



FIRST SESSION - TWENTY-FIFTH LEGISLATURE

of the

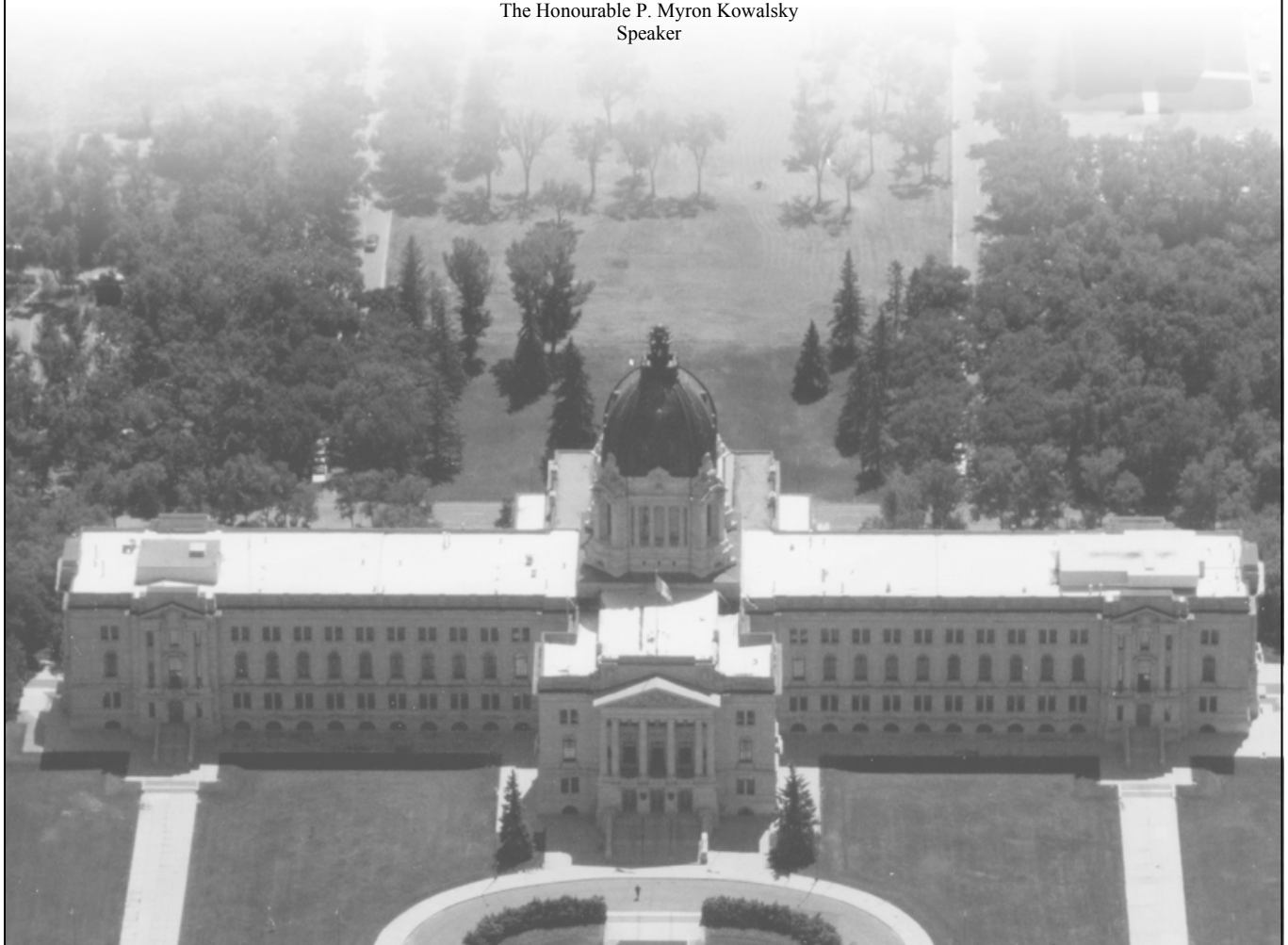
Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan

**DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS**

(HANSARD)

Published under the
authority of

The Honourable P. Myron Kowalsky
Speaker



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Morin, Sandra	NDP	Regina Walsh Acres
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EVENING SITTING

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 Regina South, the Minister of Learning.

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

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Thomson: — It's my pleasure to resume my remarks tonight to talk about the 2004-2005 Saskatchewan provincial budget, to talk about what it does for Saskatchewan people, and how it helps by investing in the future of our great province.

Tonight I want to focus my remarks on three key areas: those are the decisions that we made around the Department of Health and the funding for that; the decisions we made to find incremental revenue . . . incremental expenditure dollars for the Department of Education; and the decisions that we made around the revenue sources that were available to this government and the choices we made in terms of finding a sustainable balance within our budget expenditures.

Mr. Speaker, there are those in our province today who say that this budget does not provide enough. I must tell you I hear this from just about every one of the members opposite who come forward and call for more money on special projects that they want to see funded.

I can tell you that I hear this within . . . key stakeholders within our own sector of learning who say that they wanted to see more money for education. I hear this from people who provide health care services who too wish that there was more money for health care.

Mr. Speaker, I can tell you that I share the sentiment of those people who wish that there was more for health care, more for education. But I am also with those taxpayers who say that we must bring our budget into balance and that we must do so in a way that makes sure it is sustainable into the future.

There are a number of things, Mr. Speaker, that our government will do that are as a result of the decisions we've made within our budget. There are a number of things that this government will do over its four-year term that are not related to this budget, that in fact involve our legislative agenda.

Mr. Speaker, when I take a look at where we are going and in terms of the priorities that have been laid out in the Throne Speech of this province that was introduced a little over a week

and a half ago — and it has been followed up by the four-year plan of this government in its budget and it's been laid out in the performance plans for each of the sectors that's been attached to the budget — I know that the decisions that we make in this Assembly during this session will lay a solid foundation for this province as we enter our second century in 2005.

Nowhere, and there is no single group that I think is more important that this budget focuses on than our commitment to youth and to the agenda which will help move forward the issues which will help to make sure that we have a well-educated, well-trained group of young people who can take their rightful place in the provincial economy of this province.

Mr. Speaker, I can tell you that this budget, from my perspective as the Minister of Learning, does a great deal in terms of advancing the initiatives that we have spoken of in the Throne Speech and indeed that we spoke of in the provincial election campaign — that this budget provides new money for training; it provides new money for the K to 12 system; it provides money to help keep property taxes down. It provides new money to make sure that we can see growth in terms of excellence within our research sector and it provides new money to make sure that we have continued opportunities at our post-secondary institutions.

Mr. Speaker, these changes, these expansions that we have seen within the learning sector, are significant. There is just over \$45 million worth of new spending in this budget that is dedicated directly to the learning sector. That includes a 1 per cent increase to SIAST (Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology). That includes 2 per cent increase to our universities. That includes new money for funding to the College of Medicine to deal with the accreditation issues. That provides for additional money to deal with training initiatives and it is a budget which provides new resources in the area of early childhood development.

Mr. Speaker, there is every section of this budget that pertains to the learning sector that has an increase. I don't hear the members opposite ever talk about that. I never hear them talk about it. In fact all I heard today in terms of a reference from one of the members opposite was to say that the University of Saskatchewan was dissatisfied and that 2 per cent was not enough.

I too read these comments by the University of Saskatchewan in the paper. The fact that 5.7 million more dollars will go to the University of Saskatchewan this year I think speaks highly to what this government has pulled together in terms of a budget — \$5.7 million more new money to the University of Saskatchewan. That is a significant, significant increase. That is on top of the more than \$150 million that annually Saskatchewan taxpayers put into that one institution alone.

This budget provides us with new resources for the University of Regina. It provides us with new resources in the area of research. One of the new changes within this budget has been the decision to transfer the Innovation and Science Fund from the Department of Industry and Resources over to the

Department of Learning. We have done that because we understand that there is an integral linkage between the research that's undertaken in our universities and the quality of the education that students receive.

Mr. Speaker, we went further than that in terms of not simply reprioritizing it and moving that over so that there's a closer linkage and a better synergy. We went further than that and added \$2 million more for research into that Innovation and Science Fund.

Mr. Speaker, those are significant enhancements for our university sector. These are significant changes that will provide new money to make sure the universities can keep tuition rates down, to make sure that there is more money for research, and to make sure there's good, quality education.

The members opposite don't believe that that is enough. And yet they come forward with no plan and no alternative and no suggestion and no credibility in the issue in terms of how to deal with the funding of our universities and our post-secondary education sector.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Thomson: — Mr. Speaker, I can tell you that when we take a look at where the priorities of this government are, it is clearly in three main areas — health care, education, and agriculture — because these are the three largest benefactors in terms of our spending increases. Yes, those spending increases have meant that we have needed to increase our taxes. It has meant that we needed to find the revenue because we did not want to undertake more significant cuts into the public sector and into public services than what we have already announced in this budget.

We decided instead that we wanted to reprioritize; we decided that we wanted to strengthen our post-secondary sector; we decided that we wanted to put a focus on young people.

Mr. Speaker, the members opposite will say there is nothing new in this budget. I can tell you there is new funding; I can tell you there is a new priority in here as we go to expand the graduate tax credit that this party promised in its election campaign and is fulfilling.

We have implemented in this budget now a \$500 per year credit for graduates, \$500, which allows those recent graduates to shelter more than \$4,500 worth of their income from tax. That allows a tax shelter for graduates of more than \$4,500. Why have we done that? We have done that because we want to ensure that young people have an opportunity to get a good start on their careers here in Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Thomson: — Mr. Speaker, the members opposite say oh, we're not going fast enough. The members opposite say we're not putting enough in. The members opposite say that they are on the side of the angels, and they say that we should increase expenditure, and they say that we should cut taxes. And they say so knowing, knowing that in this last provincial election campaign when we asked Saskatchewan people who

they trust to make the tough choices that is government, they opted for the New Democratic Party under the leadership of the member for Saskatoon Riversdale.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Thomson: — I listened to the member for Rosetown-Elrose opposite. I have welcomed his participation in this House in the short time that he has been here. I can tell you that he has added a great deal to the debate in this province and he has helped make it clear to Saskatchewan people what the alternatives and the options were in that provincial campaign. That member provided a campaign platform that was clear in terms of what their agenda was, as have we.

Saskatchewan people on November 5 picked who they trusted. They picked who they trusted. And, Mr. Speaker, I can tell you it was not the member for Rosetown-Elrose and it was not the Saskatchewan Party. And so while I welcome the advice that they yell across in this House, I can tell you that as we look forward to building our agenda, that we look to the campaign platform, that we look to the discussion that we had with Saskatchewan people and we will move that forward.

Mr. Speaker, we have provided new funds in this budget for education because we believe in education, because we believe that young people should have access to high-quality education, because we believe that our universities can generate employment because they can generate research, because they can generate innovation. And we support that.

Mr. Speaker, we also have put more money into health care. The single biggest increase in this budget in new money goes into health care.

In 1999, the provincial budget was spending about 38 per cent on health care. This budget introduced this past week now provides 44 per cent of the spending, of its spending, is dedicated to health care. Forty four per cent and we believe — and I think everyone in this House believes — that that number will continue to grow.

Today we spend more than \$2.7 billion on health care. How can we afford it? Well we afford it because we have made health a priority. We afford it because in this particular budget, while there is \$160 million more going into health care, we have been able to offset some of that by having \$130 million increase in the provincial sales tax.

This was a tough choice. This was a tough choice but, Mr. Speaker, I can tell you it was a choice that was based on what we believed matched up with Saskatchewan people's priorities in that they wanted to see increases in the Department of Health because, as the members opposite stand up and do every day in this House, they call for more health care services. At the same time then they stand up and criticize us for attempting to fund it.

Mr. Speaker, when we take a look at the increases that are going in, it is interesting to note that more money is required simply to fund the health care budget than we will take in out of the provincial sales tax. Now the members opposite, I know, have little to say about that. I know the members opposite don't have a great deal to say about the initiatives now that are in this

budget that this health care funding will go to.

I can tell you that when I look at this from the perspective of Regina and southern Saskatchewan and I see the fact that there's \$2 million in additional funding in this budget to make sure there's another MRI (magnetic resonance imaging) here in Regina, I know that that is exactly what Saskatchewan people want because they want to make sure that people have access to that advanced diagnostic equipment. I see \$1.8 million more in this budget to make sure that we've got CT (computerized tomography) scanners.

The Speaker: — Order, please. Members ought to be quite cognizant that the purpose of this Assembly is to allow members to speak up individually, and they ought not to be impeded in that. I ask all members for their co-operation.

I recognize the member for Regina South.

Hon. Mr. Thomson: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. When I look at this budget and I see the priorities and the decisions that this caucus has made and this government has made, I am proud to support this budget because it puts in increased capacity for Saskatchewan people to get access to CT scans, to be able to get access to MRIs. And we know that there will be a 40 per cent, or more than 40 per cent increase in the number of MRIs that are done in this province.

This is a positive step forward. This is an important step forward, and it does this within the context of a publicly funded, publicly administered medicare plan.

Mr. Speaker, that is an important concept, and that is something that we need to make sure that does not get lost in the debate. And that is that we are putting more money in to protect medicare and to make sure that we continue to have access for all Saskatchewan citizens to these services.

Are there wait lists? Yes. Are there wait times? Yes. And are we doing something about it? Absolutely. Absolutely, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I also note that there is \$2.5 million more in this budget for high priority surgeries. Despite the fact that Saskatchewan today is tied in terms of the number of arthroscopic procedures, in terms of the number of hip and knee replacements that are done, the fact that we are on the national leading edge in terms of providing these procedures, we know there's more demand.

(19:15)

What we need to make sure is that we have the resources in place to do that. The Action Plan for Health Care that was introduced, the increases in the budget that are there to fund these, the increases for advanced diagnostic technologies, the increases that are there for the drug plan, the increases that are there for new services, these are all there within the context of medicare.

