



FIRST SESSION - TWENTY-FIFTH LEGISLATURE

of the

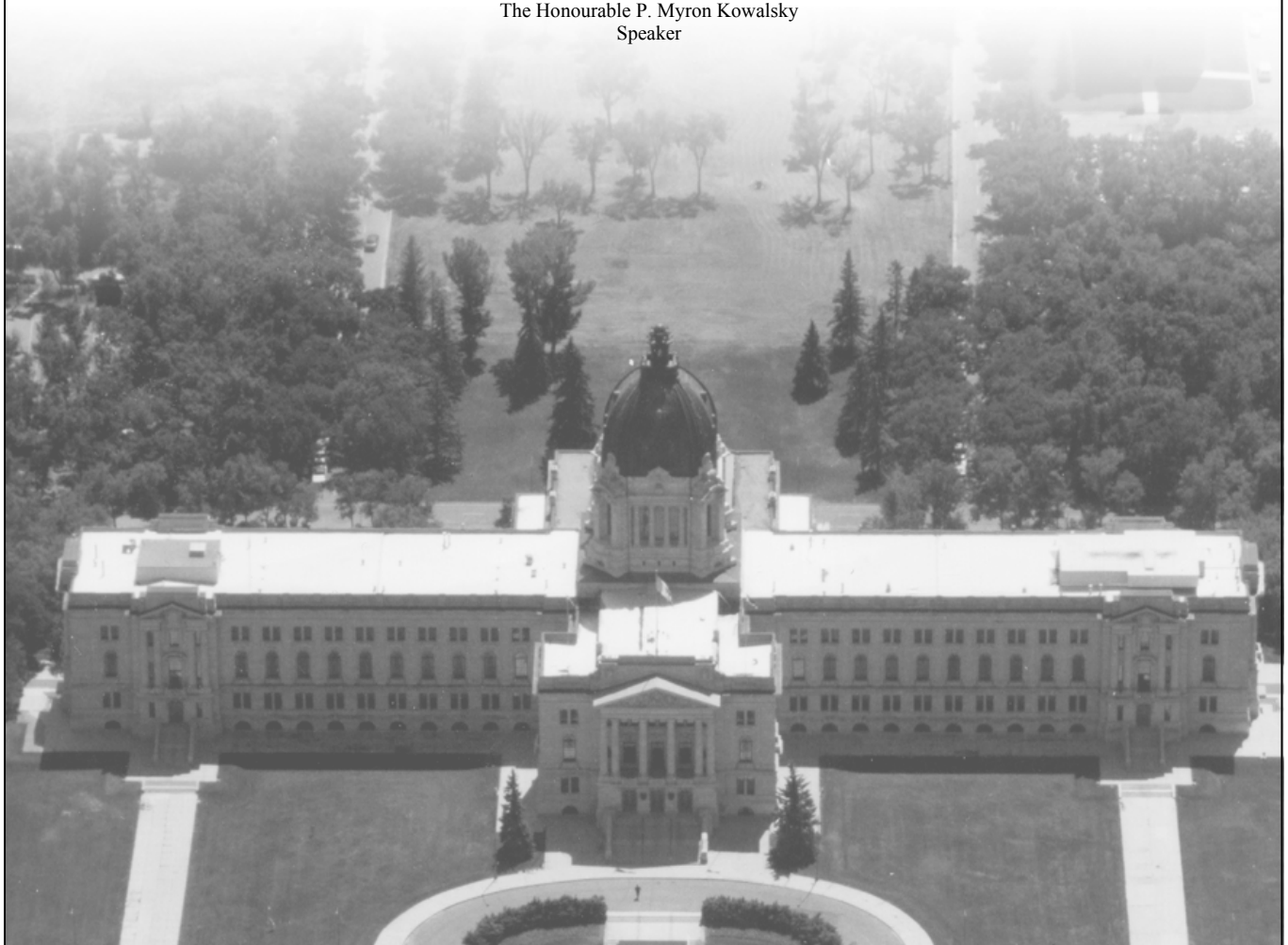
Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan

**DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS**

(HANSARD)

Published under the
authority of

The Honourable P. Myron Kowalsky
Speaker



MEMBERS OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF SASKATCHEWAN

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

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

[The Assembly met at 13:30.]

[Prayers]

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRESENTING PETITIONS

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the member from Cypress Hills.

Mr. Elhard: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again I rise on behalf of constituents of the region of Cypress Hills to present their concerns regarding forced amalgamation of school divisions. The prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the provincial government to reverse the decision to force the amalgamation of school divisions in Saskatchewan and continue reorganization of school divisions on a strictly voluntary basis.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

Mr. Speaker, these two pages of petitions are signed by individuals from the community of Gull Lake. I so present.

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the member for Cannington.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too have petitions to present today. The prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the provincial government to reverse the decision to force the amalgamation of school divisions in Saskatchewan and continue reorganization of school divisions on a strictly voluntary basis.

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

These petitions come from the Cabri, Hazlet, Pennant, and Abbey areas of the province, Mr. Speaker — excellent people and very good chicken hunting.

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the member for Swift Current.

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise on behalf of constituents concerned about the level of residential support offered to people with long-term disabilities in Swift Current. The prayer of their petition reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to take the necessary steps to provide the funding required for additional residential spaces for Swift Current residents with lifelong disabilities.

Mr. Speaker, the petitioners today are from Pambrun,

Saskatchewan and Neville, Saskatchewan. I so present.

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the member for Kelvington-Wadena.

Ms. Draude: — Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to rise again today on behalf of people in my constituency who are concerned about the growing problem of crystal meth:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause this government to take the necessary action to implement a strategy that will deal with crystal methamphetamine education, prevention, enforcement, and treatment.

Everyone who has signed this petition is from Porcupine Plain, Saskatchewan.

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the member for Rosetown-Elrose.

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have another petition to halt the forced amalgamation of school divisions, signed by people who are concerned that the proposed changes to amalgamate 59 school divisions by January 2006 will not prove to be cost-effective. Mr. Speaker, the prayer of the petition reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the provincial government to reverse the decision to force the amalgamation of school divisions in Saskatchewan and continue reorganization of school divisions on a strictly voluntary basis.

And as in duty bound, your petitioners ever pray.

And, Mr. Speaker, the communities represented on this petition include Rosetown, Plenty, Brock, Sovereign, Harris, D'Arcy, Zealandia, Elrose, and Mildred. And I'm pleased to present this petition on their behalf.

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the member for Melville-Saltcoats.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also have a petition to do with the forced amalgamation of school divisions. The prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the provincial government to reverse the decision to force the amalgamation of school divisions in Saskatchewan and continue reorganization of school divisions on a strictly voluntary basis.

The signators, Mr. Speaker, are from the communities of Melville, Duff, Fenwood, and Yorkton.

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the member for Thunder Creek.

Mr. Stewart: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise as well to present a petition signed by citizens concerned with the forced amalgamation of school divisions. And the prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the provincial government to reverse the decision to force the amalgamation of school division in Saskatchewan and continue reorganization of school divisions on a strictly voluntary basis.

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

Mr. Speaker, this petition is signed by individuals from the communities of Craik and Aylesbury. I so present.

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the member for Estevan.

Ms. Eagles: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present a petition on behalf of constituents of mine that are very concerned about the forced amalgamation of school divisions. And the prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the provincial government to reverse the decision to force the amalgamation of school divisions in Saskatchewan and continue reorganization of school divisions on a strictly voluntary basis.

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

And, Mr. Speaker, this is signed by residents of Halbrite, Midale, and Lampman. I so present. Thank you.

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

Ms. Bakken: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to present a petition on behalf of constituents of Weyburn-Big Muddy who are very concerned about the forced amalgamation of schools.

