years ago, or Prince Albert — both two years ago, Mr. Speaker. They had major forest fires, and we know that had not people stepped in to control those they would've turned out to be far more disastrous than even they were. And I guess it's just another example of how much, how much the NDP government really cares about rural Saskatchewan in general.

Mr. Speaker, we talked about . . . I'm involved, my critic responsibility is Corrections and Public Safety, Mr. Speaker. I have been visiting over the last number of weeks and months facilities in Saskatchewan.

Last week I went to visit the Regina correctional facility and some of it's getting to be 90 to 100 years old, Mr. Speaker. There was nothing in the budget unfortunately that would lead me to believe that we have any change or hope for the correctional system in Saskatchewan.

We know we're in desperate need, desperate need for a new jail, a new correctional facility right here in Regina. And I didn't see anything in the budget. That concerned me, Mr. Speaker, because I know that I have, we have some ideas, our party has some plans for what I consider to be a solid, much more solid system of corrections.

Mr. Speaker, at the outset what I talked about was the idea of credibility and who the people are going to believe when this budget all shakes loose.

And finally the last thing I wanted to speak about is, and I just wanted to touch on this, and I touched on it a few minutes ago, is about in the area of health care. And I think that for members opposite — whether they live in the cities of Saskatoon or Regina or whether they are a rural member or wherever they come from — I think they should think back to all the times, the hundreds, the thousands of times over the last years that they have stood up and said, we are the protectors of the people; we are the founders of health care; this is the birthplace of health care.

And when they go to make the decision to close one more hospital, they should keep those things in mind. We know that that's coming. We know that's coming, Mr. Speaker. I do not believe any good, thinking NDP MLA could possibly allow the

closure, the closure of one more hospital in Saskatchewan, whether it be rural or urban Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker. That's what this thing boils down to. It boils down to who you're going to believe and what you're going to do about it. That's the two things that this budget comes down to, Mr. Speaker.

I think the evidence is clear that the government has betrayed us and that they have been not forthwith with the complete truth in their campaign of last fall, and I believe they're going to pay the political price for it, Mr. Speaker.

Obviously from the words I have said today is that I will be opposing the budget, and I will be standing on behalf of my constituents in Carrot River Valley to proudly say that we oppose last week's budget. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Regina South.

Hon. Mr. Thomson: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is a real pleasure to be able to enter into this debate on the provincial budget that was released on Wednesday.

This provincial budget is an important budget. It is one that sets a new direction for Saskatchewan. It is one that will put us on a path to financial sustainability. It is one which addresses the priorities Saskatchewan people have identified, namely health care, education, and agriculture. Mr. Speaker, this budget is a good budget for Saskatchewan people and for our Saskatchewan economy. It is a budget which will take into account the balance that we need to strike in this House between financial sustainability and the demands for additional services.

I enjoyed listening to many of the speeches in the House over the last several days of debate. I find that there's a common theme, at least in the speeches by the members opposite. And that theme is this: spend more, tax less, complain a lot, offer few solutions. That is the approach that those members opposite have provided.

The member from Carrot River Valley has just stood up and presented an interesting presentation to this Assembly on his views. His views, simply encapsulated, are spend more money. Not only just spend more money generally, spend more money on his particular issues of interest. Not a word about how we deal with financial sustainability across the province; not a word about how we deal with the revenue balance. He says, oh the PST increase, you know it's an increase; what I'm worried about is how you spend more money on hospitals in my riding and how you spend more on my particular constituents.

The member opposite stands up and says that there was nothing in this budget to deal with the \$95 million expenditure to build more jails. These members opposite stand forward in this House and they bring a long list of grievances and they bring a long list of spending. And they bring nothing in terms of new ideas or credibility to the debate on this budget.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Thomson: — Mr. Speaker, I think that it is

intellectually dishonest for the members opposite to petition in this House every day for a spending increase, to petition as they did against sales tax increases, to stand in this House in question period and talk about how they disagree with where government's going because we are recklessly spending and talk about how there is a deficit in the province, and then turn around and condemn the government for having brought in expenditure management to deal with it, and to draw forward a long list of demands on behalf of themselves, their party, and their constituents for more services.

It is not an approach that's sustainable. And the members opposite, I think, owe their constituents and the members of this House more than that. I think it is unfortunate, I think it is very unfortunate that these members come forward with such darkness in their heart and their soul when it comes to understanding what the people of Saskatchewan had asked for. I think that it is a shame that they come forward with no creative solutions, no ideas on how to move this province forward other than trite suggestions in terms of spending more here on each of their critic areas, in each of their constituencies, and taxing less.

Mr. Speaker, there is absolutely no doubt, no doubt where they got their playbook from. And it doesn't surprise me that it's under this new Leader of the Opposition, the member for Swift Current, who learned all about budgeting when he was part of Grant Devine's government, that they would come forward with exactly the same kind of plan that would see them pull taxes down and see them increase spending.

Now how is it, Mr. Speaker, how is it that the members opposite believe that we can provide a sustainable financial framework over the four-year period when we see them calling for increased expenditures and lower taxes? Mr. Speaker, I do not understand how the members opposite can do that. And they have been short on solutions to bring forward in this debate. They call forward for more spending and they offer nothing in terms of solutions.