The members opposite will say medicare doesn't work. They will say it doesn't work and we've got to have private clinics. They say we've got to have access to private MRIs. They say

that we have to allow in privatization of that health care system. I tell you this, Mr. Speaker. The only reason the Department of Health is under attack is because the members opposite do not believe in a publicly funded, publicly administered medicare system.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Thomson: — The members opposite will say there is not enough access to our health care system. Forty-four per cent of this province's budget today goes to health care — 4.5 million visits to doctors, 4.5 million visits to doctors. This is a huge number, Mr. Speaker. We see more than 100,000 surgeries done in this province. We see the largest numbers of surgeries done for hips and knees. Mr. Speaker, the Saskatchewan health care system is under stress, but it works.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Thomson: — As I listen to the members opposite speak from their seat, I am shocked, absolutely shocked at what they say which can be deemed as nothing more than an absolute condemnation of the men and women who work within the health care system — that they would say that this is treated in a callous way, that they would say that people are dying because of inaction. This is not what this budget serves to do. This budget puts more money into health care and increases our funding.

Mr. Speaker, as I listen to these members opposite, as I listen to them talk about how we need more for everything — more for health care, more for education, more for provincial parks, more for public services, more privatization . . .

The Speaker: — Order. Order. Now I would just ask members to maintain the order — not for two seconds or three seconds or ten seconds. The members should distinguish between a heckle and a harangue, and what I'm hearing is harangue. I would ask members to cease on that, members on both sides of the house.

Why is the member from Regina Coronation Park on his feet?

Mr. Trew: — Mr. Speaker, I am requesting leave to introduce guests.

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

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — The member may proceed.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Mr. Trew: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank my hon. colleague, the member for Regina South, and all members of the legislature for granting me this opportunity to introduce some friends in the government . . . friends of the government, some friends in the trade union movement seated in your gallery, Mr. Speaker.

The list includes Rick Byrne, the regional director of the Canadian Labour Congress; Larry Hubick, the president of the

Saskatchewan Federation of Labour; Judy Boehmer, Wanda Bartlett, Chris Banting, Marv Michael, Bob Bymoen, Greg Eyre, Lily Olson, Dan Bichel, and Gord Gunoff.

Mr. Speaker, the government caucus had an opportunity during the break to meet with this fine group of friends, and I thank them for meeting with us. It's always good to meet with friends. I ask all members to join me in welcoming this esteemed group.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

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.

Hon. Mr. Thomson: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This budget that has been introduced in this House balances the increases for demand on provincial services, on public services, with the ability of Saskatchewan people to afford those. It balances the need for us to reprioritize within existing expenditures and to make sure that there are new expenditures in priority areas. It balances between those issues the Saskatchewan people have asked for us to deal with, and it does so in a way that takes into account the need for new revenue at the same time that we need new expenditures.

Mr. Speaker, it's interesting to note that health care has been rising at a rate of more than 6.6 per cent annually since 1999. It is interesting to note that the cost of growth within the education system has exceeded the growth either in GDP (gross domestic product) or in terms of inflation.

Mr. Speaker, in order to meet these needs, in order to meet the demands that we have for new services and continued excellence in our public services, we have made the difficult choice to increase the provincial sales tax. Mr. Speaker, I can tell you that this choice was made as we took a look at what the overall needs were within the province, and I can tell you that it has been a difficult one.

We know that the provincial sales tax increase will have an impact on an average family of about \$130 a year. I note, Mr. Speaker, that we should also be aware that this year we continue to rebalance income tax and that there was, in fact, a benefit to the average Saskatchewan family of about \$70 a year. The overall net impact will be about \$50. That is, Mr. Speaker, that is I think affordable when we take into account the benefits that are coming in here.

I listen, Mr. Speaker, to the folks across the way, the members of the opposition who now throw on their guise as the friend of labour. As I listen — and I see the member from Rosetown-Elrose who's just aching to get back into the debate

and talk about where the deadwood is, that he said — I know that those members are just thinking about how it is that they wish they could have implemented a hit list that they had.

Mr. Speaker, budgets are about making tough choices, but they're about making these tough choices based on fair assumptions. And that is exactly what this budget does, Mr. Speaker.

When we take a look at where we are at in terms of our expenditures, where we're at in terms of our revenues, where we're at in terms of our priorities, I can tell you that it has been a balanced approach.

I want to conclude tonight by talking very briefly, very briefly about an issue which comes up regularly and that is the education property tax. The members opposite have spent much of the first many days in this House petitioning against the implementation of the Boughen report. They introduced I think what may well be a record number of signatures petitioning against the implementation of that report.

Mr. Speaker, I can tell you in this budget we have provided \$28 million in new revenue to municipalities and school boards to make sure that the impact on their pressures to deal with property tax increases is mitigated. That is \$28 million, Mr. Speaker. The members opposite say, of course, that that is not enough.

So the members opposite have stood in this House now and introduced petitions for day after day after day calling for us not to implement Boughen. They then stand up in the House and say, when are you going to implement Boughen?

Well, Mr. Speaker, which is it? Do they want to listen to their constituents who said don't implement it? Or do they want to listen to the lobbyists who say implement it? Or do they want to at some point come up with any kind of a consistent policy in terms of where to move forward, Mr. Speaker?

I can tell you this. We will in the coming weeks bring forward to this Assembly a plan to deal with restructuring in education, for us to bring back into line, to bring back into line an educational infrastructure which is now stressed in terms of its sustainability as we have declining enrolment numbers, as we have now 3,000 fewer children going into kindergarten than are graduating out in grade 12, as we have pressure on us to make sure that we maintain services throughout this province, and as we have pressure, as we have pressure from taxpayers who say they do not want any more to pay for that system.

Whether it is through a new sales tax or whether it is through continued property tax, Mr. Speaker, I can tell you what I will present is a series of options that I believe will give legislators an opportunity to come together to take a look at what is the best set of options and I would hope, I would hope to find consensus in terms of how we can move forward. And I will welcome the advice of the members opposite and their ideas and their genuine sincere commitment to move forward on this, as we do.

Mr. Speaker, tonight I want to conclude by simply saying that this budget was based on a number of choices that were

difficult, that this budget was based on what I believe were the principles Saskatchewan people told us they wanted to maintain — high-quality health care services, high-quality education services, and support for agricultural sector. And, Mr. Speaker, this budget does that.

I congratulate the Minister of Finance and my colleagues for the budget that they have developed and introduced, and I will be supporting this budget.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well I am very pleased to enter into this budget debate. It's a fairly devastating budget for the province of Saskatchewan.

And I hear the rumblings like from the member that just spoke. There's a couple of sad things about it. The budget itself is sad but sadder yet is when the member from Regina South can get up and he actually believes what he is talking about. And that's sad. That is very sad for the people of Saskatchewan when he talks, when he talks about fairness.

Tell us again. Tell us again, a \$75,000 ad — how fair it is. Tell us how this whole fairness thing works. Tell us. Can this government be trusted? Can these members be trusted? Did these members, were they honest during the campaign vis-à-vis what this budget does?

Mr. Speaker, since the budget took place, travelling around the city, constituency, Moose Jaw, and here, here are some, here are some words. Here are some words that I copied down that the people of Saskatchewan are saying about the budget. Not us, not the members over there, but the people of Saskatchewan.

And, Mr. Speaker, there's only a few of the words that I can actually use in the House. Arrogant. An arrogant group of men and women over there.

They talked about the budget. The budget was a disgrace. It was shameful, dishonourable, because they are talking one thing and doing another. Deceitful — and I think we've heard that from members of our side talking about the budget. But this is people of Saskatchewan that are talking about it. Purposely misled. And that is what people are saying that the members opposite were doing in the election campaign, now to the budget — purposely misled the people of Saskatchewan.

I had people say that they were duped. Now that's a good word because they were duped by the socialist government over there, the socialist campaigners.

Disloyal. They failed the people of Saskatchewan because they were untrustworthy. Disingenuous, untruthful. Really what they were saying, that was an untruthful group of men and women. My favourite . . .

The Speaker: — Order. The member for Wood River.

Mr. Huyghebaert: — . . . favourite word that was used by one constituent was mendacious and that's exactly what those men and women were doing. They were acting in a mendacious attitude.

Mr. Speaker, when I sat here and listened to the budget it was extremely, it was extremely interesting for me. I had the opportunity to have my son here and he sat right behind my place. He got here a couple of hours early so he could get in line and sit here. And, Mr. Speaker, my son has spent the last 10 years in Alberta where so many of our young men and women have been. Him and his fiancée moved back to Saskatchewan in May. They moved back partially because I talked them into it, thinking that there was going to be a change in this province. As soon as the budget was over, as soon as the budget was over he said to me, Dad, I guess I move back to Alberta.

That is how bad this budget is and yet members over there have the audacity to stand up and say, it's good, it's going to keep people here. Welcome to reality; welcome to reality. Hello, the light's on; nobody's home over there.

When men and women around this province start talking . . . and I have been receiving, and I'm sure everybody has been receiving piles and piles of e-mails and letters and phone calls related to this budget and the lack of foresight in it, a typical socialist budget.

Here's one. And I'm going to paraphrase some of these because I would be here all night to read all of the letters and e-mails that I've received. Why doesn't anybody call the budget like it really is? Rural people are being punished by the NDP.

And the bottom line in this one, and it says and I quote:

They're alienating us quicker than the feds did, and they have the audacity to blame it on health care. They show such disdain for our intelligence. We are the only intelligent people in the province — we didn't vote for them!

And that's why the people of rural Saskatchewan feel they're being punished. And tell us again; tell us again how fair that group of men and women are over there that orchestrated this budget.

(19:30)

Mr. Speaker, on that note there's a couple of quotes that I would like to read in. This is the way people are thinking today but I would like to make a couple of quotes:

The problem in this province is that . . . (the) government has spent way, way too much.

Who said that? The current Premier. Quote from *Hansard*, May 31, 1991. As Yogi Berra would say, déjà vu all over again.

. . . Saskatchewan people have said enough is enough. They want a government that will begin to set a goal of living within its means.

Who said that? The current Premier back in the earlier days.

. . . we need a government in this province that views the treasury as a trust . . . not as a trough.

Who said that? The current Premier. There is a bit of a pattern.

Then we get the current Finance minister and he's probably pretty proud of some of the statements he made back in the 1991 time frame.

Well now it all begins, it seems to me, with the simple truth: if you spend more than you bring in, you're going to have a deficit and you're going to have problems.

That's from the current Finance minister, Mr. Speaker, the current Finance minister. And he has the audacity to sit in this house and say he's got a balanced budget. We know there's been four consecutive deficit budgets and yet he'll sit in this house and try and pass it off as a balanced budget. That is not being truthful with the people of this province and that seems to be a theme from those members is not being truthful to the people of this province.

Mr. Speaker, there's a whole bunch of quotes here. Here's one that I also like:

Why don't you cut out the waste, cut out the mismanagement? Save the taxpayers some money. Waste not, want not. Why don't you follow that approach for a change instead of gouging and gouging and gouging and gouging the way that you do?

That was the Minister of Finance in 1991. And what, Mr. Speaker, is that Minister of Finance and those men and women doing right today? Tell us again. Tell us again how fair it is. Only \$75,000, you're trying to tell the people of Saskatchewan how fair it was. Tell us again.

Can they be trusted? Can the Premier be trusted? Can he be trusted to tell what's going on and tell the truth about what's going in this province? And I think not. And the proof is in the pudding on the deficit budget.

Mr. Speaker, I had a chance to talk on the Throne Speech, and we had at that time talking about how this government was going to support rural Saskatchewan. Well that was a bit of a joke in the budget. And it's not a funny, ha ha type of a joke because the people out there are hurting, and then they got slapped. They got slapped by this government.

When I talked in the Throne Speech debate about the cattle industry in this province and how we are shipping the cattle out to Alberta to be fed, we're shipping our feed to feed them. And we're shipping our young people. And what do we do? Tack on a sales tax. Can any man or woman on that side of the House tell me how that is going to help our cattle industry in this province? Will it save one animal from being shipped to Alberta? I think not. And yet they can stand in their place and say, we're supporters of agriculture.

Mr. Speaker, these have been read into the record before, but I think it's worthwhile to note how some of these attacks on rural Saskatchewan, how this government betrayed the whole province of Saskatchewan but how they really took attack at

rural Saskatchewan — the closure of 22 of the province's 31 rural service centres; closure of 9 Saskatchewan Environment offices.

I'll get more into health care in a little while, but they're closing health care facilities and converting some. And yet the member that just spoke has the audacity to stand up and say how good health care is, and there's nothing wrong with waiting lists, and there's nothing wrong with people dying on waiting lists. He has the audacity to say that in this House.

Reducing the number of long care beds, the seniors . . . and I'll get more into health, but that's just some of the things attacking rural Saskatchewan. How are the seniors going to put up with this in rural Saskatchewan? This is an attack on seniors.

Mr. Speaker, a 20 per cent reduction on the rebate of bulk farm fuel purchases. That is sure going to help rural Saskatchewan, isn't it? Cancellation of the farm family opportunities initiative and Conservation Cover Program. There's another great one that helps rural Saskatchewan. I can just see people clamouring to vote for these socialists just because of they're doing something like that.

Increased park fees. And I will have more to talk about on increased park fees because how ridiculous can these people be? Putting up . . . There's pages and pages of fees that are being put up. Oh, but we're fair; we're fair. Tell us again; tell us again how fair we are. This is the NDP (New Democratic Party) ad, and it says tell us again how this whole fairness things work.

Can they be trusted? I suggest they cannot be trusted at all.

Now in the park fees that have gone up, it's quite interesting. We hear them shortening summer. The minister can stand up in his place and say well, we saved \$100,000 and we're going to put it to good use. Mr. Speaker, how much is it costing businesses? How much is it costing other people out there?

There's not a socialist amongst the group that consider anything about the businesses. That's a socialist budget — you tax, you tax, you gouge. You pull everything in but don't take one thing into consideration for the businesses.

We talked to one business and he figures he's going to lose between 30 and 50,000. That's one business associated with the park. But it's a good thing, Mr. Speaker, because we're saving \$100,000 by putting rocks on the entrance to the parks.

How much is it going to cost to hire somebody to put rocks at the entrance to the parks, I might ask. A hundred thousand bucks? That might even cost \$150,000 by the time you get them there and take them away.