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the provincial government to reverse the decision to force the amalgamation of school divisions in Saskatchewan and continue reorganization of school divisions on a strictly voluntary basis.

And the petition is signed by residents of Regina, Weyburn, and Midale. I so present.

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the member for Arm River.

Mr. Brkich: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also have a petition here dealing with forced amalgamation of school divisions.

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the provincial government to reverse the decision to force the

amalgamation of school divisions in Saskatchewan and continue reorganization of school divisions on a strictly voluntary basis.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

Signed by the good citizens from Govan and Nokomis. I so present.

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the member for Biggar.

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to present another petition to revisit the effects of the TransGas Asquith natural gas storage project. The prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to immediately address the concerns of all individuals affected by this project, pay 100 per cent of the costs involved to rectify disruptions to water supplies, produce an environment assessment study encompassing a larger area outside the scope of the project, disclose the project's long-term effects on these areas, and consider alternative sources of water for the project.

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

Signed by the good citizens of Saskatoon and district. I so present.

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the member for Carrot River Valley.

Mr. Kerpan: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too rise today on behalf of citizens who are concerned with the effect that the TransGas Asquith natural gas storage project could have on the quality and the quantity of their water. And the prayer reads as follows, Mr. Speaker:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to immediately address the concerns of all individuals affected by this project, pay 100 per cent of the costs involved to rectify disruptions to water supplies, produce an environment assessment study encompassing a larger area outside the scope of the project, disclose the project's long-term effects on these areas, and consider alternative sources of water for the project.

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

Mr. Speaker, signed by citizens from Saskatoon and Vanscoy. I so present.

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the member for Last Mountain-Touchwood.

Mr. Hart: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to be able to present petitions signed by citizens of Saskatchewan who are opposed to the forced amalgamation of school divisions. The prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon.

Assembly may be pleased to cause the provincial government to reverse the decision to force the amalgamation of school divisions in Saskatchewan and continue reorganization of school divisions on a strictly voluntary basis.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

Signatures to this petition, Mr. Speaker, come from a number of communities including Melville, Goodeve, Duff, Fenwood, and quite a number of citizens from the city of Regina have also signed this petition. I'm pleased to be able to present these petitions.

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the member for Batoche.

Mr. Kirsch: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too also rise to present the position opposed to the forced amalgamation of schools. And the prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the provincial government to reverse the decision to force the amalgamation of school divisions in Saskatchewan and continue reorganization of school divisions on a strictly voluntary basis.

And this petition is signed by the good people of Regina. Thank you.

READING AND RECEIVING PETITIONS

Deputy Clerk: — According to order the following petitions have been reviewed and pursuant to rule 14 are hereby read and received as addendums to previously tabled petitions being sessional paper nos. 180, 637, 715, and 720.

NOTICES OF MOTIONS AND QUESTIONS

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the member for Rosetown.

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I give notice that on day no. 86 I shall ask the government the following question:

To the Premier: what new positions were included in the 2005-2006 budget for Executive Council? What are the corresponding job descriptions and responsibilities? And what are the salaries for each new position?

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the member for Regina Lakeview.

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the legislature, a number of members of the Saskatchewan Union of Nurses who are here, seated in your gallery. They've been here today meeting with various members, and I ask all members to welcome them.

Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the member for Indian Head-Milestone.

Mr. McMorris: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To you and through you to the rest of the members, along with the Minister of Health, I too would like to welcome the members of SUN [Saskatchewan Union of Nurses] here to the proceedings today.

Sitting in your gallery, Mr. Speaker — and I'll ask them to wave; I won't single them out that they have to stand up and stay standing, just a wave would be fine — would be Lynne Dielschneider, Deb Prevost, Fred Bordas, Jan Anderson, Linda McKinnon, Sandy Keating, Adelle Eikel, Paul Kuling, Louise Wilk, Cheryl Carlson, Eleanor Lenderbeck, Rita Nell, Susan Kotzer, and Grace Normandeau.

Mr. Speaker, we had a chance to, as a caucus, meet with them before — earlier this morning, I guess — and certainly learned a lot from what they had to say and the situation that they face every day, whether it's in the long-term care homes, the hospitals of our province, whether it's in Blood Services, or a number of different areas that registered nurses and RPNs [registered psychiatric nurse] serve the people of Saskatchewan. Just on behalf of the official opposition, I would like to thank you for the work that you do under sometimes very trying conditions. Thank you very much.

Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the member for Regina Coronation Park.

Mr. Trew: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly, 20 grade 5 and 6 students seated in the west gallery along with their teacher, Ms. Sandy Jost.

These students . . . I was trying to quantify or figure out how I was going to say these citizens of the future, and I realized how terribly wrong that is because these 20 students from Regina's Huda School are citizens today, and they make me so proud. I was in their school earlier this month. We had a very nice visit with these students and the others in the Huda School in my constituency of Regina Coronation Park.

These students epitomize all of the very best that young people have to offer Saskatchewan today and in the future. Mr. Speaker, I ask all honourable members to help me join Saskatchewan's future, the grade 5 and 6 students from Huda School.

Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the member for The Battlefords.

Hon. Mr. Taylor: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to take the opportunity to introduce to you and through you to the members of the legislature a friend of mine from Saulteaux Reserve who's here today to sit in on the proceedings, Mr. Rod Gopher from Saulteaux Reserve, who's

also a former grand chief of the Battlefords Tribal Council. I ask all members to welcome Rod to his Assembly today.

Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the member for Lloydminster.

Mr. Wakefield: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too would like to follow and welcome Mr. Gopher to the Legislature this afternoon. He's really a constituent of Cut Knife-Turtleford, but it's adjacent to mine. And on behalf of the people in that part of the country, welcome to Mr. Gopher.

Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

[13:45]

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

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

Hanley Team Wins Elks National Curling Championship

Mr. Brkich: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today in the House to talk about a remarkable curling team from Hanley. Daryl Grindheim and his two sons, Dean and Darren Grindheim, have been curling for a number of years and are very well known in the Hanley circles and the bonspiels up and down the line.

This year they are entered in the Elks men's curling, along with, they had Merlin Lee and Mark Burgess. These gentlemen recently competed in the Elks National Curling Championship that was held in Swan River, Manitoba. They did very well in the round robin competition during the week, thus moving into the playoffs on the weekend. Here they made it to the final game, beating Alberta by a score of 6 to 4 to win the 2005 Elks National Curling Championship.

This team has curled very well over the years and looks forward to defending their national title at Saskatoon in 2006.

I would like to personally congratulate the Hanley team on their success, and thank them for doing their part towards inspiring our young people to take up this very enjoyable and traditional winter sport. I would ask all the members to join me in congratulating the Hanley Elks and the curling team that came from there. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the member for Cumberland.

Nipawin Biomass-Based Ethanol Project

Hon. Ms. Beatty: — Mr. Speaker, Nipawin already contributes to Saskatchewan's renewable energy base with its hydro facility. But it will be making an even greater contribution to Saskatchewan's green renewable energy in the future. Mr. Speaker, we are providing \$950,000 to the community of

Nipawin for their \$2.1 million biomass-based ethanol project. The funding is being provided under the Canada-Saskatchewan Western Economic Partnership Agreement.

Mr. Speaker, this project builds on groundbreaking work done by the Saskatchewan Research Council and includes technology development, plant design, and feedstock availability. There will also be an examination of potential markets for the end product. This project represents yet another step forward in the ongoing process of establishing a viable biofuels industry in Saskatchewan, with ethanol as one of the fuels.