Mr. Speaker, I can understand why the members are disappointed. I can understand why they are frustrated. I can understand why they are angry. But I cannot understand why they do not do more service for their constituents and bring forward workable alternatives and solutions.

Mr. Speaker, I want to talk today and into the evening tonight about some of the very good news items that are in this budget and some of the things that we've taken a look at to move Saskatchewan forward; why . . . how we have acted as a cabinet and as a government to help bring the budget back into balance. I want to talk about some of the difficulties that we face, both in terms of demands for increased expenditures, but also in terms of some of the disappointment that I know we all share in terms of the revenue parameters that we have to deal with and the pressure that it puts on Saskatchewan people and on our economy.

Mr. Speaker, this budget was a difficult budget because it was put together based on tough choices. The members opposite will say every single choice we made was the wrong one, but they have not identified what the right choices are. All they have done is complain about the options that we have picked.

Mr. Speaker, this budget contains record spending in health care. It contains record spending in education. It contains increases for agriculture. And it does so in a way that rebalances the spending agenda for this government.

More than half of the government departments have either seen no increase or have seen a cut in their expenditures so that we can refocus our expenditure priorities on those priority areas the Saskatchewan people have identified.

People have told us that they value the health care services and that they want more service there. People have told us that they value what is happening in education and they want to make sure young people have the opportunities that they should have available to them.

People throughout urban and rural Saskatchewan have told us that they understand the pressure that is happening in terms of the agricultural industry, and the need for us to make sure that we have put additional resources in to deal with the crisis, particularly around BSE. Mr. Speaker, we have presented a budget, the Minister of Finance has presented a budget that addresses these initiatives.

The fact of the budget is that in order to deal with expenditure increases, we need to do two things — we need to refocus the spending of the government, which means cuts in other areas, and we have needed to go and increase the revenue of the province.

These two issues, I can tell you, have been difficult for the government to deal with. It causes a great deal of concern for us as we have to look at laying off civil servants, that we understand that the layoff notices that have been issued are troubling because these affect real people, these affect ordinary families.

To the members opposite, these people may be as they, you know, talk about . . . The Leader of the Opposition, former leader of the opposition would refer to them in the most unfortunate terms. To us, we understand that civil servants provide good service to Saskatchewan people, and it obviously pains us when we need to reprioritize spending in order to support the core services.

Mr. Speaker, we have done that with a heavy heart in terms of reducing the number of employees in the government. And it is difficult to know that several hundred people have lost their jobs as a result of the decisions that we have made.

But, Mr. Speaker, it is the responsibility of those members who sit on the Treasury Board benches, of those members who serve in the government to make the choices in terms of how we can move the budget in a direction that focuses on sustainability and that emphasizes the key priorities Saskatchewan people have identified.

Mr. Speaker, as we talk about these issues, and tonight I notice that we are nearing our recess for dinner, I want to take up tonight the discussion that we have around particularly why we have put an emphasis on health care, what it is we are doing in education, our agenda for growth in terms of the provincial economy, and how this provincial budget moves that forward.

The members opposite have not yet provided us with any solutions. They have not yet provided us with anything other than trite slogans and an agenda which is as paper-thin as their blank policy statements are.

Mr. Speaker, I note that it is now being near the hour of 5 o'clock that I would take my seat and I would prefer to resume . . . Mr. Speaker, the advice that I have received is that it is, according to the clock, 5 o'clock.

The Speaker: — Members of the Assembly, it being near the hour of 5 p.m., this House stands recessed until 7 p.m.

The Assembly recessed until 19:00.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS	
PRESENTING PETITIONS	
Elhard	337
Hermanson	337
Huyghebaert	337
Brkich	337
Dearborn	337
Hart	337
READING AND RECEIVING PETITIONS	
Deputy Clerk	338
NOTICES OF MOTIONS AND QUESTIONS	
Heppner	338
INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS	
Wall	338
Nilson	338
Hermanson	357
Lautermilch	357
STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS	
Forum to Explore Saskatchewan's Economic Potential	
Cheveldayoff	338
Special Olympics Western Canadian Curling Championship	
Wartman	338
Senior Couple Reunited	
Toth	339
Making Education and Training a Priority	
Trew	339
Junior Achievement Awards in Saskatoon	
Morgan	340
Nobel Prize Winner Donates Money to Luther College	
Crofford	340
National Wildlife Week	
Huyghebaert	340
ORAL QUESTIONS	
Emergency Room Issues in Saskatoon	
Gantefoer	341
Nilson	341
Whistle-Blower Protection	
Morgan	342
Higgins	342
Strike at the Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology	
Cheveldayoff	342
Thomson	342
Utility Rates	
Elhard	343
Atkinson	343
Opening of Provincial Parks	
Wall	344
Forbes	344
INTRODUCTION OF BILLS	
Bill No. 201 — The Whistleblower Protection Act	
Morgan	346
TABLING OF CORRESPONDENCE	
Board of Internal Economy	
The Speaker	346
MOTION	
Hours of Sitting	
Van Mulligen	346
ORDERS OF THE DAY	
WRITTEN QUESTIONS	
Yates	347
The Speaker	347

**SPECIAL ORDER
ADJOURNED DEBATES
MOTION FOR APPROVAL OF BUDGETARY POLICY
(BUDGET DEBATE)**

Taylor	347
McMorris	350
Forbes	355
Hart	358
Nilson	362
Kerpan	365
Thomson	368

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