Mr. Speaker, it is just absolutely ludicrous the amount of increases that have gone up — like I say, pages. But the one that caught me probably the worst is the one, is the one that deals with taxing after death. Because the fees went up for registration when a child is born — we know under this government we're taxed all our lives — but now when you die you're getting it again. You're getting it in the ear after you die because they're upping the rate from 600 to \$900 after you're dead. They can't even leave a poor body alone; they've got to

throw more tax on it. And now they're all sitting there happy and laughing about it. They think it's funny and they think it's good.

It is a slap, it is a total slap at the people of the province.

And we hear members get up and they talk and they say well, well, over there, you people on the other side of the House, tell us where you'd get the money from. Well I'd like, I'd like to show you one place where there's money available, and I'm reading from the budget, and it says:

Investment Saskatchewan has a mandate to invest an estimated \$50 million annually in commercial investment opportunities . . .

Fifty million dollars a year to compete against private business; \$50 million to get the government into business of being in business — that's a socialist way.

Now if the government would get out of the way of private business, this economy could and would grow. But when the government starts tinkering in business it impedes growth. And I'd like to hear from the masters of industry on that side of the House just how well some of their investments have worked. And I'm going to enlighten you somewhat. And I'm going to go back a few years but we'll start looking at some track record of how this government . . .

And they just are talking about another \$50 million a year of investing, but we can go back to such things like Guyana. Well that's okay, Mr. Speaker, that was only a couple of million dollars.

How about NST (NST Network Services of Chicago)? How about NST? Well we only lost \$16 million in NST. That was small potatoes. Oh, speaking of potatoes, I'm sorry about that, that was a Freudian slip. Yes, we only lost 28 million on potatoes, and it's climbing.

How about Retx.com? Now again, these giants of industry from that side of the House getting into the dot-com market, Mr. Speaker. Well Retx only lost 14.5 million and they're pretty happy about that. It was only 14.5. How about *tapped into*? Oh we didn't even worry about that; that was only a couple million. Clickabid, yes, that's only a couple of million too.

Well Navigata got up there a little bit more — 13.5 and climbing. There's more in there now. How about Coachman Insurance? That's only 17.2 million.

And of all the great things, and after we heard from the current Premier and other people about how gaming — this is back a number of years ago — how we can't draw money from gaming, now it's their livelihood basically in government. So they went into mega bingo. Well that's only a few million dollars; that was only \$8 million or something. Craig Wireless, 10 million.

The point being, Mr. Speaker, these are investments that that government made and these are losing ventures, and . . . and we have people over there who get up and say, you guys, where would you get the money from? Do you know what this little

sheet adds up to, Mr. Speaker — \$312 million, 312 million. Now I'd like somebody to get up on that side of the House and tell me how good this loss of 312 million was for health care, how good was \$312 million for education. How good was the loss of \$312 million for long-term beds in rural Saskatchewan? Get somebody up on that side of the House to say, oh it was a good thing, it was the right thing to do.

Well I would suggest, Mr. Speaker, that there is money available if it's looked after and managed right. But these people, these people have this whole fixation that the only way anything will work is if government get their fingers in it. And proof is in the pudding, Mr. Speaker. When government gets their fingers in it, it doesn't work.

Mr. Speaker, we hear an awful lot from the, we hear a lot from the people getting up on that side of the House and they have to have something that they can talk about. So what are they saying? We're investing in health care. We're investing in education. We're investing in a green economy.

Has anybody over there yet got up and told us what a green economy is? They don't know. They don't know what a green economy is. They can say there's wind power, that's green energy, but what is a green economy?

They took away the cover crop. That was a green economy item. But what is it? So they're getting up and speaking on rhetoric after rhetoric and the sad part is they're actually believing their own rhetoric.

Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker, we see things in the budget and it is just rhetoric. We talk about improving the transportation efficiency in roads. How do they do that? If you remember of a year ago or so, the then minister of Highways got up and said, well we've got a plan for the highway system; we're going to make farmers carry their grain in the wintertime so it doesn't hurt the roads. That's the kind of plan that comes out of the NDP.

Mr. Speaker, I've got a long letter from a constituent of mine that deals with one of the roads. And I'd be glad to table it, but she is very much concerned for her and her children's lives by travelling Highway 43. And it's been mocked by members opposite when we get up and cite petitions of Highway 43. It's only been going on for about three years. And what do these people do? Nothing.

A friend of mine was killed on a highway just outside of Assiniboia about three years ago from potholes in the road, and then something was done. And that's this lady's concern, is they're going to wait until somebody is killed because of the lack of repair of this road, and then maybe something will be done. But she says it's a total unacceptable risk for them to drive on the road. And this lady goes on and it says, please don't tell me our hope lies with the recent address, or the rather non-address, in the budget.

That is how, that is how people of this province actually think of this budget. There is nothing in there for rural people or for highways, although they got a big amount of money scheduled for it.

But, Mr. Speaker, now I want to talk a little bit about health care. We've heard health care from that side of the House — we're investing in health care, we are doing everything for health care, we're the only people in this province that can do anything with health care.

(19:45)

Well I would suggest let's take a look at the record of health care in this province. In 1993, in 1993 the budget was roughly \$1.5 billion for health care in 1993. The NDP government closed 52 rural hospitals — 52 rural hospitals. Mr. Speaker, can any member over there get up and tell me how much it saved by closing 52 rural hospitals in 1993? Let's hear the loud chirp from the member from Moose Jaw North. Can he get up and say how much money was saved by that? Because, Mr. Speaker, shortly after that the budget kept going up and up and up and the waiting lists kept going up and up and up to the point, Mr. Speaker, where today we're spending \$2.7 billion on health care, the waiting lists are the worst in the country, and they say it's good.

So they are saying that closing 52 rural hospitals was good because now we've got a waiting list. Before we didn't have one. And now we've got a waiting list that they over there can be proud of. Well, Mr. Speaker, they should be ashamed, very much ashamed of what they have done to the health care system.

Mr. Speaker, and now they're saying well we're going to close more hospitals. How much did closing the Plains save them? Has anybody ever stood up in this House from that side and said closing the Plains saved us X number of dollars and shortened waiting lists? I think not, because it's not true.

And so now they're talking about closing more health care facilities. What are they trying to do, save more money? They didn't save it before. What is the rationale behind it?

I wonder if any person on that side of the House ever looked at how it's managed. Even the former premier of this province says throwing money at the health care system is not the answer. There has got to be some fundamental changes.

Do they have the will to make the changes? They have the audacity to stand up in the House and say oh, we're making changes. Have they announced anything other than up taxes and close hospitals? What else have they asked for or done in the health care system?

And, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to go on a bit about the MRI. I spoke about the MRI three or four months ago. And I was asked and said, was I in favour of a new MRI in this province? And my answer was very simple. It said why don't we utilize the ones we've got? We do not have the men and women to run the three MRIs we have. We don't have them. So is buying another one going to help? If we can't even run three, how can we run four? Is there a plan from those people to have more, more radiologists running them? No there isn't. They can sit and talk rhetoric but they can't even run the three that we've got.

And so driving the other day, driving the other day a young person had said to me, when you go into a mall as a young

person they've got these machines that you can go in and have your picture taken. You insert quarters in and you get four pictures taken or whatever it is. And I got thinking if this is what the NDP government was thinking about the MRI. You could design an MRI where you go in and you pull out 11 \$100 bills and you shove it in and you get self-service MRI. Is that what they are thinking about? Because they don't have the men and women to run the ones we've got, so how the goodness are we going to run another one when we can't run the ones we've got? So is that, is that good planning? Is that helping the health care system? Is that going to reduce the waiting lists? I would like somebody from that side of the House to get up and explain to me how this is going to help.

And, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker, I also want to touch base of the increases to the health system. Now I met with my local health . . . a local hospital, not the health authority. I met with the hospital board and they said to me, over the last few years from this government, every penny, every penny of increase went to wages. Nothing for inflation, nothing for any program. As a matter of fact, Mr. Speaker, in this hospital they said they had to cut services. They had to cut services because they were given no money. Now the members get up and say, we're putting another \$163 million into health care. Where is it going and how is it helping the people of this province? Mr. Speaker, this is absolutely ridiculous of how this is being run.

Mr. Speaker, I know my time is getting long here. I'm not trying to compete with the previous speaker although he was up a lot longer, but I do want to, I do want to read parts of a letter or an article that was sent to me recently . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Well the member from Prince Albert couldn't tell the difference. He's so engrossed in potatoes over there yet that he couldn't tell the difference anyway. This letter is from *The Calgary Sun* and it's immediately after the election. And I would like to read parts of this letter because it . . . I'd like to read it all but time won't permit me. It says:

Flight of the bright: Young flee socialist Saskatchewan in hordes.

Weep for Saskatchewan. Last week our neighbouring province was sentenced to four more years of socialist rule. Of course, nobody inflicted an NDP government on (Saskatchewan). They did it to themselves . . .

And it goes on:

There is no denying it: Saskatchewan's default state is socialism. It's not that Saskatchewan doesn't give birth to entrepreneurs, investors, conservatives and others who typically vote to shuck off big government. It's that more and more of those kind of people are fleeing Saskatchewan . . .

Premier Lorne Calvert's win will only speed up this trend. Saskatchewan loses 500 citizens a month more than it gains — the only province other than Newfoundland from which Canadians are fleeing.

Alberta, by contrast, gains nearly 5,000 a month.

Those migrants aren't seniors — they're young

Saskatchewanians, typically after they finish high school or university . . . Seniors on pensions might like big government, NDP-style, but young entrepreneurs with young families don't.

It's a bright future.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Mr. Speaker, this is an article in *The Calgary Sun* and I think it says it all. People in this province are tired of a socialist government. Yes, they won; they won the seats through a fear campaign, through a fear campaign that obviously worked.

I got a letter, received a letter today from people that work at Valley View Centre in Moose Jaw. And I spoke about this during the Throne Speech, how this group of men and women or their people had gone in and just put the fear into the members at Valley View. And I commented about how these are the most vulnerable people in our society and somebody had the gall . . . And I don't know which one of those over there would stand up and say they're proud of what they did. I don't know if any one of them would. There are some that I think might, because some of them think that is funny that they can get up and scare people to that extent.

Well I received a letter today from Valley View and the NDP are now talking of closing it. After they put that fear into the people at that facility and now they themselves are talking about closing it.

Mr. Speaker, this is absolutely cruel. So I would like again for all of those members over there to tell us again how this whole fairness things work. Tell us again how they can be trusted. Tell us again how the Premier can be trusted.

I'll be voting for the amendment and not the budget.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Brkich: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is good to enter the budget debate, along with the Throne Speech debate.

One of the themes I talked about on the Throne Speech, what the legacy of this government is going to be, and with the budget it never changed. It is going to be one, people are going to talk about this government, will be with disgust and contempt again. It will be of losing people in Saskatchewan, of basically writing off rural Saskatchewan.

You look at 19 quarters of population loss out of 21. When people look back under this government's regime in '91, of what has happened in rural Saskatchewan, what has even happened throughout Saskatchewan — a province with the potential here to grow, to grow with the agriculture and the mining and the forestry and the tourism, all the things that this province has and they haven't grown it in 12 years.

The economy is suffering. They are running deficit budgets the

last three years. How shameful is that under that regime?

When you look at this budget, there is no change in that — no direction and no hope to grow this province. And that is what this budget talks about, that there is absolutely no hope to grow this province, and that's what the people are talking about. They were looking forward that maybe this government would be bringing something forward that would help grow this province — some long-term plans, some long-term ranges that were going to help.

What did they get?

I will start with the parks. We've talked about tourism. Over there they have talked about tourism, a green and prosperous economy. Numerous times they have gotten up and said what great potential there is for tourism — the Environment minister over there, many ministers have mentioned in their speeches.

What have they done to tourism? Not opened the parks, most of the parks until the middle of June and they did not even get it right in their brochure. I mean what kind of message does that send out to people? This brochure is sent out all through the country, outside to the United States. These people come, look at this brochure, thinking a park is open, getting there the middle of May, June 1 — it's not open. They aren't going to come back. When they go home, they're going to tell the people that.

How can you not promote tourism? That is one of the mainstays of this province, along with agriculture — the many things that can grow in this province. And they basically cut that back, saving roughly they feel . . . they are not even sure. The minister couldn't even say; he thought maybe \$100,000 at that.

Well I talked to the manager of the golf course at Harbour Golf. He figures closing Douglas is going to cost him \$50,000 for that loss of time, for people that aren't going to come there and camp, because a lot of people come there with their families. The guy goes golfing; the wife will take the kids swimming lessons. They will camp out. He says they're not going to come there. They're going to go to one of the other parks that are open, one of the few parks, so they're not going to come.

But he said there's lots of people that came there and lots of examples of where guys have phoned him now and says they were booked in for a tournament and they're not going to come there golfing for that, till . . . basically it doesn't open until the middle of June. So he figures he's going to lose up to \$50,000 worth of business. That's a golf course that they lease from this province.

How is that going to help . . . how is that going to help grow Saskatchewan, this budget? And these people have talked about how is that going to help grow this province, Mr. Speaker, at that end of it.

You talk about infrastructure and highways. I've read numerous petitions about highways. They've talked about how important it is in the Throne Speech, how highways and transportation is to tourism up north and to business.

I mean we have highways that are basically beat. I've got one

from 15 Highway running east from the junction of 20 to the junction of 6 that you can't even drive a vehicle on. You know it's just a total, total wreck and a shame. Yet people that will come down there with a motorhome. They never come back on that highway again and that's impacting the growth of this province.

Business that wants to run down 15 Highway — it's probably the only corridor running east from there in the province to west and the trucks can't go down it. So nobody wants to put any business out in that area of the province because basically you can't get your goods in or out on that, or if they are they're beaten.

I've got Bergen Industries; they make trailers. He said, we used to pull them into Saskatoon to sell them. He says: we pull them in; we've got to repaint them, there's so many stone chips going down some of them highways there. He says, that's an extra cost, he says. How can I compete with other businesses at that end?

That's what impacts out in rural Saskatchewan. That's why there is no businesses growing. That's one of the reasons, because there is no infrastructure out there. And that budget does not address that, Mr. Speaker.