Mr. Speaker, ethanol production is a good idea for many reasons. It is cleaner burning than traditional fuels, and it will help reduce greenhouse gas emissions. It promotes rural economic diversification and helps to create jobs in rural Saskatchewan. It takes us beyond primary production to value-added economic development. And, Minister Speaker, organic energy sources such as biofuels don't run out.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all members to join me in congratulating the people at Nipawin for their initiative and innovative thinking, and acknowledging the Saskatchewan Research Council for its valuable contributions in this initiative. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the member for Indian Head-Milestone.

Avonlea Teams Win Provincial Hockey Championships

Mr. McMorris: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, with the warm weather brings the end of hockey season, and with that of course the crowning of many provincial champions, which I'm sure we'll hear over the next few days in members' statements.

But, Mr. Speaker, the town of Avonlea southwest of Regina had a great season. The Avonlea Arrows won the 2004-2005 SAHA [Saskatchewan Amateur Hockey Association] senior D provincial championship last Friday night with a decisive 5-1 victory over the Dodsland Stars. They won the best of three-game series two games straight. The Avonlea Arena was packed to watch the Avonlea Arrows win their first provincial championship.

Although Avonlea won by four goals, the game was fast paced with plenty of scoring chances and end-to-end action. It was a crowd-pleaser for all. The Arrows defeated Montmartre, Rouleau, Kelliher, and Central Butte in this year's playoffs before meeting Dodsland in the final.

But that wasn't the only victory, the senior team in Avonlea, the peewees, the Avonlea Thunder, won the peewee C provincial championship as well, defeating St. Walburg Eagles. On the way they had to defeat the Hudson Bay Hunters in the semi-final and then, of course, as I said, the St. Walburg Eagles with a score of 8 to 4 in a two-game, total-point.

Congratulations to the teams in Avonlea on two provincial championships this year, and I'm sure many more in the future. Congratulations.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the member for Yorkton.

Students Win Regional Spelling Bees

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Four Saskatchewan students recently earned the right to represent our province at the CanSpell National Spelling Bee in Ottawa.

Mr. Speaker, Anqi Dong, a 10-year-old Saskatoon student, who won the Northern Regional Spelling Bee, and runner-up was Brook Lennox of Archerwill. In the South, Swift Current's Kaleb Adam took first place, and Bennett Reusch from my constituency was second. Anqi Dong and Kaleb Adam will also go to compete at the prestigious Scripps National Spelling Bee in Washington, D.C.

Mr. Speaker, all four students impressed their teachers, parents, and judges as they rose among some of the top of thousands of students of Grade 5 to 8 from across the province. The winning students attribute their knowledge of spelling to their love of reading. One student said, "I read books for as long as I can remember."

Mr. Speaker, reading and writing are essential to the quality of life. While illiteracy is linked to poverty and exclusion, through investment in education we can reduce these levels and enhance human dignity and equality.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to thank Air Canada for graciously offering to fly all of the contestants to Ottawa and Washington to ensure that they have the opportunity to compete in these prestigious events.

Mr. Speaker, I also ask all members to join in recognizing all the teachers and parents and students who support them throughout the years and in congratulating these young winners for their outstanding skills and accomplishments. And I want to wish them all the very best of luck in the national championships.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the member for Kelvington-Wadena.

Centenarians Honoured

Ms. Draude: — Mr. Speaker, as Saskatchewan celebrates its 100th birthday, we have the opportunity to recognize the contribution of our pioneers. It is humbling to think of the debt we owe to our pioneers.

Yesterday I was honoured to participate in the celebrations for three of the five centenarians who reside in the Jubilee nursing home in Foam Lake. I even shared a dance with Mr. Robert Barrowman, who was quick to point out he was just 99; he won't be 100 until September.

Gerald Holowaty, the reeve of the RM (rural municipality) of Foam Lake was part of the celebration and I'd like to share his very appropriate remarks to the centenarians.

This centennial year offers an opportunity to honour fine people like the centenarians here today, people who had the courage, faith and fortitude to settle in an unknown land. You probably experienced more hardship than joy in your quest for new life and freedom.

It has been said that we must know the past to understand the present to face the future. I stand humbly before you and thank God for those who lived before us and ask that we quit assuming that everything begins with us.

We drink from wells we did not find. We eat food from land we did not develop. We enjoy freedoms we have not earned. We worship in churches we did not build. And we live in communities we did not establish. Our generation thanks you and we can only hope we adopt your strength and integrity to ensure a solid foundation for our next 100 years.

Mr. Speaker, I'd add my voice to thanking the centenarians who reside in my constituency: Gladys Miller, Robert Barrowman, Rose Woitas, Elizabeth Letwenuk, Nick Hancheruk, Annie Shulko, Susan Messenger, and Dorothy Simmonds.

I ask the Assembly to join me in thanking all the centenarians for making Saskatchewan a province we're all proud to call home.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the member for Saskatoon Eastview.

2005 — The Year of First Nations and Métis Women

Ms. Junor: — Mr. Speaker, the Government of Saskatchewan is joining with First Nations leaders in proclaiming 2005 the Year of First Nations and Métis Women in the province. This is a time to acknowledge the vital role that First Nations and Métis women play within their communities and in Saskatchewan while recognizing their strengths and their struggles.

Mr. Speaker, this year is an opportunity to create awareness about the vulnerability of these women and their families. This is not a celebration, Mr. Speaker, but a time to recognize and acknowledge the poverty and violence that many First Nations and Métis women face in their daily lives.

Mr. Speaker, acknowledging the hardships that disproportionately affect First Nations and Métis women is only a small step forward. The findings of the Commission on First Nations and Métis People and Justice Reform have been a wake-up call.

Mr. Speaker, it is vital that we as a province stand united on issues as important as the health and well-being of all women. This government is developing and implementing policies and investing resources in initiatives that will result in Aboriginal women and children living more secure and healthy lives.

Mr. Speaker, First Nations and Métis women have contributed and continue to contribute immeasurably to this province. They are the backbone of their communities and their families.

Mr. Speaker, I'm sure all my colleagues will join me in giving First Nations and Métis women the recognition and support they so rightly deserve, and in acknowledging the important work done by the many Aboriginal women's organizations in Saskatchewan.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the member for Biggar.

Elks Annual Provincial Dart Tournament in Biggar

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On the weekend of March 11 through 13, participants from across the province converged on Biggar to take part in the Elks annual provincial dart tournament. I had the pleasure of meeting and mingling with a number of those individuals at their banquet on the 12th.

The tournament was hosted by the Biggar Lodge of the Elks and saw contestants vying for a position on either the eight-persons men's team or the eight-persons women's team and the opportunity to represent Saskatchewan at the Elks national dart tournament in Penticton, British Columbia.

At the nationals every province and territory in Canada is represented by their 16-person teams with the goal of bringing home the national trophy which is presented to the province with the best showing at the tournament. This is determined by a point system over five events for each, the women's and men's teams, and the points combine for the provincial standing. I am proud to say that our Saskatchewan team have brought the national trophy home for the past three years and they are confident they will be coming home with it again this year.

I was informed that even though darts is a highly-contested sport, the fellowship and camaraderie at these tournaments have led to many lasting friendships both at the provincial and national level.

I'd like to congratulate the Biggar Elks for hosting a great weekend and also congratulate those who are moving on to the nationals in Penticton. Good luck.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

ORAL QUESTIONS

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the member for Melfort.

Negotiations with Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation

Mr. Gantefer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Apparently the Minister of Learning found more than Easter eggs this weekend. It sounds like he found a basket full of money and had an Easter . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order, please. Just to remind the member to direct all his remarks through the Chair. Member for Melfort.

Mr. Gantefer: — Mr. Speaker, I'm sure that the Speaker would direct this . . .

The Speaker: — I would ask . . . the member is not to comment on any orders of the Speaker. The member may proceed.