Another area is agriculture, Mr. Speaker, that the member from Yorkton — and I wish him well — if he's watching that budget on TV, he must have felt . . . I don't think he felt that good, felt betrayed. Because he, at least he, I think he fought it, tried to fight at the cabinet table for some money for agriculture. But the current minister they have, I don't think did any fighting for agriculture at the table. He basically just kind of, ah whatever they want to take, let it take out of there.

(20:00)

We can start with the closing of 22 rural service centres. With value-added coming into this province or that's how . . . one of the areas we want to grow. There's many new crops that people are looking at growing, at developing, whether it's . . . my area is . . . coriander is a crop that the first time I heard of it was last year. I had a neighbour grow it.

Losing the agrologist and the rural service centre in that area is going to be an impact on a lot of them growing these new crops. They say they can use the Internet, but you look at the average age of farmers out in our area where, 55 years old, 50, a lot of them don't use the Internet, don't use computers.

They dealt with the rural service centre, they dealt with an agrologist person-to-person. They had somebody that came out to their field, looked at the wheat problem with this different, different crops they've got out there. So it's definitely going to be an impact on it.

Plus a lot of the programs that are out there, crop insurance. You look at what this government has did to that — increases again to crop insurance and reducing the rates. Now how is that going to help agriculture grow? They say they want more people on it. I think if you check the stats when the crop insurance is done, it's going to be down this year because people just basically can't, can't afford it at that end.

Another thing on agriculture, basically we can talk about they're not committing the final money to CFIP (Canadian Farm Income Program) on their 88 per cent. I've talked about, how they talk about the feds don't do their commitment. Does this government follow through on their commitment?

I can remember the member from Yorkton — I said in the Throne Speech and I'll say it again — he said that we will be funding CFIP 100 per cent. Our commitment is we're doing our 40 per cent and that is our commitment. And obviously the new minister decided to renege on that.

They talk about this budget as a . . . well basically it doesn't have a name. A lot of my constituents would like to give it a name but I don't think I could use a lot of them here, and because I think I would be sat down. I could see they could be embarrassed about this, about this budget.

As a new government, or new, newly elected government, the people were — put them in just by slim, very slim majority — were looking for some direction, some hope. I think that's going to change next election. Like I say, I think the disgust and the contempt is growing. It has grown through rural Saskatchewan. But it's going to be growing into places like Yorkton with the agriculture end of it; Meadow Lake, where they already lost, Melville last time.

It's creeping into the cities and it's going to stay for a long time. And basically the hurt and the disgust for this government is going to stay for a very long time at that. And that, Mr. Speaker, is going to be their legacy.

They talk about hospital closures, Mr. Speaker. We're cut to the bone out there in rural Saskatchewan. Over the last four years of my term I've read numerous petitions dealing with health care — Davidson, Imperial, Craik centres. These are small little hospitals but they still have two doctors there. You close them, people are looking at travelling 40, 50, 60 miles for broken arms, stitches.

A lot of people . . . It's going to be very hard closing long-term beds. There's waiting lists out there already in rural Saskatchewan in these small centres. How is closing more beds going to help? How is it going to help the cities? I mean, it doesn't address that. It should be addressing that there should be more beds out there, more money to keep these facilities going. And this budget is looking at closing more beds and closing more facilities at that end.

Also we can talk about the fees that are going up across the board, water testing fees. How is that going to help the small towns that are already dealing with crunches out there?

They changed the per capita which isn't going to help a lot of the small towns. They were hoping that the formula would be a little different on them. They have, a lot of them have major changes to make to water treatment plants due to the new rules and regulations that are coming in from SERM (Saskatchewan Environment and Resource Management) and the Environment.

They won't be able to deal with that in that budget. There is no money in this budget to deal with that. I don't know what towns are going to do. I've got a couple of small towns in my area that

just say, we don't know what we'll do with it.

When the regulations come in, we're either going to have to turn the towns over to the province and let them basically run it because we can't afford it. We can't borrow money. We can't run deficit budgets like the province does. Mr. Speaker, those are the problems that they're out there facing. And those are problems that weren't addressed in this budget.

There's many things that weren't addressed in the budget. Basically the property tax relief out there wasn't addressed. That was a promise that was made by the Premier two years ago and talked about it again this year at SARM (Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities), and basically just I would say betrayed the voters out there. I mean there were people that honestly thought he was going to deal with that, that took him at his word, that aren't going to take him at his word any more at that, Mr. Speaker.

Talk about the fuel rebate on gasoline. You know agriculture, they talk about how agriculture has been taking a hit over a number of years. And who do they hit the hardest in this budget? It looks like it's agriculture at that end of it. Elimination of the fuel tax rebate at retail outlets and the 20 per cent reduction on bulk fuel purchases — that's going to be a major impact on farms out there already that are already on the cash crunch, dealing with the BSE (bovine spongiform encephalopathy) out there.

In the budget there was no money for BSE. And we don't know if the border's going to open. I hope it does but I, honestly I don't think it's going to. And if it does, I don't think the price of cattle are going to be down for quite some time. And there is nothing in the budget dealing with the long-range plans on that, Mr. Speaker.

I haven't seen in this budget anything about growth for this province; anything for long-range plans; anything to bring population back to this province to make it grow. Like the one member said, the only thing that is growing unfortunately is the deficit — something that some of the members rallied against at hard in the '80s and now all of a sudden it doesn't seem to be a problem to them any more, Mr. Speaker.

The sales tax going up 7 per cent — I mean that's hard on everybody, Mr. Speaker. That's not going to encourage business from one end of the province to the other.

Basically this budget is a budget by, to me, a dying, dead government that has no ideas out there, that it's . . . that is going down but with it unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, is taking the province down with it. And that is very sad. Yes.

The Speaker: — Why is the member from Estevan on her feet?

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

The Speaker: — The member from Estevan has requested leave to make an introduction. Is leave granted?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — The member may proceed.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Ms. Eagles: — Mr. Speaker, thank you, and thank you to the member from Arm River-Watrous for his . . . for allowing me to interrupt his speech.

And I would like to introduce to you, Mr. Speaker, and through you to all members of this Assembly, a gentleman that is certainly no stranger to this Legislative Building. His name is Craig Dutton, and he is seated in your gallery, Mr. Speaker. And Craig was a former principal secretary to Premier Devine, and he does now have a law practice in the town of, city of Humboldt. So I ask all members to join me in welcoming Craig here this evening.

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 Arm River-Watrous.

Mr. Brkich: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Talking about rural Saskatchewan, I've got the closure of the Simpson School coming up, possibly the Semans School coming up — two schools going down in my constituency. Last time there was one in Marquis that went down. That's a recurring occurrence out there in rural Saskatchewan, the closure of schools.

You know why, Mr. Speaker? Population loss. There is nothing to grow these towns, no businesses, and that's throughout Saskatchewan. I mean, look at Regina; it hasn't grown. You know, Moose Jaw hasn't grown; P.A. (Prince Albert) hasn't grown. This province is not growing.

Talking about health care, Watrous has put the money aside for a new hospital, waiting for the government to commit their share. They've waited for a number of years. There was nothing I see in this budget that's going out for capital expenditures like Watrous. Outlook was another one that made an announcement where they promised that construction would be beginning this year on the Outlook hospital. Still waiting for the ground to be broken on that one, Mr. Speaker.

On the Watrous one, they've worked a long, long time to put that money together, and their hospital is in very bad shape. They're looking for the government for their commitment, a government that hasn't kept a word at that end, Mr. Speaker.

And that just seems to be almost a theme of this government of breaking their word on numerous promises, especially through

the election year, Mr. Speaker, and it just seems to be growing at that end.

One of the things going on about Davidson, with the Craik, two very small hospitals there — people are very worried there that they're going to be closed, the beds there. There is waiting lists on the beds right now, and the members don't take that in account.

They don't know, I don't think they have an idea what it's like when you have, when there is no bed out there for a loved one. That's probably the hardest thing as an MLA (Member of the Legislative Assembly) to deal with them kind of calls, when you'll get a call from a distraught person whose mother they can't get her in the home at a time. They can't look at her. There is no money in this budget for extra even home care. These people are at their wits' end. They can't care for these people at home. There is no beds for them anywhere. And I can't see them calls being addressed in that budget coming up, Mr. Speaker, at that end of it.

With that, I cannot support this budget. I will be supporting the amendment and I know the people in my constituency are not supporting it. I've been told numerous times that if there was any way that you could possibly defeat this budget or this government, go for it. Some of the members over there, if they vote with this budget they must not have much of a conscience. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Regina Rosemont, the Minister of Community Resources and Employment.

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to be able to share with you some thoughts on the budget tonight, and through you to the members of the Assembly. I'll just start out by clearing the air on the question of, do I support the budget? Yes I do, Mr. Speaker. Do I like it all? Well no I don't, Mr. Speaker. There's many things I would like to do.

I'm always very ambitious for the work of the public service and for government, but I have found out the hard way in my own personal life that sometimes when things don't go the way you expect them to and when your revenues are not exceeding your expenditures sufficiently, that you have to make adjustments. And I don't think anybody ever likes to do that but when you listen to any financial planner one of the first things they say is that you have to do that if you want to in fact increase your overall prospects of long-term financial success.

You know, Mr. Speaker, over the years we've had Action Saskatchewan, the mayor in Regina, many people identifying that attitude is the main issue for growth in Saskatchewan. And the one thing I haven't seen change in the entire time that I've been in this legislature is the attitude of the opposition. They will continue to criticize everything about Saskatchewan, everyone in Saskatchewan, and every effort that anyone makes to improve Saskatchewan.

And you know, I took the time to read the c.v.'s (curriculum vitae) of the newly elected people over there and I actually was

surprised at the very high calibre of background — surprised because these people would be experienced enough to know that in business it's not always what you do but there is such a matter as the climate for your area of business. And I would have thought that people with the background that many of these people had would have a little more respect for the facts and a little more respect for what it takes to credibly run a budget.

(20:15)

And so I'm a little surprised to see one member after the other stand up with not more innovative ways of how to save and redirect money, but 1,000 more ideas on how to spend money. And I just don't see that this is really getting us anywhere.

I want to go to the issue for a moment, and I know it's controversial, Mr. Speaker, but I want to go to the issue of rural services because for many years businesses have been closing in rural Saskatchewan. And I guess it's a bit of a chicken-and-egg problem. But if you ask people why those businesses are closing, it's because people drive right past them and go into the larger centres to do their shopping.

We have the same issue with many of our rural service facilities out there. People drive right past them and go into the city where they believe they'll have access to more specialists or access to a higher level of service. And the fact of the matter is, is you cannot force people to use a local service if they are determined to use a different one.

And I think there has to be a little reality about where the population is choosing to live in Saskatchewan and that there is some obligation at some point to have funding follow the trends in population.

The other thing I want to mention, which is just a fact and there doesn't seem to be any acknowledgement of it, is that we have the highest number of long-term care beds of anywhere in Canada. And there doesn't seem to be any acknowledgement of that as well. It's just a fact.

So I see a lot of this negativity driven by ideology, not by facts. And it's troubling again, considering the calibre of people that have been elected who I thought would have a little more commitment to a factual debate in the legislature.

The other night I was at a banquet, and I was sitting with someone from central mortgage and housing. And I said, you know, people talk about population loss in the province, and yet I see all these big boxes going up; I see a lot of business expansion in Regina; I see very good numbers for new housing starts. So I said to this person, what's your opinion on why there's all this business activity, and yet we keep having reports of population loss?

So he shared with me that from 1996 to 2001 we did suffer net out-migration of 18,452 persons. However, the census tells us that the province grew from 372,820 households in 1996 to 379,675 in the 2001, which is a net improvement of 6,900 households. And certainly we have seen a great deal of in-migration and he said to me that most of that, of people forming households, is from Alberta. And I will explain in a

minute, Mr. Speaker, why I think that is in terms of affordability.

But in that time period when I mentioned that 18,000 people had left, 89,639 people in-migrated to Saskatchewan, 87 per cent of which were from other provinces; and the remainder were people who came in through international migration.

Now why would folks be choosing Saskatchewan to establish a household? Well again if you look at the facts, Mr. Speaker, from the *Leader-Post*, on April 1, 2004, there is an intercity comparison of taxes and household charges for a two-income family at a \$50,000 income level. And this includes — I'll just quickly run through the list — income tax, tax credits and rebates, health premiums, retail sales tax, gasoline tax, mortgage cost, property taxes, home heating, electricity, telephone, and auto insurance.

So the base on which this was compared was the same from province to province across Canada. So what does it tell us? In Vancouver that package of services is \$23,090. In Toronto it's \$23,292; Calgary, 17,317; Halifax, 17,765.

Then we get down to the 15,000 folks: St. John's, 15,876; Charlottetown, 15,692; St. John, 15,611; Montreal, 15,827; Winnipeg, 15,053; leaving us, Mr. Speaker, with the very cheapest place in Canada for a total package for a household — \$14,383 in Saskatoon. Now that's I think a pretty plain fact. And in fact, when I talked to our mayor he says, I don't know why people keep complaining because the facts don't prove it out.

And why is it that intelligent business people with a background in economic development are unwilling to acknowledge the facts about the fact that this is just one heck of a terrific place for families to live? Certainly the CMHC (Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation) stats would prove out that people are making that decision. But no, we have instead a group of people led by the member from Swift Current, who have an ideology about business.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I don't like to attack people individually, but when you look at the background of the newly appointed leader, the fact of the matter is, is that he doesn't have business background. His huge dedication to the private sector is all theoretical; he's never actually tested himself in the waters of the private sector, a little like the member from Wood River who has also spent his entire life living on the public purse. So what we have here is a theoretical commitment to an ideology but no particular desire in their own lives to walk the talk.

We look for indications of what their policies are and are confronted with a blank policy page that indicates absolutely nothing about what their policies are.

Then we find out that the new Leader of the Saskatchewan Party worked for John Gerich, Devine's caucus Whip and associate minister of Economic Development and Tourism. Well I don't have to say too much. Anybody who knows the history of the time knows what that member must have witnessed in that particular situation.