Mr. Gantefer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll just start over.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Mr. Gantefer: — Mr. Speaker, it seems that the Minister of Learning found more than Easter eggs this weekend. He found a basket full of money, and he had a revelation about the talks that needed to be conducted with Saskatchewan teachers.

After blaming teachers for high property taxes and repeatedly saying that there's no money to move off of the 0,1, and 1, here's what the Minister of Learning said to the teachers' Spring Council this morning. He implied that he sat down with his officials over the weekend and found resources for a new offer. Just last week, Mr. Speaker, the minister was saying that they were going to stick to the wage mandate.

How in the world can the minister explain to this House how he can go through a budget process as late as last week and not know what resources are available to negotiate with teachers?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the Minister of Learning.

Hon. Mr. Thomson: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I do want to advise the members of the House the Easter Bunny was very good to me over the weekend and was very kind.

This morning I did have an opportunity to address the STF [Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation] council in Saskatoon, and I have extended to them and the trustees an invitation to return to the bargaining table as early as next week. It is our understanding . . . Certainly we saw from the sanctions vote that was taken that there is a very strong resolve on the part of the teachers.

And I think over the weekend in the discussions that we had, internally we understand that there is a need for us to find a negotiated settlement. Nobody in this province will win if there's a teachers' strike. Teachers understand that; we understand that. And negotiations are built on compromise. That's the approach we're working on.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the member for Melfort.

Mr. Gantefer: — Well, Mr. Speaker, surprising as it seems, it seems as if the Minister of Learning actually was listening to what we were saying this last two weeks about the way you

have to negotiate with teachers. But, Mr. Speaker, a concern I have is, if the minister is promising to be flexible, is he also going to be flexible and find what he got in his Easter basket and pass it on to the school boards so that they are able to meet the requirements of a new negotiated contract and not necessarily have to pass it on to property taxpayers?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the Minister of Learning.

Hon. Mr. Thomson: — Over the next several days, we'll be sitting down with both the STF and the trustees to share with them what we believe is the best way to resolve this and reach a collective agreement. And I think I owe it to those partners first, to share that discussion with them. I'll be very happy once we have a tentative agreement to share the details with the House.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the member for Canora-Pelly.

Collective Bargaining with Public Sector Workers

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, last week the Premier stood in his place and said and I quote:

... this is a government that believes in collective bargaining with all of its public sector ...

Despite his supposed support of collective bargaining, this is the same Premier who has imposed a 0, 1 and 1 wage mandate on all of its public sectors. Mr. Speaker, this begs the question: how exactly does this Premier and his NDP [New Democratic Party] government define collective bargaining?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

[14:00]

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the Minister Responsible for Community Resources and Employment.

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well I think anybody who truly understands collective bargaining would know that no one ever goes into it with no understanding of the resources they have available at the negotiating table. And certainly I think we were very clear when we talked about 0, 1, and 1 being based on total compensation which was more than base-wage rate. It includes overtime. It includes other things. But as well, we indicated flexibility to solve problems such as recruitment and retention and health plan issues. So we have been flexible throughout and will continue to be flexible.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the member for Canora-Pelly.

Mr. Krawetz: — Mr. Speaker, I think we're going to have to clarify the definition of zero from that member before too long.

Mr. Speaker, perhaps it's time the NDP government pulled out The Trade Union Act and actually read it. Mr. Speaker, on the very first page of The Trade Union Act collective bargaining is defined as, quote, "negotiating in good faith." Dictating a wage mandate does not constitute negotiating in good faith, Mr. Speaker, according to The Trade Union Act. In fact some might argue that a wage mandate constitutes an unfair labour practice. How can this NDP government say that it upholds the principles of collective bargaining on one hand and on the other hand engages in an unfair labour practice with its 0, 1, and 1 wage mandate?

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the Minister for Community Resources and Employment.

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Well thank you very much. And I'm pleased to hear the new support that the member opposite has for The Trade Union Act.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — I can assure, Mr. Speaker, that we will hold them to that in future discussions around amendments to this important piece of legislation. And as well I would say, Mr. Speaker, that we have settled 11 agreements to date, which I think speaks to the flexibility at the bargaining table.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the member for Canora-Pelly.

Mr. Krawetz: — The definition of fair and collective bargaining, whether you refer to this Trade Union Act or anywhere across this nation, means the exact same thing. It's fair and collective bargaining.

Mr. Speaker, over the last year the NDP government had an unexpected windfall revenue of nearly \$1.2 billion, half of which came from the oil and gas revenues. How can this government plead poverty when it's spending on movies, at least \$50 million more on money-losing out-of-province investments, doubling the staff at the Premier's communication office, and other frivolous expenditures?

How about this idea, Mr. Speaker? How about investing in Saskatchewan workers? How about giving people a reason to stay in Saskatchewan? How about negotiating a contract in good faith? When will this government stop its unfair labour practices and drop its 0, 1, 1 mandate?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the Minister for Community Resources and Employment.

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, there's hardly a member on the other side who hasn't spoken in favour of the core services review done by the BC [British Columbia] government. That review resulted in a

rollback of wages that resulted in elimination of teachers, elimination of nurses, contracting out, privatization. I don't have to think very long, Mr. Speaker, before I understand where this group of people would go.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the member for Canora-Pelly.

Mr. Krawetz: — Mr. Speaker, as the Chair of the public sector bargaining committee, at least we should expect an answer from that member. But no, she's going to play that same game. Mr. Speaker, I would argue that this province has simply been educating our young people to export to other provinces.

This morning a document distributed throughout the province by the Saskatchewan Union of Nurses shows that Saskatchewan is the worst in Canada in terms of retaining its graduating nurses in the field of nursing. It is the worst at a 66 per cent retention. How can we retain professionals like teachers and nurses in this province if our wages are not competitive with those of our neighbouring provinces?

Mr. Speaker, next door in Manitoba some teachers have settled for 3, 3, and 3, and collective bargaining continues for others in that province. This NDP government has piled on extra work for teachers with School^{PLUS} and then expects them to swallow 0, 1, and 1. How does this NDP expect to retain our young professionals with a 0, 1, and 1 wage mandate?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the Minister for Community Resources and Employment.

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. First of all I would say as the grandmother of a 12-year-old that no one admires more than I do the work that teachers do in the classroom. I think it's a very tough environment they have there today, and I think they're doing a terrific job.

Secondly I would say that we are very committed to collective bargaining, and I believe that we are showing the flexibility at the bargaining table required while at the same time working hard to create a sustainable budget line in the province — which I think we've heard criticism from the opposition on the balanced budget question. And I ask them to refer themselves to their speeches on that subject.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the member for Indian Head-Milestone.

Nursing Resources

Mr. McMorris: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, last week the Minister of Finance told the media he expects to see a downward trend in health care wages. Can the minister share with us today how he expects and what evidence that he has to base that there will be a downward trend in health care wages in the next few years?

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the Minister of Health.

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, over the last number of years we've seen substantial increases in health care costs at all levels, and that's happened right across North America — in fact right around the world. We know that a number of the different costs have started to level off, and that included everything from costs of pharmaceuticals, costs of equipment, costs of building, and costs of staffing. And a lot of these things do relate to the availability of people in the whole system.

Mr. Speaker, we try to look ten years out. The government on this side of the House here is looking and trying to figure out where we're going ten years out. And many times you end up having to look at trends to make sure that you get your planning right.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the member for Indian Head-Milestone.

Mr. McMorris: — Thank you. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to clarify, not for the Minister of Health, but for the Minister of Finance, what he had to say to the CTV [Canadian Television Network Limited] on a budget interview last week. And I quote, Harry Van Mulligen said:

I am hopeful that in the medium term, the next two to three years, that we'll see some of the health care costs come down. The major portion of health care costs is salaries and wages, and we think some of those will start to trend down at about that time.