And when we talk about new ideas, the economic policies that

we're seeing put forward by the members opposite would make Adam Smith turn in his grave. These are policies that haven't been around since 1790. So I just . . . that before people start talking about growth perhaps they should walk the talk and actually get involved in a little business activity of their own.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — When we . . . actually the member — although the folks at home wouldn't necessarily benefit from all the side comments here — wonder about my business background.

Well in fact I have run several businesses, Mr. Speaker, and very successfully, and in fact got an award and was nominated for a business award when I was a member of the chamber of commerce in La Ronge. What can you do, Mr. Speaker? Some people are just natural risk takers, and others aren't, and there doesn't seem to be a lot that you can do about that.

But I do want to speak for a moment about some of the comments the member from Wood River made about losses in Crown investments. Again, any business people would know that there is no way to be 100 per cent sure if you're perhaps part of an investment firm and you're deciding what to invest in to benefit your shareholders, your stockholders. And what you know, that in any portfolio you're going to have some losses and some that make money. But what is important, Mr. Speaker, is that overall you have a net profit in your portfolio.

Well overall since SaskTel started investing in international investments, they are net 111 million to the good. And in fact many of the businesses cited by the member today are moving into their five-year success that most small businesses experience when they're going through the trajectory towards success.

So when we talk about what the priorities are in this budget, well obviously public health care is one of our great priorities because it's what differentiates us from other places in the world where people lose their businesses, their homes, and have to sacrifice everything, even for the cost of having a child, never mind having a serious illness. We live next door to the United States where 40 million people aren't covered by any kind of health care. We've seen exposés on the home care down there where many seniors are just tied in their beds. Many are not fed properly.

We don't have that kind of a system here because it's not the kind of system we believe in. We believe in a publicly funded system where people are treated with dignity and where there's fairness in the application of the system. And that system there, the HMOs (health maintenance organization) that run people's health plans, even tell them which doctor they can go to see, which services they can get. And your chances of getting private insurance go down if there's any chance you might actually need it.

So it's not the right kind of system, and I think we need the full support of both sides of the House here to continue to support a public system in Canada, even though we do know that we have to make changes continually to improve this system and the way it works.

As you know, 85 per cent of all increased spending in the budget went to health care, so I think it's pretty clear that this is a very substantial priority. The next increase to education and then the next most substantial amount to rural Saskatchewan . . . and I think that does reflect the priorities of people in Saskatchewan.

I want to speak just for a moment, Mr. Speaker, about taxation. We talked about continuing to cut taxes responsibly without jeopardizing health and education. And I have to say, Mr. Speaker, that even with the small tax increase of 1 per cent that happened in this particular budget, Saskatchewan people are still on a net basis better off than we were before we began tax reform. We managed to cut taxes for an average of \$1,000 for the average Saskatchewan family, and this will be a very small bite out of that tax reform. So people are still net beneficiaries of the tax reforms that we took in Saskatchewan.

Now it did take us four years to accomplish that, and during the past election our platform had a modest cost of 152 million. And what was the Sask Party's platform promise? It was 500 million, Mr. Speaker, with a lot of missing money and expenses that weren't accounted for — a platform that their own former leader of the opposition admitted in *The Star Phoenix* on November 4 was missing a gap of about 150 million in revenues to support this.

And you know, they say that the government was hiding the financial situation. Well that seems rather odd when they had a press conference in August of 2003 prior to the election which states, and I quote, Mr. Speaker. This is a quote actually from the auditor's report as well:

The government's accumulated deficit is large and its finances are vulnerable to changes in commodity prices, interest rates, and the weather, said Wendel, the Provincial Auditor. (The story continues.) The auditor's report describes the demands on government finances caused by the weather. The 2002-03 results show the government's support to farmers and for fire suppression are costly during periods of drought, and for example the government's cost for its crop insurance program was (are you listening in the opposition . . . for the crop insurance program) was 200 million in 2002 and 480 million in 2003.

Please do tell me how that constitutes a decline in support for people in rural Saskatchewan who we have gone the distance with in this particular situation.

So I'm saying that you clearly knew, and you had a press conference about the fact that you knew. And you know I have a lot more to tell you about a budget of a government that cares for the most vulnerable people: the disabled, the working poor. And we've done a great deal in this budget to support folks who are trying to get on their feet and get into the workplace. But I'm going to have to leave that to another one of my colleagues to tell that story.

(20:30)

So thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and what we need here is a little more appreciation of the facts, a little less dedication

to ideology. And I will be supporting this budget. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Melville-Saltcoats.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I've been elected to this legislature for nine years, and this is without a doubt the most devastating budget that I have ever seen brought forward to the people of Saskatchewan: devastating to the farmers in this province, Mr. Speaker — and I'll get into that more in a few minutes — devastating to businesses of all kinds, devastating to union workers and non-union workers alike, devastating to the provincial growth of this province which should be so crucial in the mind of whoever is government at this time.

Population growth — we see again the population's been dropping in the province of Saskatchewan. Everything in this budget is going to help drive our population down instead of up, Mr. Speaker, which the government should be dealing with.

Mr. Speaker, I notice Murray Mandryk had a write-up this last weekend in the paper saying that . . . well I believe he was saying that this budget didn't even warrant a name. And I was trying to think of what this name could really be for this budget because the last eight budgets there's always been something in there, whether it's growth or prosperity or whatever — usually a myth under the NDP — but there's been a name. But nothing on this one.

But I come to the conclusion it probably should be called the Pinocchio file, Mr. Speaker, because if you go back to the November election, from what the Premier and the NDP said they were going to do to what they did in this budget . . . is totally, totally the opposite. I mean it's totally disingenuous; it's deceiving. And the scare tactics that they ran in the election, Mr. Speaker, there was nothing in this budget that they said they were going to do in the November election.

I want to go over some of the highlights. And the highlights I might add, Mr. Speaker, are all negative to the people of Saskatchewan.

I start, Mr. Speaker, with the 1 per cent PST (provincial sales tax) increase. This is not a rural issue. This is not just a urban issue. This hurts everybody in Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker.

I want to go through the highlights first by agriculture, the ones that affect our farmers and our ranchers in the province of Saskatchewan. And listen, Mr. Speaker, because there's a long list of things that negatively affect our farmers.

The elimination of the farm fuel tax rebate on gasoline and propane effective January 1, 2004. Effective April 7, 2004, the fuel tax rebate of 15 per cent will apply to 20 per cent of gasoline and propane purchases at bulk fuel outlets. Also, Mr. Speaker, that affects rural and urban people.

Farmers also . . . no new indexation of income tax rates. The

livestock and horticultural facilities incentive program will not be renewed. There goes another program, Mr. Speaker.

One that was announced a couple of days before the budget, Mr. Speaker, that's really going to affect rural Saskatchewan but will affect all of Saskatchewan is increased vehicle registration fees. And it's our understanding, Mr. Speaker, that some farm vehicles — trucks, pups, and trailers behind trucks — will go up as much as \$1,200. Mr. Speaker, that just keeps adding to the bottom line at a time when farmers can least afford it.

Mr. Speaker, we also talk about in the budget, we see the absence of no property tax relief. And that's interesting, Mr. Speaker, because I have some quotes here from the Premier when he talked in Yorkton — I believe it was — on October 17 when he was putting out the NDP platform. And I quote, Mr. Speaker:

It's a platform that is financially achievable and financially viable. (And, Mr. Speaker) It is a platform that provides for the room to receive the recommendations of the Boughen Commission on the funding of education. It's a platform that is realistic, practical, and above all affordable.

Well the Pinocchio files come to life once again, Mr. Speaker. The noses are growing on that side, and I can't go any further as you well know, Mr. Speaker, or I won't be on my feet long.

Mr. Speaker, the Premier promised they were going to deal with the Boughen report. If they weren't, what on earth did they pay cash dollars to have it done? Why did they have it done at all if they weren't going to listen to it? But then I thought, well go a little deeper into the Boughen report. He also recommended that they expand and raise the PST. And they did that; they raised the PST. But they forgot to read further because he said, address the education tax on property, both urban and rural, but especially on farm land, Mr. Speaker. So they read part of the report. They forgot to go further and read the other part of the report.

Mr. Speaker, they also went into . . . and this really affects rural Saskatchewan, in fact not just rural Saskatchewan but mainly rural Saskatchewan. Health care facilities will be closed.

Well déjà vu because in 1992 that government, the NDP government closed 52 rural hospitals. I know, Mr. Speaker, because some of mine were closed. In fact they were planning to rebuild the one in Langenburg where they had \$3 million raised. And this government came along and squashed the idea, cancelled it — 52 hospitals gone.

Then we saw in '95, Mr. Speaker, nothing mentioned in the election of course, three, four more hospitals closed. And let's remember back to those years because the Plains was one of those hospitals, Mr. Speaker. Served all of rural Saskatchewan, was a very good hospital, and right now the mess they've got us in with health care, wouldn't the Plains look good to shorten the waiting lists in Saskatchewan, both urban and rural?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Bjornerud: — They went on in this budget, Mr. Speaker, to say that they're going to close or shut down some of the long-term care beds in Saskatchewan. I'll tell you, Mr. Speaker, that's put the fear of God in our seniors in this province. I went home on the weekend and from the administrator to the workers to my parents, along with every other person in that care home, are scared of this government.

And I find that amazing, Mr. Speaker, after the election in November when they said, watch the Sask Party; they'll close facilities like this. Well that's the party that's closing them right now. That's the party we can't trust. That's the party that's disingenuous, and in the next election I don't think scare tactics will work, Mr. Speaker.

I don't think the people of this province are going to fall for that one twice. I don't think union members in this province are going to fall for that one twice. And I know one thing, Mr. Speaker; I know my mother ain't going to fall for that one. She didn't vote for them this time and I can be darn sure she's never going to vote for them after this.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Bjornerud: — Water testing fee increases. That's going to cost urban and rural towns and RMs out there. Hearing care fees increased.

Now we get into one of the big ones, Mr. Speaker. Never mentioned a word about this in the election. They're closing 22 rural service centres. Well here we go again. Many towns, and a lot of them small towns in this province, have people working in those rural service centres that have lost their job now. They're gone. So another nail in the coffin of rural Saskatchewan.

But we should be used to it, Mr. Speaker, because since 1992 there isn't a member on that side now, or ones that have been here and gone, that really cared about rural Saskatchewan — never highlighted like it has been in this budget.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Bjornerud: — And again, Mr. Speaker, I talk about the loss of hundreds of employees, but many of them that live in rural Saskatchewan. The cancellation of the farm family opportunities initiative and Conservation Cover Program — another program that farmers use, Mr. Speaker — \$700,000 reduction to base funding for Prairie Diagnostic Services lab, and this was responsible for all CWD (chronic wasting disease) testing in Saskatchewan. The elimination of the short-term hog loan program. Livestock drought loan program — gone, Mr. Speaker.

And here's one that's been a continual thing the NDP government have hit on — crop insurance budget cut by \$6 million. That's after last year increasing premiums by 52 per cent, increasing premiums this year by 13 per cent, at the same time cutting the coverage that farmers have. The last time I looked, we've had droughts in this province. At a time when they can least afford cuts in the program, this government sees fit to make cuts to agriculture programs in the province of Saskatchewan.

What a way to grow Saskatchewan, Mr. Premier, Mr. Speaker. No wonder our farm kids are leaving for Alberta. They see what their parents are going through in agriculture and they also see that this government is not standing behind our farmers and helping them through bad times, Mr. Speaker.

There's also closure of extension services branches. And now we get to a pet peeve of mine, Mr. Speaker, only \$1.6 million in revenue-sharing funding to rural municipalities. Now if you take, Mr. Speaker, the 1 per cent increase in the PST and many of the cuts that I've listed already and many more that I am going to go through, if you add that together, RMs (rural municipality) are once again being downloaded on. They didn't get an increase in revenue sharing. They lost money, Mr. Speaker, once again.

In '92, RMs and urban municipalities all over this province took a hit. Well this time if I was SARM and the municipalities . . . And I'm sure I don't have to carry the torch for them; they'll be speaking for themselves. In fact, I would be very surprised if they're not out in front of this building before this session's over after this budget, Mr. Speaker — probably along with a lot of union members that will be joining them out front of this building.

Mr. Speaker, they can't take any more downloading from this government. They're the fibre and the backbone, the municipalities in this province, and they need funding from this government to help them carry through, especially when farmers are having a bad time, and especially when education tax is on the rise out on the farm because this government sees fit not to deal with that problem.

Where we were in '92 where the farmers paid 40 per cent and the government paid 60, and urban taxpayers for the education tax paid 40 per cent and the government paid 60 — well guess where we are now, Mr. Speaker. Because the new money that this government in this budget put into education, it will last until about August, Mr. Speaker. And after that, guess who's going to pick the tab up. Local school divisions have nowhere but to pass that on to the local taxpayer. And once again this government has turned its back on the people of Saskatchewan.

And, Mr. Speaker, it's not just rural; it's urban and rural. Again we go back to health care. It's not just rural cuts out there that are going to hurt rural people. When our hospitals are closed, we come into Regina and Saskatoon for treatment. Guess what? The waiting lists are going to increase here. City people are on those same waiting lists that us rural people are and are going to have to wait just as long as we are, Mr. Speaker. This budget hurts everybody in Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker.

We go to SERM, Mr. Speaker. And I know some of the members on that side are quite interested in this one. SERM offices will be closed in nine communities. SERM offices will no longer sell fishing, hunting, and trapping licences — the same licences, I might add. Maybe some of these offices couldn't collect that much because they have all gone up, Mr. Speaker.

Change to SERM will mean about 200 employees will lose their jobs. Now I find that amazing, Mr. Speaker, after the November election when the Premier and those MLAs on that

side went around this province and their supporters said, don't elect the Saskatchewan Party; you should be scared of them for what they'll do to this province. Elect us because we can be trusted.

Well, Mr. Speaker, after this budget, I don't think there's anybody, even NDP supporters, that will trust that NDP government.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Bjornerud: — Mr. Speaker, they're closing six SERM fire bases and three historical parks are going to open later than usual — that's historical parks.

Now we can go to another problem we have out there, and again affects both urban and rural people in this province, Mr. Speaker. We're not going to open 12 parks in this province until the middle of June. My God, we might as well call off summer, Mr. Speaker, because it's half over by then.