Mr. Speaker, trend down, that means a reduction in where they're at right now. Mr. Speaker, we thought zero, dash one, dash one was bad enough. To the Minister of Finance, does that mean zero, negative one, negative one to him — to the Minister of Finance? Or does he plan on taking a page out of their book of a couple years ago, and instead of dealing with the issue of waiting lists, they ended up firing nurses around the province. Is that how they're going to deal with the problem?

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the Minister of Health.

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, for a number of years we had challenges with the previous Health critic around the kinds of research and the kinds of advice that the member was getting. And Mr. Speaker, I think we're seeing a similar situation here. When the Finance minister talks about bringing the trends down on all kinds of costs, that doesn't mean a reduction in costs. That means the increases are not quite as great.

We've already seen that in some areas in health. In the wages and compensation area, it hasn't happened yet. But I think that we will continue to see fair wages for all the people who work in the health care system. But there is a recognition that each individual patient is also a taxpayer, is also a voter, and they end up having to try to make that balance between all of those different groups. We're going to continue to provide that kind of leadership over here.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the member for Indian Head-Milestone.

Mr. McMorris: — Mr. Speaker, the leadership that that minister just talked about is the worst record in Canada for nurse retention, Mr. Speaker. That is not leadership. And in the meantime the Minister of Finance is saying that we're going to see a trend down in wages. How is that going to help the retention and recruitment of nurses to this province?

Nurses are looking for full-time work. They're looking for competitive wages, and they're looking for good working conditions. And when we're losing most of our graduates to other provinces, when we're training nurses to export, that will not deal with the issue of waiting lists and so many of the other problems that we're seeing in our health care system.

Mr. Speaker, will the NDP expect to reduce the waiting lists that we are seeing in this province with a Finance minister talking about a downward trend in wages?

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the Minister of Health.

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, the Finance minister last week announced money in both Health and in Learning for training more nurses. We have funds within the budget around retention of the existing nurses. We have funds to provide stability across the health care system, to make sure that the jobs that are there now continue, and that they continue to transform . . .

We discussed before how in the nursing profession there is a transition taking place where many people our age — the age of most of us in this legislature — will be looking towards retirement and being replaced by newer, younger nurses. All of those things are part of our planning, Mr. Speaker. We're going to continue to do that in a very straightforward way. In this province we've always had very good planning for the long term, and we'll continue to do that.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the member for Estevan.

Canadian Agricultural Income Stabilization Program

Ms. Eagles: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, while all farmers in Saskatchewan are in desperate situations, I have a producer in my constituency facing a serious problem. He put down the required deposit under the CAIS [Canadian agricultural income stabilization] program. This CAIS deposit has now been waived until March 2006. He needs that money for spring input costs, but he can't get it back. Can the Minister of Agriculture tell us what he's going to do on behalf of my constituent and other producers across the province that have the same problem?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the Minister of

Agriculture.

Hon. Mr. Wartman: — Thank you for the question. I think it's very important that producers know how this program is going to roll out.

First of all, those who had their NISA [Net Income Stabilization Account] accounts roll into the CAIS program will be able to withdraw everything but the one-third deposit, the one-third deposit that is already in place. Until the federal government takes the right legislation, they'll not be able to withdraw it.

Our position at the meetings, federal-provincial meetings, was very clear, Mr. Speaker, that we wanted to see the ability to withdraw those funds immediately. That, Mr. Speaker, that position was not accepted by the federal government. And we will continue to push for producers to be able to withdraw their funds for CAIS deposit. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the member for Estevan.

Ms. Eagles: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, like, that isn't even a fair situation. The producers need this money now. My constituent did the right thing. The federal government urged him to participate in the CAIS program. Many producers had to borrow money to honour their commitment to this program. Now that deposit money, thousands of dollars, is locked in and can't be touched. That money could be used to cover spring input costs.

Mr. Speaker, will the Minister of Agriculture try to get that money into the hands of producers?

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the Minister of Agriculture.

Hon. Mr. Wartman: — Yes, I most definitely will.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the member for Melville-Saltcoats.

Support For Agriculture

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, yesterday the federal government took a step in the right direction; \$1 billion will be distributed to ag producers across Canada. And, Mr. Speaker, the NDP Ag minister has all but ruled out maintaining a traditional 60/40 split with matching money from the province.

So my question is: will he put any money at all into the renewed federal initiative? Will he make any commitment of putting any provincial dollars towards this program?

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the Minister of Agriculture.

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

We, the provincial ministers, met by teleconference yesterday. First of all it was agreed that we did appreciate the federal government taking their initiative, putting the \$1 billion out. But since this was completely a federal initiative — no discussion with the provinces at all — it is their responsibility to fund it.

Mr. Speaker, where we can, in the programs that are necessary — including CAIS — we are seeking to try and fulfill our obligations. There are many challenges in doing that. But, Mr. Speaker, our commitment is to do our utmost to fulfill our obligations and to make sure that we facilitate the funding that is available for producers today. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the member for Melville-Saltcoats.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, Mr. Speaker, I wonder if the Agriculture minister will answer this: if Alberta and Manitoba change their mind and decide to put their 40 per cent in towards the program, will he reconsider and match their funds that they put in for their farmers?

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the Minister of Agriculture.

Hon. Mr. Wartman: — Mr. Speaker, in our discussions yesterday Alberta and Manitoba were both on the line; both agreed that they were not going to participate in this program. And, Mr. Speaker, we don't do our budgets based on what they do. We do them on what our fiscal capacity is. And sometimes we're in a better situation than they are, sometimes worse.

But, Mr. Speaker, where we can put in funding, where we can provide that support for Saskatchewan farmers, we've done it. We'll continue to do it. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

[14:15]

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the member for Melville-Saltcoats.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Well, Mr. Speaker, maybe the Ag minister should go and meet with the Education minister and find what basket he's finding money in because our farmers certainly could use some of that money right now.

Mr. Speaker, seeing that the Ag minister is reluctant to put anything towards the new federal program, let's go back to the CAIS program then. What I heard farmers saying yesterday all over the province, and the calls I got, and from my local farmers, was that if this province won't come to the table for a new program like this, the least they could do is put up their money for the CAIS program. Last year that minister and that government waited till the very last minute, the eleventh hour, before putting their money in, and that's holding up the cheques coming out to the farmers that qualify now.

Mr. Speaker, I ask the Ag minister, will you at least then fully

fund the CAIS program for 2004?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the Minister of Agriculture.

Hon. Mr. Wartman: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, yesterday the critic from the opposition party was noting that he was, and I'll quote:

“I'd be a little hesitant to jump in and say the province should step up to the plate [regarding the federal funding, Mr. Speaker] . . .

He's obviously lost some of his hesitancy, Mr. Speaker. But I can tell you we have not lost our hesitancy in trying to pull together the resources we can to fund the CAIS program.

Mr. Speaker, what I want to know is where that group is in terms of helping to get a change in the formula. They said last year if we fully funded CAIS, they'd be fully behind us. They'd be working hard to try and get a change in that formula. We haven't heard a peep, Mr. Speaker, not a peep on behalf of Saskatchewan taxpayers and producers.

So, Mr. Speaker, if they're going to stand by their word, it's time they stood up and started trying to work for producers and get a better deal around CAIS. Mr. Speaker, we're doing that. We're trying to get the best deal possible. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the member for Melville-Saltcoats.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, Mr. Speaker, every farmer I talked to yesterday appreciated the cash injection from the federal government — \$275 million approximately for Saskatchewan. But, Mr. Speaker, that includes cattle, livestock of all kinds. It includes the grain sector spread right across the country of Canada. I think what farmers are concerned about is when the money actually gets out here, the cheques are not going to be near as big as I think we're led to believe.

Mr. Speaker, input costs have gone up dramatically in the last 10 or 15 years. I remember back farming when — 1986, I believe it was — there was a \$1 billion injection at that time. Right now, Mr. Speaker, to the minister, it would take 3 or \$4 billion to even match what that would cover at that time to what our needs are now.

This minister and that government, Mr. Speaker, has got to get to the plate sooner or later and fund the CAIS program. There's enough stress in the farm community. Will he at least do that much today, seeing that they won't jump in and fund other programs?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the Minister of Agriculture.

Hon. Mr. Wartman: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I hope the member opposite is not suggesting that we should come out with the kind of programs that were out in the '80s that threw this province into such incredible debt.

Mr. Speaker, that is not what we're about. We do actually have balanced budget legislation which we follow, Mr. Speaker. And in following that, Mr. Speaker, we need to do the very best in terms of our stewardship of the public resources. For us that means trying to get the best deals possible with the federal government on CAIS. We're doing that, Mr. Speaker. We are committed to trying to get the formula changed. We're committed to doing that, Mr. Speaker. When it came down to it in the end last year, we fully funded CAIS, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, our commitment is to try and get the very best deal for our producers this year as well. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the member for Melville-Saltcoats.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Well thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, Mr. Speaker, to the Ag minister, I know the Western premiers are going to be meeting very shortly. And I guess the question many farmers in Saskatchewan and in fact everyone would like to know . . . if 60/40 is not adequate and the province doesn't want to honour that commitment, what commitment would they honour? Ten per cent? Twenty per cent? Nobody seems to know at what level that government will back its farmers. Will the minister tell us today, what would be satisfactory? Would it be 80/20? What would it be?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the Minister of Agriculture.

Hon. Mr. Wartman: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I think I have provided the member opposite with both of the proposals which we made, which we would find acceptable in terms of dealing with CAIS. I will give him another copy if he doesn't have it.

But, Mr. Speaker, we started off our first proposal with saying this province should not have to pay any more than three times the provincial per capita average. Today we're at 10 times, Mr. Speaker. We should not have to pay more than three times. That was unacceptable on a broad base because it wouldn't affect any other province, and we need other provincial support.

So, Mr. Speaker, we went back to the drawing board. We came up with an alternate plan. In that alternate plan, Mr. Speaker, there is a sliding scale, and that scale changes that rate from 60/40 to 70/30 to 80/20 to 90/10, depending on how far off you are from your own provincial average so that it would affect every province, Mr. Speaker. We think it's very effective. We want to see the federal government adopt it, and we're getting the support that's necessary. We hope we can push it through. We've got changes in FIMCLA [Farm Improvement and Marketing Cooperatives Loans Act], Mr. Speaker; we're going to keep pushing.

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the member for Melville-Saltcoats.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Well thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, let's take a minute here and review the NDP government and that Ag minister's record. Last year they wouldn't put money into the CAIS program until December. This year they aren't putting any more money into the CAIS program, not fully funding it.

What else do they do with our farmers this year? They raise crop insurance premiums, cut coverage. No cash injection provincially into the new federal announcement. They freeze municipal funding which, in turn, is going to raise taxes for farmers and ranchers. They also froze the foundation grant. This is also going to raise the education tax that farmers and ranchers pay.

What other good news have they got for farmers, Mr. Speaker? Just tell the farmers of Saskatchewan one optimistic thing they're doing for farmers this year.

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the Minister of Agriculture.

Hon. Mr. Wartman: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I think revisionist history is always a problem, and these guys are trying to provide it all the time for us.

What I would like to do is point out very clearly the multi-millions of dollars that we have come forward with — 3 per cent of Canada's population supporting almost 50 per cent of Canada's agriculture sector, Mr. Speaker, and this 3 per cent of the population has provided around BSE [bovine spongiform encephalopathy] off budget, over budget, \$85 million in the last couple of years, Mr. Speaker. That's a lot of money for the people of this province but we're there for our producers. We don't resent it. We're putting it forward, Mr. Speaker.

I also want to say, Mr. Speaker, that last year once we knew that we could get the resources and we had the final numbers, we did come forward — \$210 million, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Wartman: — Mr. Speaker, that kind of contribution from 3 per cent of the population, 10 times the provincial per capita average, is astounding and I commend the people of this province for the kind of support they have. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Speaker, with leave to introduce a guest that has joined us in the Chamber.

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

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — Leave has been granted.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to welcome to the Saskatchewan Legislative Chamber, and I am sure all members will join me in offering a welcome to a very distinguished Canadian who has joined us today in your gallery, Mr. Speaker, a former premier of the great province of Manitoba, former governor general of Canada, Mr. Ed Schreyer. He is in your gallery. I want to welcome him to the legislature.

Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Speaker, just before I take my place, we all recognize the great contributions that Mr. Schreyer has made to his province and to our nation. But he continues to do so, whether it's through Habitat for Humanity or, in fact, through other initiatives of which he is a part today. I want to thank him for his contribution ongoing to our nation and I look forward to meeting with Mr. Schreyer shortly after question period.

Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Wall: — Well thank you, Mr. Speaker. With leave to introduce guests.

The Speaker: — Is leave granted?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — The member may proceed.

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just very quickly but sincerely, on behalf of the official opposition, we would like to join with the Premier in welcoming Mr. Schreyer to our Legislative Assembly, in your gallery.

I'm not sure if we'll get a chance to visit later on but I would relish that in terms of his knowledge of the history of Western Canada and of course for the nation as a whole. But we thank him for his commitment to his province and his country and welcome here to the Assembly today.

Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Why is the member for Saskatoon Massey Place on his feet?

Hon. Mr. Cline: — To ask leave to introduce a guest, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: — The member may proceed.

Hon. Mr. Cline: — I just want to acknowledge, Mr. Speaker, Elwood Cowley, who is a former member of this legislature and is sitting on the floor of the legislature behind the government benches. And I want to say as a minister of Finance formerly

myself, and presently in charge of Mineral Resources, Mr. Cowley also held those positions and served the province with a great deal of distinction. And I know all members will want to welcome him to the legislature today.

Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the member for Thunder Creek.

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

The Speaker: — . . . more time. Is leave granted?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — Leave has been granted.

Mr. Stewart: — I, as well, would like to introduce Mr. Elwood Cowley who is sitting behind the bar. Mr. Cowley was my history teacher in Thom Collegiate and a very good history teacher he was too. And I resent the implication that he taught me revisionist history.

I hope that all members will welcome Mr. Cowley.

Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

ORDERS OF THE DAY

WRITTEN QUESTIONS

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the Government Whip.

Mr. Yates: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am extremely pleased today to stand on behalf of the government and table a response to written question 913.

The Speaker: — Response to 913 has been submitted.

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. Cheveldayoff.]

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the member for Saskatoon Massey Place and the minister . . . The Chair recognizes the member for The Battlefords.

Hon. Mr. Taylor: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity today to enter into debate on the budget. And in doing so, Mr. Speaker, offer my congratulations to the Minister of Finance and the Premier for putting together a budget that is pragmatic, cautious, and very forward-looking for the circumstances that we find ourselves in.

Since budget day, Mr. Speaker, I've had personal meetings with community leaders, both in the Battlefords and in the city of Lloydminster. Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to say that the response generally was very positive to the initiatives that have been put forward. There are things, of course, that we need to continue to discuss and continue to work at, some of which I will mention in my remarks. But generally, Mr. Speaker, the response was a positive one indicating that we've done a pretty good job of assessing the circumstances of the province and preparing us for the years ahead.