Mr. Speaker, somebody on that side of the House has to shake their head and see what we're doing. We're killing the economy of Saskatchewan. We have business people that are either in the parks, outside the parks, that rely on our five months of summer if it's a good summer.

And what we've done now is taken away about a third of their income. But we've hurt the province, because on their income they pay tax. There's PST, there's a number of taxes out there. There's gas tax out there for tourists coming in.

Tourism should be one of the biggest highlights that we have in this province. It could be a growth industry for the province of Saskatchewan. And what do we do? We say, well you're not welcome here in Saskatchewan; we're closing our parks.

Why are we closing our parks? To save \$100,000. And the Minister of Environment today, Mr. Speaker, says every penny counts. Well it does. But when you close the parks and don't open them till June 15 to save \$100,000 and you lose \$1 million, somebody has no sense on that side at all, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Bjornerud: — It doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure out you're killing Saskatchewan, and I'm not even sure that the minister understands what he just did, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I found it interesting this afternoon that the Minister of Health was talking about books that the members on this side of the House should read. While he was doing that I thought, you know, there must be books that members on that side should read. Because number one is they certainly need an education on how you grow a province.

And I was thinking, you know, the budget — well we've had four deficit budgets — and I was thinking, well maybe we could get them the book called creative accounting. All of them do. But then I thought they must have all read that, because for the last four years under this Premier, there's been some tremendous creative accounting done over there to try and let on they've balanced the books.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Bjornerud: — Also, Mr. Speaker, I thought maybe . . . There's a number of stories that Pinocchio has out. I know when I was a kid I read them and I didn't pay much attention. But I certainly see there was some value to them at that time, because there was kind of some reasoning in there that I see that really fits the members across.

(20:45)

Mr. Speaker, when we talk about creative accounting, and I notice the Minister of Finance got up the other day and he was so proud with his little flower and he said, this is the 11th balanced budget. Well you know what the problem was? There is about only 28 people in the province of Saskatchewan that actually believe that.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Bjornerud: — Because that one fooled for a while Mr. Speaker, but nobody is falling for that one now. Before this budget, Mr. Speaker, there was about \$1.5 billion of new debt in the province of Saskatchewan because the rainy day fund does not exist.

It would be like me, Mr. Speaker, wanting to buy a new car and not having any money — and I know what that is like, Mr. Speaker. But I will go out and I'll borrow the money from one of the banks, finance company or something. But you know I don't want the wife to know I borrowed that money. So you know what I am going to do? I am going to create a fiscal stabilization fund for myself. So I am going to borrow from the bank. I am going to take that money and I'm going to put it over in this account. And when the wife looks, I've got a brand new car but I don't owe them nothing.

But do you know the problem with that, Mr. Speaker? My kids are going to have to pay that off because I am not going to have the nerve. I can't tell the wife. She can't know. I'm going to let the kids do it.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Bjornerud: — And I haven't told them, Mr. Speaker. If they are watching tonight, they will know. I hate, Mr. Speaker, to break it to my family like that, but I couldn't think of a better example, Mr. Speaker. The rainy day fund I was going to call it and I thought no, I want to be like the Minister of Finance — it's the fiscal stabilization. And as the Minister of Agriculture would say, it is the right thing to do.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Bjornerud: — Mr. Speaker, I could go on, but I know there's other members that are just hurting to get up.

Once again I will say, Mr. Speaker, because I think it is actually important that the people of Saskatchewan understand, that after all the hurt that they have put on Saskatchewan people we have another deficit budget of \$312 million. It doesn't matter what way you shake. If you did it like I did my car, if you do it like the Minister of Finance, we still owe 312 million more than we

did before that budget.

Mr. Speaker, do you know something? The debt of the province of Saskatchewan is higher now than when Grant Devine left office. How did that happen? I remember for about eight years that government did nothing but blame Grant Devine. Then they graduated to the federal government. Well right now I think what they should do is look in the mirror because, Mr. Speaker, after 12 years of being in government, you had better start pointing the finger at yourself. You did it; you created the mess. And, you know, I think they were surprised when they won the last election. They can clean up their own mess, Mr. Speaker.

And you know when the next election comes, Mr. Speaker, whether it's Thursday, Friday, a year from now, two years from now, four years from now — it will depend how glued to their seat they stay, Mr. Speaker — the people of Saskatchewan are not falling for that campaign in the next election like they ran in November, and they certainly are not going to fall for a budget like we just saw. Mr. Speaker, you've probably come to this conclusion too. I can't support the budget but I can support the amendment.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Moose Jaw North.

Mr. Hagel: — Well thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed a pleasure to enter into this debate, Mr. Speaker, on the budget. And given that I have the opportunity to welcome you when standing to my feet this time, I want to take a moment just to say congratulations to you, Mr. Speaker, and to commend the historic moment that you were the absolute very first Speaker re-elected by the members of our House. And, Mr. Speaker, I just want to join others here who have extended their personal congratulations to you and extend confidence in your chairing of our sessions here.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I listened with some interest and amusement to the hon. member for Melville-Saltcoats who just talked about . . . and the hon. member, Mr. Speaker, he says he's been in the House for a while and he's seen a number of budgets, nine I think he said, and I'm a bit surprised, Mr. Speaker, that after having seen nine budgets he's still having a hard time figuring out how to read these things.

And, Mr. Speaker, the fact of the matter is I'm proud to join with the members on this side of the House to vote, when we come to the vote, for the 11th consecutive balanced budget in all of Canada. It is the highest number and the first.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I know the hon. member, he has an analogy — he has an analogy about how his family manages or mismanages their finances. Mr. Speaker, as complicated as he tries to make it, it just ain't that complicated. Sorry about that, Mr. Speaker.

But the fact of the matter is there are people in this province who have children and what they have is a bank account, a chequing account, and they have a savings account. What goes into the chequing account, Mr. Speaker, is the monthly income

and the expenses that go out, and what's in the savings account are the savings that have been there and they have been built up over a period of time.

Now the hon. member says there's no cash. Well, Mr. Speaker, they all have . . . none of them . . . the savings account don't have a box with a bunch of \$100 bills or \$1,000 bills. There's no secret box with \$1,000 bills. No, no, Mr. Speaker. What there is, there's a savings account book. It's a book. It's got a number in it. And when you take it to your credit union to get your money, they look at the book. They say, there's that amount of money, and you want money that's less than that, we give it to you because it's yours.

Mr. Speaker, that is the Fiscal Stabilization Fund. The people of Saskatchewan believe in saving for the future, for a rainy day. So does their government. We will manage the finances of the people of Saskatchewan just as prudently as the people of Saskatchewan, and they will have none of this hocus-pocus financial stuff that we get offered as explanations of high financing by the members opposite.

Mr. Speaker, there is no doubt in my mind why they're there and we're here.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hagel: — Now, Mr. Speaker, I listened with some interest as the hon. member talks about the attack on rural Saskatchewan. And, Mr. Speaker, I listened with interest to what he has to say and I pick up a recent copy of *The Western Producer*, the March 25 edition.

Mr. Speaker, there's an article in there about a recent provincial report about the province. It says there is a provincial government report that acknowledged that the growth in the province has been mainly on the main corridor between the two larger cities in the province. It goes on to say that:

. . . (the) per capita income (in the province) was . . . (2,700), but in (the) rural . . . (area) it ranged from . . . (only 13) to \$16,000. (In fact) few rural residents have access to high-paying jobs and few companies are willing to locate in rural areas because of poorer services.

It goes on to say that the main, one of the main concerns is access to the management of water. Well, Mr. Speaker, there were two government MLAs on this report and it says that they spent more than a year reviewing the previous reports and talking to hundreds of rural residents to come up with a picture of rural life. And then it says, Mr. Speaker, note this. I listened to the hon. member's remarks and it says:

That picture — of volunteer burnout, crumbling arenas, hospitals that can't keep doctors and towns that can't attract (business) . . .

Mr. Speaker, what's the province? The Alberta report recognizes rural hardship — the province is their beloved Alberta, their beloved Alberta. The hon. member says he encourages his family members to go to their beloved Alberta where the rural report is pointing to hardship.

Mr. Speaker, I say that not to depress the people of Alberta but to make it clear to the people of Saskatchewan that we live in the real world here. We live in the real world. One of the great advantages, and in fact I think the hon. member for Saltcoats-Melville in his annual report to his constituency quoted here just a week or two ago in his local newspaper, said that one of the things they're going to have watch out for now that the numbers are close is they're going to have to watch what they actually say in opposition because they're going to be held accountable.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hagel: — But it hasn't happened yet, hasn't happened yet. Listen to his . . . What a wake-up call; what a wake-up call. Mr. Speaker, there are people on this side of the House who get up every morning and are prepared to be held accountable for the decisions they make.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hagel: — This isn't something that . . . This is not a game that we're playing here, Mr. Speaker. This is about real life.

And as I look at what is going on in the budget that we have before us, Mr. Speaker, it seems to me that there are three characteristics that will mark a good budget in any year: one, that the budget puts forth a plan that is sustainable; secondly, that it aids those who are the most vulnerable of our citizens; and thirdly, that it responds to the top priorities of the people of the province. Surely that's the characteristic of a good budget.

And, Mr. Speaker, let me say, in spades, in my view this budget, although it required difficult decision making, it was made by people who are prepared to accept the mantle of responsibility that was given to us by the people of Saskatchewan by democratic decision. And the top two priorities very clearly for the people of Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, are health care and education — very clearly, very clearly. There will be nobody who will argue differently that those are the top two priorities, Mr. Speaker.

In this budget — health care clearly the top priority — 160 new million dollars of two and a quarter million dollars in total that are new. In addition to that, another \$45 million new money in education. You put the two together, Mr. Speaker, over 90 per cent of the new money going to the top two priorities.

How is it being realized? Well in health care, Mr. Speaker, \$2.7 billion in spending this year in the health care budget. Mr. Speaker, that's \$2,700 for every man, woman, and child in the province of Saskatchewan. Over \$5,000 a year a family of two; a family of four, Mr. Speaker, over \$10,000 a year being spent on their behalf in the interest of their good health. Mr. Speaker, not too shabby, now 44 per cent of the total of the province of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, in that increase to some important areas that we've been hearing concerns about on this side of the House for a long time — we don't have to come to the House here to hear concerns; we do it every day at home in our constituency — increase in funding to support the needs of the Saskatchewan Cancer Agency. And, Mr. Speaker, one that's important in my

home constituency as well as at here in the city of Regina, an increase by one MRI machine, Mr. Speaker, that will help to deal with the needs for diagnosis.

Mr. Speaker, in the world of education, \$1.2 billion for education in this budget. And of interest to those in the world of post-secondary education, Mr. Speaker, there is an increase in Canada's first post-secondary graduate tax credit, increase in it in this budget from \$350 to \$500 and a plan, Mr. Speaker, to raise that to \$1,000 over the course of the next four years.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hagel: — Now, Mr. Speaker, in this budget one of the tough decisions made was to increase the sales tax by 1 per cent. Mr. Speaker, the decision to do that will generate some additional \$130 million, Mr. Speaker — almost, almost equivalent to the increase in the health care spending of \$160 million.

And, Mr. Speaker, sometimes people will tend to be of the view that health care is free. And I would argue, Mr. Speaker, health care is not free. Health care is not free. There is, Mr. Speaker, a commitment by every single Saskatchewan citizen to contribute towards their health care.

Mr. Speaker, in this budget there is an increase to the sales tax. There have been debates over the years, Mr. Speaker, there have been debates over the years about the appropriate way of funding your health care system. In Alberta they have a system where they charge a health care premium — \$528 I believe it is for a single individual in Alberta, \$528. Well the hon. member says they might as well come to Saskatchewan. It is the first sensible thing I have heard from that side of the House in the entire budget debate.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hagel: — Mr. Speaker, I am impressed. The hon. member from Cannington has had a vision; the light has been turned on. Because he has recognized, he has recognized that in Saskatchewan the health care premium is the provincial sales tax.

I have argued for many years, Mr. Speaker — maybe some year I will get my way — that here in Saskatchewan it would be more appropriate to call it the provincial health tax. Because as a matter of fact, Mr. Speaker, in my judgment it is, it is the health care premium that we pay in this province already. We have been for years and we will continue to do it. And we will do it on the basis of consumption, on a basis of ability to pay instead of the Alberta way — the Saskatchewan Party, the Alberta envy party way of \$528 if you're a single individual; and if you are in a family, then you get to pay a health care premium in Alberta of \$1,058, I think it is.

Well, Mr. Speaker, that's not our way. Here in Saskatchewan we made a decision that contributes to the sustainability of the budget which I think is an important criteria in any good budget. And I will stand in defence of the importance of the increase of the sales tax.

(21:00)

Now, Mr. Speaker, before I take my place, I do want to address the matter of support for people who are the most vulnerable because surely it should ought to be the responsibility of all of us when we come to these hon. chambers, Mr. Speaker, to make decisions that will ensure the stability and the protection of those who are the most vulnerable in our society. And I'm very, very proud, Mr. Speaker, of some of the decisions that are in this budget that I'd like to make quick reference to.

And I find it very, very interesting that not once, not once have I heard any of the hon. members opposite make any reference to any of the social funding improvements in this budget — none. It has gone completely over their heads; it's completely outside their vision, Mr. Speaker.

And I would be very, very interested in hearing whoever's speaking next — I think it may be the hon. member for Cannington — I'm sure he's going to want to expand on the social conscience of the Saskatchewan Party because here he is now, he's on record, he understands that it is better to be in Saskatchewan than his beloved Alberta. And I'm sure he's going to want to tell us just why that is, why this province is so much more preferable in terms of our social programs in the vision of the Saskatchewan Party.

Mr. Speaker, we have in the province of Saskatchewan a very progressive program called Building Independence, which is support for low-income families with children that make it always, always, always, without fail, better off for them to be working than not working. Mr. Speaker, a very important part of that system is the employment supplement. And in this budget, Mr. Speaker, there is an increase of \$2 million which provides the employment supplement to be extended by, we estimate, an additional 680 families in addition to those some 7,000 families who are currently eligible for and receiving the employment supplement.

Mr. Speaker, a very important part of that as well is the family benefits. This is for families who are not receiving social assistance, and an increase in funding of some \$1.4 million will extend back to some 2,700 more Saskatchewan families.