In northwest Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, we like the expenditures in health care; the new money for youth; the new integrated facility that's being proposed or being brought forward in Maidstone; the continued twinning of the Yellowhead highway; and the addition of two new CT [computerized tomography] scanners for the Prairie North Regional Health Authority, one of those CT scanners, Mr. Speaker, for North Battleford and the other one for Lloydminster. This is all money well spent according to the people that I've been talking to in both of our communities.

The northwest part of the province, Mr. Speaker, also appreciates the enhanced oil recovery initiatives that were announced just prior to budget. Everyone I talked to agreed that these incentives should continue to build on the economy that exists in northwest Saskatchewan. The people I talked to clearly see the long-term benefits of developing the industry and putting the education and training, as well as research and development activity, to work at the same time. Mr. Speaker, they talk about this program as visionary, to support the economy of northwest Saskatchewan.

For some across the way, they argue of course there is no vision. For others — my constituents, Mr. Speaker — that vision is very clear and broadly supported: oil incentives, education and training, research and development, working hand-in-hand to develop an industry and an economy for the future of Saskatchewan, more jobs, improved quality of life, a better province for all, Mr. Speaker.

[14:30]

My constituents also understand that 2005-2006 is very much a transition year and that one-time revenues cannot be used to fund long-term ongoing programs and expenditure. Mr. Speaker, it's a transition year because we've just settled on past grievances with the federal government on equalizations. Past grievances, Mr. Speaker, hard fought by the Premier of Saskatchewan with support from some sectors of the provincial economy.

Mr. Speaker, equalization is not clarified for the future. We've settled past grievances, but we still have to await the review of the review committee set by the federal government and, Mr. Speaker, we won't know the circumstances that Saskatchewan will face on equalization until the end of this year and the response of the federal government to that.

Also, Mr. Speaker, we understand and recognize the volatility that exists in our non-renewable resource sector and the revenues that we've gained from that.

Mr. Speaker, certainly it's been an interesting and rewarding year for the people of Saskatchewan thanks to increase in world oil prices, natural gas prices, potash prices. But, Mr. Speaker, we also recognize that these prices are very volatile. Many members in northwest Saskatchewan clearly remember 1998 when the price of oil in the world market was only \$15 a barrel, Mr. Speaker, compared to the \$50 a barrel that it's at today. And of course everyone recognizes that the price of oil over the course of the last year averaged out at around 40 to \$41 a barrel.

And therefore, Mr. Speaker, given that this is a transition year between unfairness and unpredictable to a more fair and more predictable circumstance, my constituents give us high marks for being very cautious and being very pragmatic in the way in which we've approached our budgetary measures.

While I'm on the subject, Mr. Speaker, more congratulations to the Minister of Finance I think are in order, who has managed to reduce our provincial debt to its lowest level in 14 years and secured this province, secured for this province, the 11th consecutive credit upgrade by the bond rating agencies of the world. This work provides us with tremendous positioning for the future, Mr. Speaker, in that we know that the bond markets, the credit rating agencies, those from outside who are looking at the way in which this budget, this government is being managed from a fiscal perspective, Mr. Speaker, goes a long way to giving us credibility for work that's yet to be done.

Now, Mr. Speaker, before I resume my seat, I want to make some remarks about the municipal sector and what this budget does in support of the municipal sector. Mr. Speaker, the budget that we've got in front of us confirms the funding for a new infrastructure program with a total of \$9.2 million in funding.

Mr. Speaker, those who read the budget document closely will realize that overall the spending of the province increases by 7 per cent. The increase for the Department of Government Relations support for the municipal sector, Mr. Speaker, is increasing by about 12 per cent this year above the provincial spending average. Mr. Speaker, this is primarily because there's \$11 million to fund municipal infrastructure in this budget. This is money that's in addition to previously committed Canada-Saskatchewan infrastructure program funding that was put in place over the last five years.

The province was pleased to be able to announce our infrastructure program earlier in the year, Mr. Speaker, so that municipalities could submit applications for projects and be approved in time for this year's construction season.

This year under the Canada Strategic Infrastructure Fund, also previously announced, we are providing \$2.5 million for the Saskatoon south downtown development project, \$1.4 million to complete Saskatoon riverfront redevelopment project started in 2004, and \$2 million for the Regina Exhibition multi-purpose building done in conjunction with the Canada Summer Games. This totals \$5.9 million under the Canada Strategic Infrastructure Fund. These initiatives demonstrate the province's commitment to focus on infrastructure for the coming year.

I was also pleased on budget day, Mr. Speaker, to announce provincial funding for urban development agreements for each

of the cities of Regina and Saskatoon. Mr. Speaker, this funding will enable the province to conclude negotiations with the Government of Canada and the cities of Regina and Saskatoon under urban development agreements. It represents the first year of a five-year commitment that will see the province contribute a total of \$5 million, 2.5 million for each city, to be used for project initiatives identified by the three governments as priorities in each respective city.

The UDA [urban development agreement] signalled the beginning of a new relationship in Regina and Saskatoon amongst federal, provincial, and city governments and a new tripartite approach to addressing issues of shared interests in the two cities. The UDAs are to be cost shared on a federal-provincial-city basis. As a result, the provincial funding contribution together with each city's contribution of 2.5 million and the federal government's commitment of up to 5 million for each UDA will provide a total of \$20 million over five years to be directed to urban development priorities and issues in the two cities.

In providing funding for the UDAs in the '05-06 budget and committing to funding the five-year term agreements, the province recognizes the importance of Regina and Saskatoon from a provincial economic perspective. They are a step towards making tangible investments that positively impact the residents of the two cities and that benefit the population of the province as a whole.

When we look more specifically at the municipal sector, Mr. Speaker, municipalities are aware that the province is preparing to sit down with them to discuss options available to us with regards to future revenue sharing. They are also very appreciative that the additional money that we had available this year has gone to support their projects and infrastructure and with the expectation that new options on revenue sharing will be discussed seriously and in a straightforward manner. And I have made that commitment to the municipalities, Mr. Speaker.

In this budget, municipalities will find that this budget totals funding for municipalities of \$130 million, Mr. Speaker, some of that flowing through from the federal government. That includes \$85 million for revenue sharing, \$5 million under the grants-in-lieu program, \$2.65 million for the transit assistance for people with disabilities program, and \$37.8 million for infrastructure through the completion of CSIP [Canada-Saskatchewan infrastructure program], the new MRIF [Municipal Rural Infrastructure Fund], and other major projects shared by the province.

In conclusion then, Mr. Speaker, I want to take this opportunity to thank the Minister of Finance, who I believe has done an admirable job positioning Saskatchewan's finances to both support and lead the growth of this province for more stable years ahead. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the member for Melville-Saltcoats.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm glad to have the opportunity to respond to the budget this year. And I guess

first off, Mr. Speaker, I find it amazing that a budget such as this would come out from the NDP government after last year having in excess of \$1 billion windfall in the province from gas and oil revenues, equalization revenues from the federal government; \$1 billion, Mr. Speaker, more that they thought they had.

And now this year I understand that there may be anywhere from 400 to 500 million more than was usually the case when oil prices, gas prices were lower. That much more at a minimum probably, Mr. Speaker, because gas prices — if we watch downtown Regina and all over the province for that matter — have skyrocketed in excess of 90 cents a litre. Probably 400 to 500 million new-found money again this year is probably a very low estimate.

Having said that, Mr. Speaker, and not knowing where the \$1 billion disappeared to, I find it amazing when it come to things like agriculture that the NDP government had to cut the agriculture budget about \$140 million from last year. And I know that some of . . . led to believe . . . I know the Premier said the other day that they're putting record amounts in agriculture provincially.