Mr. Speaker, prior to the budget of a year ago I remember the Premier, and that time the minister of Community Resources and Employment, making an announcement together that in last year's budget, Mr. Speaker, there was the greatest increase in child care spaces that there has ever been in the history of the province. And there was in fact stated at that time, Mr. Speaker, not just a one-year plan, but a four-year plan, and that four-year plan continues right on schedule, Mr. Speaker.

And this year, in addition to the 500 new spaces announced last year on the way to 1,200 spaces over the course of four years, there will be an additional 200 new licensed spaces for the people of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, this is a very important support for low-income families to ensure that their parents have the ability to participate in learning, improving their educations, or going to work as part of supporting their families and lending stability and security to the future.

Mr. Speaker, it is also important to me that there is an

integrated plan bringing together child care and early learning as part of a thoughtful plan that will support early learning and child care in the province in the years ahead. Mr. Speaker, this will bring the number by the end of the year of licensed spaces here in Saskatchewan to 8,100.

Mr. Speaker, I want to just take a moment or two if I may as well, to reflect on the announcements in this budget that refer to housing.

For those of us who are fortunate enough to have our own homes, oftentimes we don't think about the significance of this. But the fact of the matter is that when you have low income, one of the things that oftentimes unfortunately seems beyond your wildest dreams is the ability to own, to literally own your own home. Far too often, Mr. Speaker, for lower-income families whose families unfortunately will also have a higher level of illness and so on, higher degrees of insecurity, where you live, you tend to think of as where I am now and it really doesn't have a whole lot more meaning than that.

Mr. Speaker, for families to be able to raise their children in a place that they call their own — our place; this place where our family is growing together in our neighbourhood, where we are building our future, where a child can have his or her room that is his or her place — Mr. Speaker, to far too many families this is beyond their wildest dreams. I am so pleased, Mr. Speaker — it means a great deal to me personally — that in this budget there is movement forward in the area of housing.

Mr. Speaker, it may come as a surprise to many to know that in this year's budget there is over \$200 million being spent in support of housing support for over 17,000 Saskatchewan families. That is the fact of the matter, Mr. Speaker. In this budget there will be, and over the course of the next few months there will be introduced a new housing supplement that will be intended to be linked to better quality housing for families with children.

Mr. Speaker, I have talked to many families across the province over the last several years for whom this will make a huge difference in their security about the place they live in and the quality of that place in order to raise children.

Mr. Speaker, there will become . . . also announced by the Minister of Community Resources and Employment, minister responsible for Housing, at a later time, a new program as well which will provide greater opportunity for Saskatchewan families, lower-income Saskatchewan families to become home owners.

We've got some programs in place already. There is the centenary affordable housing program. Mr. Speaker, in this budget . . . is being announced that we're moving towards the target of 2,000 new homes for low- and moderate-income families over the course of a five-year period, Mr. Speaker. That's part of this that's been previously announced.

There are other neighbourhood development organizations . . . supported homes. There are co-op housing. There are a number of structures that have been in place, and there will be some additional structures being put in place to assist those vulnerable families here in the province of Saskatchewan. And,

Mr. Speaker, for that I feel very, very proud to be associated with the good work of the people on this side of the House.

Mr. Speaker, together inner cities will be rejuvenated. There will be a strengthening of northern communities. And in the process of this, Mr. Speaker, there will also be some expansion to the economy as some . . . over a hundred million dollars in new house building takes place in order to achieve the objectives of these programs.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I just want to make a brief reference to supports for people with disabilities. For far too long in our society, Mr. Speaker, people with disabilities have been the forgotten citizens, and it was the experience of this government, Mr. Speaker, that we received the report of the Saskatchewan council on disabilities and their action plan back in '01, Mr. Speaker. And since that time, this government has been busy beaver away in a series, a steady series of progress for people with disabilities, towards the objective of becoming full, participating citizens in our province to enjoy full citizenship, full citizenship, Mr. Speaker, in a number of ways to be fully participating in all elements of our society.

For far too long, for far too long, the barriers have been left to be. And they will only go away, Mr. Speaker, one way, and that's if the provincial government — together with the federal government and our municipal governments as well, but largely initiated by the provincial government — if those disability barriers are attacked one by one, are broken down and enable, as a result of that, Mr. Speaker, people with disabilities to participate in mainstream activity.

Mr. Speaker, being a full citizen when you're disabled means being able to go work — being able to go to work, not just at what some will call a plastic job. I remember, Mr. Speaker, very clearly talking with some people with disabilities about a year and a half ago who said to me, whatever you do, don't do those plastic jobs. I asked them what they meant, and they said, those jobs, you know where you give out some money for people to hire us for a while, and they said you know what happens. You know how long those jobs last. They said from the point of view of the government, you may say, oh well at least people with disabilities got some work experience. But they told something I'll never forget. They said to us it feels like we lost another job.

Mr. Speaker, people with disabilities don't want plastic jobs. They want real jobs — no better, no worse than every other citizen in our society would wish to have for ourselves or for our family or for our neighbours.

Mr. Speaker, there is support in this budget for attachment to mainstream employment. That's been introduced. That's continued. There is support for people with disabilities to have access to housing supplement. There will continue to be the support, Mr. Speaker, for housing. There will continue to be, Mr. Speaker, support for replacement of transit vehicles, paratransit vehicles as being part of the tradition.

Mr. Speaker, there will continue to be support for early childhood development and intervention programs. Mr. Speaker, there will continue to be the increase last year announced in the social assistance program for people receiving

the disability allowance. And, Mr. Speaker, there is also — alive and well and working very hard — one full-time person who is with the Saskatchewan public service who is working very hard on an initiative to more employ people with disabilities in the public service of Saskatchewan, serving all the people of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, I think that's what a conscientious employer does. And that is also, Mr. Speaker, the sign of a wise employer who recognizes that, as the labour market is tightening, there is an untapped pool of potential, people who have got knowledge and skills who — because they have some barriers — have not been able to participate in the workforce. You address the barriers, Mr. Speaker, and you make available to you and access people who have got disabilities. They have got skills. They have got knowledge and who want to go to work and to support their own families and build their own potential for pensions and so that they can look forward to retiring in dignity just like everybody else.

Well, Mr. Speaker, it is with all of those things in mind that I come to this debate, and I will stand in my place very, very proudly and without hesitation on Thursday when we entertain the amendment moved by the hon. members opposite who have threatened the people of Saskatchewan with an election with their non-confidence vote which is . . . non-confidence motion which has been moved, Mr. Speaker, in every budget in every legislature since the creation of parliamentary democracy over the centuries.

So we're going to have the amendment. Mr. Speaker, I predict the amendment will go the way of the dodo bird, and it will go the way it belongs, Mr. Speaker, when we stand to vote in favour of a plan for the future of Saskatchewan that is sustainable, that puts the priorities of Saskatchewan people first — health care and education — and which promises to improve the lot of those who are most vulnerable in our society.

I will, Mr. Speaker, I will stand and join very, very proudly with the members of government. I will be voting in favour of the budget motion.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Cannington.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, Mr. Speaker, I would like to start off with congratulating you on your election of Speaker again. I know that you find this, the job of Speaker, to be a very interesting and enjoyable one, and I wish to indicate to you, Mr. Speaker, that I will do my part in making sure that your job of Speaker is interesting and enjoyable.

Mr. Speaker, there have been a number of people across the province who have looked at this budget and have noticed the fact that there is no name for it. And I think everybody across the province has been kind of playing the name-the-budget game, and I wanted to put in my submission, Mr. Speaker. And I came up with what I felt was a very appropriate name for this budget, that described the budget, described the development of this budget, described the campaign that led up to the presentation of this budget, Mr. Speaker.

And the name that I've come up with for this budget is, needed within: truth and honesty. Mr. Speaker, that describes what this budget needs. It needs to have the light of truth and honesty shone upon this budget, Mr. Speaker, because this budget is a sham. The campaign was a sham, Mr. Speaker, and the delivery of this budget was a sham.

I was interested to listen to the comments made by the member from Regina Rosemont, Mr. Speaker. And I specifically asked her a question while she was speaking . . . and perhaps Mr. Speaker didn't notice that because he would have called me on it if he had have. But I asked her the question, Mr. Speaker: are you saying that the opposition should have known what the financial situation of the province was prior to the election?

And as she went through her litany, she said yes, you should have known because you were quoting from the Provincial Auditor as to what the financial position of the province was. And, Mr. Speaker, we had a good idea what the financial position of the province was, and it was not a strong position, Mr. Speaker. But the minister of Community Services, Mr. Speaker, seemed to be indicating that she understood what the financial position of the province was.

(21:15)

So I have to ask, well if the minister of Social Services, the member from Regina Rosemont knew what the financial position of the province was, why wouldn't the Finance minister know what the position of the province was? I'd like to quote from the Minister of Finance, Mr. Speaker, from a radio show on the CBC (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation) radio of January 13. And the reporter obviously asked the question of the minister, and the minister responded:

During the campaign (and this is a quote, Mr. Speaker) it wasn't very clear what the immediate financial situation holds and would hold for Saskatchewan.

Well that's kind of strange, Mr. Speaker. Here we have the minister of Community Services, not that long ago in the House . . . says that the opposition should know what the financial position of the province was because we were quoting from the Provincial Auditor who clearly outlined what the position was. But the Minister of Finance says he didn't know what the financial position of the province was during the election campaign.

So how is that, Mr. Speaker, that the opposition can know what the position of the province is financially, the minister of Community Services can know, but the Finance minister doesn't? Was the Premier not telling him? Was he being kept out of the loop by the Finance department, Mr. Speaker? I mean this is a strange situation. And perhaps the Premier should have another one of his infamous commissions to look into this. Why did the Minister of Finance have no knowledge of the position of the province's finances?

He says it wasn't very clear on what the immediate financial situation holds and would hold for Saskatchewan. We were supposed to know. The minister of Social Services . . . Community Services seemed to know, but the Minister of Finance was in the dark. That's a strange situation, Mr.

Speaker, a very strange situation indeed. Makes you wonder why that would happen, it does indeed.

The Minister of Finance goes on to say, "I don't think there was any mistaking the province's financial situation during the course of the provincial election." Let me read that again: "I don't think there was any mistaking the province's financial situation during the course of the provincial election" — a direct quote from the Minister of Finance, Mr. Speaker, on January 13, CBC radio show.

But that's a direct contradiction, Mr. Speaker, from his previous sentence on the very same page in the very same interview. One question he doesn't know. It wasn't clear what the financial situation was, and the second quote, Mr. Speaker, in the same interview: "I don't think there was any mistaking the province's financial situation."

So did the Minister of Finance know, or did the Minister of Finance not know? He can't have both. One of them can't be true, Mr. Speaker. He either knew or he didn't know, but he said both of them, so which one is the truth, Mr. Speaker? And I think that speaks directly to the title that I gave the Minister of Finance's budget, needed within: truth and honesty.

Well a little bit later in the interview, Mr. Speaker, the reporter asked the Minister of Finance about tax hikes. And the Minister of Finance, the member from Regina Victoria — Douglas Park, I think the name of it is now, Regina Douglas Park — said:

Why don't parties want to talk about tax hikes during elections? I don't know. Again it's another one of those conundrums perhaps. I suspect that anyone who talks about tax hikes is not likely to be very popular during the course of an election campaign.

Maybe that was why the Minister of Finance was confused in his first statement, Mr. Speaker, where it talks about the financial situation wasn't clear. But then if that's the case, why would he say in his second statement that it was impossible to mistake the position of the province's finances during the election campaign? Again, Mr. Speaker, I guess it comes back to what is true here. It comes back to that debatable point, Mr. Speaker, of what is the truth in this House.

You know, Mr. Speaker, this is what people across this province are referring to as a budget of betrayal and a budget of hopelessness. When the Minister of Finance is confused about the very position of the financial situation of Saskatchewan, it's certainly easy to confuse the electorate — especially if you set out to do so, Mr. Speaker, which is clearly what happened during the election campaign. The minister of Social Services seemed to have it clear and she felt that the opposition should have it clear. But it wasn't necessary for the Minister of Finance or the Premier to have it clear.

So, Mr. Speaker, I think when you take a look at this budget and you start to question the things that have been presented by the Minister of Finance, you find that they don't add up. They don't add up, Mr. Speaker.

You know I listened to a number of the . . . to the member from Regina Albert South, Regina South now, give his address. And

he talked very much about balance, Mr. Speaker, balance in the budget, that the budget was balanced, Mr. Speaker. Well when you look at the numbers, Mr. Speaker, in the budget books, you find out just how balanced the budget is.

On page 42 it talks about the GRF, general revenue fund budget balances. For the year of 2004-2005 in this budget, Mr. Speaker, you come up with a balance of point one million — \$100,000, Mr. Speaker, is the cumulative balance. And next year they're projecting point two or 200,000; and then point three in 2006, that's 300,000. And then a whopping, Mr. Speaker, a whopping \$42 million in 2007.

But if you talk to the Finance department people, Mr. Speaker, they'll tell you to check a different number because the GRF fund is easily manipulated, manipulated through use of the Fiscal Stabilization Fund.

They tell us, Mr. Speaker, that the numbers you really need to check to understand the financial position of the government — and maybe this is why the Finance minister was confused, shall we say, on this issue; he wasn't checking these numbers — you look on page 78 of this budget and it says, summary statement of changes in net debt.

And it outlines the decrease or increase in net debt for this fiscal year, Mr. Speaker. So that's the amount of money that we're either over, for income over expenditures, or less income than expenditures. And this year, Mr. Speaker, it's 312 million and point one, 100,000 . . . so that's \$312 million more debt. That's what the deficit is this year, Mr. Speaker. There is no balance here; \$312 million in debt; \$312 million in debt. Last year, Mr. Speaker, it was 299 million.

So while the Minister of Finance is talking about balancing the GRF over four years —remember 100,000, 200,000, 300,000, and then 42 million — he hasn't even touched the \$312 million debt this year, Mr. Speaker, and that is going to continue to grow. That is going to continue to grow next year, Mr. Speaker. And if this government doesn't do something to get this province growing, it's going to grow every year after that until we simply are bankrupt, Mr. Speaker.

And this province is heading in that direction. We have more debt now than we've ever had, Mr. Speaker, and it continues to grow under this NDP government, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I was paying attention to what some of the members were talking about, and they were talking about the improvements to the health care system. Well I attended a meeting last week put on by the Minister of Health that talked about the surgical waiting lists in this province and how the minister had a plan in place to cure those surgical waiting lists by measuring them.

Well, Mr. Speaker, his plan was that we're going to get the maximum waiting time down for surgeries in this province to 18 months. It's a laudable goal, Mr. Speaker, to reduce the waiting list, but I submit to you that 18 months waiting for a needed surgery is still too long.

But that's not even the bad part yet, Mr. Speaker. It was going to take two years to get the surgical waiting list in

Saskatchewan down to that 18-month period. The minister was going to put in place six different categories: one that you got in immediately; one you got in with three or four days; and one that was six weeks; one that was three months; one that was six months, one that was eighteen months.

Then the minister says, as we measure this, if one of those categories is doing better than its target — let's say the target is six weeks; let's say the average surgery in that category is happening now in five weeks, which would be a good thing — but what the minister is going to do, he's going to pull resources out of that category and shift them into another category, raising that level back up to the target of six weeks. So rather than it becoming a maximum waiting time, Mr. Speaker, of six weeks, it becomes a minimum waiting time of six weeks or three months or eighteen months, whatever the case may be, Mr. Speaker. That's no way to run a health care system where the maximum becomes the minimum waiting period of time.

So if you need a knee surgery, which right now you're going to wait for 32 months for . . . Now it would be nice to be able to say to that person, the minimum you're going to wait is 18 months because that's supposed to be the maximum as well, but it's going to take you two years.

But if all of a sudden the surgeries in that category were at 12 months and the minister is going to come up and say, sorry, the minimum waiting time is now 18 months. We're taking nurses and doctors out of there and shuffling them off into another category, Mr. Speaker. That's an unacceptable way to run a health care system.

The minister talks about purchasing a new MRI. Certainly not to say that we don't need another MRI in this province but what we need even more, Mr. Speaker, than another MRI is to use the MRIs we already have here. The current system, Mr. Speaker, in Regina utilizes the MRI here for five days a week, five days the next week, and four days on the third week, and they don't operate 12 hours a day, they don't operate 24 hours a day, Mr. Speaker.

If you even just ran them the same hourly schedule, but ran them over the weekends and ran them on the third Friday, you would increase your MRI times by 50 per cent, Mr. Speaker, 50 per cent, and your only cost there would be staffing.

You buy a new MRI, it's going to cost you a million bucks. It's going to cost you money to install. You're going to have to have space in whatever facility that it's going into that's going to have to be renovated, and you still, Mr. Speaker, need new staff to operate that MRI. So operate the current MRIs that we have, Mr. Speaker, which are in place already and you can increase your production there by 50 per cent. But that just goes right over the minister's head, Mr. Speaker, just missed it totally.

Mr. Speaker, I listened to the member from Moose Jaw, Moose Jaw North, in his talk and he talked about how hard it seemed to be to read a budget and to understand it. And I can understand, Mr. Speaker, why the NDP have trouble presenting budgets when they find them that hard to read.

(21:30)

I had the discussion, Mr. Speaker, about three years ago about the Fiscal Stabilization Fund from . . . with the minister of Finance of the time, the member from Saskatoon Massey Place. And, Mr. Speaker, at that time he admitted that there was no savings account — that the money that he had allocated to that account was totally, completely gone; not one red penny left in that account, Mr. Speaker.

So when the member from Moose Jaw North goes into his piggy bank, what he's going to find is that the member from Saskatoon Massey Place has already spent the money. There was no money there. So when he goes to get into his piggy bank, into his savings account, he's got to borrow the money. And that's why it's important to know what the net debt is of the province, rather than the jiggery-pokery that goes on in the General Revenue Fund, Mr. Speaker.

And the real number is \$312 million of new debt for the province of Saskatchewan for 2004-2005, and growing thereafter, Mr. Speaker. So it's another part of the need for a title for this budget — needed within: truth and honesty, Mr. Speaker, truth and honesty.

While I was out campaigning, since I'm talking about the member from Regina . . . Moose Jaw North, Mr. Speaker, I did a little campaigning in Moose Jaw during the campaign. And one of the things that came forward on the doorsteps, Mr. Speaker, was people were telling me as I would knock on their door: you, the Sask Party, you're going to close Valley View hospital. No, Mr. Speaker, we had never said a word about Valley View. But I know what was going on.

What was going on, Mr. Speaker, is that the NDP campaigners were running around, especially to the people working in Valley View or the people who had family members in Valley View, telling them that the facility was going to close. Now why would they be doing that?

Well let's take a step back, Mr. Speaker, prior to the campaign. I'm sure that somebody within the Premier's office, within the ministry of Finance, went to the minister, to the Finance department, to the bureaucrats and said, what do we need to do to straighten out the economy of Saskatchewan? And the bureaucrats within the Department of Finance laid out some possible scenarios, Mr. Speaker. They laid out scenarios such as increasing taxation. They laid out scenarios of job cuts within the civil service. They laid out scenarios of closures of facilities such as Valley View, such as long-term care facilities, such as hospitals across this province.

Going into the campaign the NDP had no expectations of winning. But they did have an expectation of what the bureaucrats would advise a new government coming in, that they would be advising that you — to get the finances of the province under control, the mess that has been left by the previous administration — you are going to have to raise taxes. You are going to have to cut programs. You are going to have to fire bureaucrats. You are going to have to close health care facilities. So they took that scenario, Mr. Speaker, that the bureaucrats had informed the Minister of Finance, the Premier of, and they went around the province scaring people, blaming it on the opposition, Mr. Speaker, blaming it on the opposition.

And now what do we see? What do we see? We see the very same things that the NDP Party went across the province declaring dire warnings that would happen if the Saskatchewan Party got elected, are the very same things that this budget contains, Mr. Speaker. This budget presented by the Minister of Finance, presented by the Premier, presented by the member from Saskatoon.

They all support the firing of civil servants. They all support the closure of more health care facilities. They all support the increase in taxation which was not one iota mentioned in their campaign, Mr. Speaker, not one. They gave the impression — the statements; the Premier made a statement, Mr. Speaker — no health care premiums. Absolutely no health care premiums. And yet he is musing, Mr. Speaker, he is musing in the news this week that there could be health care premiums imposed on the people of Saskatchewan. That wasn't the campaign that was run, Mr. Speaker, and that's why the title for this budget should be, needed within: truth and honesty.

Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker, as I campaigned in Yorkton I talked to a number of nurses on the doorstep. And one of the things that they were concerned about, Mr. Speaker, was something called joint job evaluation. And they were concerned as whether or not they were going to receive this pay benefit. They were unhappy that the minister, the deputy minister had spent \$50 million building a palace to booze in Yorkton, rather than providing them with a new long-term care facility, Mr. Speaker, because they felt that was needed much more than a new liquor store was needed — a palatial liquor store, Mr. Speaker. And so they were concerned about that and they were concerned about their jobs, Mr. Speaker.

And now what do we see? We see in this budget that health care facilities are going to be closed again across this province, that nurses, that LPNs (licensed practical nurse) that support staff, Mr. Speaker, are going to be out of a job.

You know one of the things that the members opposite have always spoke against, including the member from Saskatoon Nutana, is privatization of health care, Mr. Speaker. And so what does this, what does this budget do? It privatizes, Mr. Speaker. It privatizes health care, it privatizes health care in long-term care facilities. Because what it's doing is it's closing down long-term care facilities, forcing people to go into private care homes. That's privatization, Mr. Speaker. I don't care how you slice it, that's privatizing the health care system and that is what the member from Saskatoon Nutana is doing in this budget, Mr. Speaker. That member is supporting the privatization of long-term care facilities, Mr. Speaker, and that's certainly not what they campaigned on.

You know you talk about this budget had a lot to talk about youth, Mr. Speaker. It was about youth, you know, and one of the things that youth need in this province is education, is education. And so the government says, well look at how much more money we've put into K to 12 (kindergarten to grade 12) system.

Yes, Mr. Speaker, there is indeed more money. There is more money. And if you talk, Mr. Speaker, to the head of the School Trustees Association, what'll he tell you? He says the new money, Mr. Speaker, will take us to August 31. Mr. Speaker,

the school year hasn't even started yet for next year and the money has run out. So where does the rest of the money come from? Where does the money come from?

We hear there is going to be an increase in SaskPower rates. Where does that money come from? Where does the cost for SaskEnergy increases come from? Telephone? Gas prices? Mr. Speaker, where does the money come from for the support staff salary increases? Well it comes from one place — property taxes, Mr. Speaker. It comes from property taxes.

The Premier during the election campaign in Yorkton, Mr. Speaker, when asked, specifically said there's enough money in the province's budget to safely handle the Boughen report, Mr. Speaker. He said the money is there. We can deal with the Boughen report and provide relief from property taxes, without any doubt.

Well Boughen was recommending an increase in the PST of 1 per cent to pay for the reduction in property taxes. Well the Premier got half of it right. He increased the PST but he forgot to lower the property taxes. It was a set-up, Mr. Speaker, and the Premier got elected. And so he increased the PST and forgot all about the Boughen report and the reduction to the property taxes, Mr. Speaker.

And it doesn't affect just rural Saskatchewan. It affects every property owner in this province, rural and urban. It affects everybody who rents, Mr. Speaker. Whether they own it or not, they're all paying the property taxes — each and every one of us. You go down to the grocery store to buy a chocolate bar, Mr. Speaker, and you're helping to pay for that property tax, Mr. Speaker. Even if it is a diet chocolate bar, you're still paying that property tax, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker, this government says, whenever you ask them a question, well what would you do; what would you do — to the opposition. Well a number of my colleagues who are gathered around me in support have talked about the \$75,000 ad that was paid by this government to convince one person. It didn't seem to work — yet, at least.

Seventy-five thousand dollars to convince Ralph Goodale that he should take a look at the equalization formula. You know, the Premier was on the stand with him last weekend. All he had to do was to lean over to Ralph and say, hey Ralph, how about giving us a break on the equalization payments? You know, I wonder if he did that. It was a lot cheaper than 75 thousand bucks, a lot more personal, and probably would have been a lot more effective. That \$75,000, Mr. Speaker, would have opened up nine of the twelve parks that they're leaving closed, Mr. Speaker, until the middle of June or later. Nine of them.

I mean, they only had to find another \$25,000. You know, get rid of one of the hacks. The past minister of Finance, when he first got elected, got elected on a platform of get rid of the hacks and flacks. Well, Mr. Speaker, as soon as he got the chance he got lots of them. He never fired any of them.

You know, so if the ministers, one of the ministers was to voluntarily, you know, maybe the Minister of the Environment . . . maybe the Minister of the Environment could let go of one of his assistants in his office and keep the other three parks

open. That's all it would take. You know, don't pay for that ad; get rid of one of the minister's staff and you'd keep all 12 parks open, Mr. Speaker. It's not that big a deal.

You know they say, well, what else could we do? What else could we do? Well the government blew 15 million more dollars, Mr. Speaker, on Navigata, a company in BC (British Columbia). Fifteen million dollars in BC. Doesn't seem to do a lot for Saskatchewan, but they're in BC — \$15 million.

You know what, Mr. Speaker? That \$15 million is more than the increase to the Agriculture budget; it's more than the increase to the Community Resources budget — which actually took a cut this year; it's more than the increase to Corrections; it's more than the increase to Culture and Youth; it's more, Mr. Speaker, more than the increase to Highways, and more than the increase to Justice. And that's only a few of them.

It's more than most of the increases. Probably only two budgets, maybe three, that got a bigger increase than that \$15 million, Mr. Speaker. Why not put that \$15 million, Mr. Speaker, into any one — any one — of those departments?

I'm sure the people in Community Resources would certainly have loved to have \$15 million to support the programs for FAS (fetal alcohol syndrome), for single mothers, Mr. Speaker, for the housing programs that the member from Moose Jaw North, Mr. Speaker, was talking about.

There are a lot of things in this province that that \$15 million could have funded, but no — blow it off in BC. You know it's a nice place to go visit in January, Mr. Speaker, so why spend the money here in Saskatchewan?

(21:45)

You know, the member from Moose Jaw North was explaining about how caring a government that they are; how socially conscious they are; the need for more housing; the need for more child care services, Mr. Speaker, you know.

And there was a member, Mr. Speaker, who sat . . . I think he sat in that very chair actually when he was the minister of Community Services, then known as Social Services, Bob Pringle. And in an interview, Mr. Speaker, on the radio right after the budget, Mr. Pringle was in tears. Not tears of joy, Mr. Speaker, but tears of despair for the abandonment of those very, very important social programs that this government was doing, Mr. Speaker. He had nothing but condemnation for this government, he didn't have praise. And this was the government that he was a part of; this was the government that he had been the Social Services minister of and he had nothing good to say for what this government was doing to that department, Mr. Speaker.

And yet they stand here so sanctimoniously and praise to high heaven the good job they're doing. Well they should listen to the people who sat in those seats for them, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, that's the kind of response that this budget is engendering across this province on both sides of the political spectrum, Mr. Speaker. This budget is nothing but a budget of betrayal and hopelessness. It leaves the people of Saskatchewan

with no hope for the future, with no vision that it's going to get better, Mr. Speaker. This is simply a budget of decline, of rot, Mr. Speaker, and does not deserve the support of any member of this House.

And I challenge one of those members over there to stand up for these people that Bob Pringle was crying for. That, Mr. Speaker, would show leadership.

Mr. Speaker, I will not be supporting this budget, and I ask one of those members to not support it as well.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the Government Whip, the member for Regina Dewdney.

Mr. Yates: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm going to rise on my feet and make a few remarks about the budget. But at this time seeing the late hour, Mr. Speaker, I'd move we adjourn the debate.

The Speaker: — It has been moved by the Government Whip that debate be now adjourned. Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — The motion is carried.

Debate adjourned.

The Speaker: — I recognize the Government House Leader.

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

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

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

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

The Assembly adjourned at 21:48.

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