Well that's not exactly the way I see it, Mr. Speaker, because I believe if you go back to about 1990, Mr. Speaker, there was around \$1 billion put into the agriculture budget in Saskatchewan. Right now we're down to 264 million, Mr. Speaker, and what that is, that's about 140 million less. The budget I see for last year that was spent from the province of Saskatchewan was about \$404.792 million into the agriculture budget. That's after they finally got up after the eleventh hour and funded the CAIS program fully, which they're going to have to do again this year, Mr. Speaker, because our farmers in Saskatchewan cannot afford to not have the CAIS program fully funded.

So at a time when farmers have had BSE problems for a couple of years, we've had frost last August 20, I know in my constituency and for that matter in many areas of the province, in fact all over the province, farmers are right up against it. They don't have money to put this crop in.

In fact many of the farmers I've talked to have not even finished paying off last year's bills. Can't get an operating loan until you get those bills paid off. The banking institutions are certainly not going to look at you and say, certainly we'll back you on an operating loan or cash for spring seeding. You certainly have to have last year's bills paid off. That isn't happening, Mr. Speaker.

Yesterday's announcement by the federal government is very positive. I've heard nothing but good things from farmers yesterday that that announcement was made now before seeding. It was very timely. Let's hope the cheques get out there very quickly. I guess our concern, and I think also farmers in the province's concern, is that that \$1 billion is spread right across the country of Canada. That injection of money yesterday is to cover everything. It's to cover all forms of livestock, I understand, the grain and oil sector, the full spectrum, Mr. Speaker. And I think the concern all of us have is that when the actual dollar gets out to the farmers and ranchers of Saskatchewan those cheques may not be all that big at all.

And I know it's . . . in the past it sounds good to the federal government, in fact both levels of government — especially the NDP government — when they do something like this. They announce the full amount that they're putting in but they really don't break it down so that the average urbanite, the people living in the cities, can understand exactly what's going out there. So it's not the urban people's fault when they think farmers are getting a big wad of cash put into the farm community.

I think the problem sometimes is communications out there. As farmers, and I included myself as that when I was farming, maybe we don't spread the word enough and explain these cash injections in the programs that we have out there. And these are not all just handout money. We put our share into the program such as crop insurance, Mr. Speaker, a third, a third, and a third; and the farmer puts his share in.

Through good times, the federal and provincial governments get to return money to the revenue fund. They get to put money back in that they never spent that year. When bad times come and there's more money needed, that would be the time to put that money back into these programs, crop insurance being a good example.

Mr. Speaker, how does the NDP government deal with things like crop insurance? Well we go over the past two or three years . . . I think it was two years ago they increased premiums by 52 per cent, and about the same time cut spot loss hail from the program. Spot loss hail, Mr. Speaker, was the only reason that many farmers were actually taking out crop insurance at that time. The next year, I believe, they raised the premiums another 13 per cent and kind of doctored the coverage a little bit.

This year, Mr. Speaker, again at a time we can least afford it, this government sees fit to raise premiums on an average of about 9 per cent — in fact in some areas I understand it's as high as 46 per cent — and at the same time cutting coverage.

Mr. Speaker, farmers are between a rock and a hard place when it comes to crop insurance. Unless they have crop insurance, they can't get the cash advance. Unless they have crop insurance, they can't get an operating loan in most cases from the bank. The financial institutions want that guarantee there. No matter how low it is and no matter how expensive for the farmers, that's what they ask, and that's what they insist on before you qualify for any sort of an operating loan.

So, Mr. Speaker, having said that, I think there's a great appreciation out there for what the federal government did yesterday. I think that appreciation would have been extended to the provincial government should they have come to the plate and said, here we go, we'll back our farmers. But that's not to be. As we heard the minister say in question period today, there is no way that they're going to put anything into this announcement.

But having said that, Mr. Speaker, then at least the minister could have done was said, instead of putting into this program, I think what we'll do is fully fund the CAIS program.

Mr. Speaker, there's stress all over rural Saskatchewan out there — not just the farmers, not just the ranchers, but business

people that are tightly affected by what happens in the agriculture community. And by funding the CAIS program, I think it would have give all those people that are reliant on the spinoff from agriculture, it would have given the confidence that there's something there in case we have another bad year and to help cover for the year we just had.

Mr. Speaker, I want to look at a number of other things in the budget that actually affect my constituency. Talk on highways for a minute. I noticed in the budget that, I think, we're froze at about the same amount of money as we were last year. Coming in this morning, Mr. Speaker, it's amazing the potholes that are showing up — not only in the urban places like Regina and the towns and that — but also on our highways in the province. And they're going to take a tremendous amount of maintenance just to get them back to where they were before.

[14:45]

And with the normal rate of inflation out there, I believe what we're actually doing by freezing that budget very close to what it was before is we're going backwards. Because with inflation, we'll actually be able to build less highways and less maintenance this year out there.

Mr. Speaker, I want to also talk about school divisions and what the money in the budget was for school divisions, especially seeing that the minister of Education is forcing school divisions out there, forcing them to amalgamate.

Remembering back, Mr. Speaker, when I believe it was Mr. Melenchuk was the Education minister and asked school divisions to voluntarily amalgamate. And he did that and the school divisions all over the province took a look at it and a number of them actually did amalgamate — some two, some three — into one body. I think there was roughly \$400 million put into that program to assist them to voluntarily amalgamate.

They just got finished doing that, they did exactly what the minister at that time asked, and what does the government do? It comes along and says, well now we're ruling that out; that isn't going to work; you're going to do what we say and we're going to cut them away more. We're going to get down to what — 12, 13 school divisions in the province?

I want to use Melville-Deer Park for an example, Mr. Speaker. They had a really good system there where they shared a building, they shared office staff, they shared administration with the Catholic board and it was just a perfect, perfect situation.

Now that the minister has saw fit to force amalgamation on it, has threw that completely out the window. And you know what that's going to do, Mr. Speaker, for the public system and for the Catholic system? Because it won't work now in the new set-up that we have with the larger divisions out there. It's going to increase taxes in the local, to the local taxpayer.

Mr. Speaker, I want to also mention that we have the pending teachers strike coming up and I have two of my kids are teachers. I have a son teaching in Yorkton, I have a daughter teaching in Eston. And, Mr. Speaker, it's interesting when we hear on the open line shows and that, some people phone in and

say, oh well teachers are overpaid and they've got all this time off.

Let me make one thing very clear, Mr. Speaker, and I know myself I was a farmer before and was not that fully aware of what teachers did. But if people only knew the hours that teachers put in, it's not a straight 9 to 3:30 job.

I know my kids and I know every other teacher in the province puts in these extracurricular activity hours where it could be on a weekend, you could be going to volleyball tournaments, all sorts of things, Mr. Speaker. And then preparation for classes and preparation for the things they're going to do tomorrow, the things they're going to do after the weekend.

Even on this Easter break that they've got right now, I know my kids and I think many other teachers in the province are already preparing for next week and on down to the end of the school year.

So, Mr. Speaker, teaching is not an easy profession; it's a very worthy profession. And I've learnt to have a great appreciation for it since I have two kids in it as teachers. So, Mr. Speaker, I hope the minister would keep that in mind when he's negotiating a contract because I know the student loans that my kids had to take out when they went in to teaching, and I know the money that it cost the parents to put them through four, five years university. So, Mr. Speaker, it's very expensive and it would be nice to see the teachers getting a little reward, far more than the 0, 1, and 1 that's being offered to them at the present time.

I found it a little bit hypocritical, Mr. Speaker, of the government when they have all this money but yet they have no money for agriculture and they've got no more money for municipalities, froze the foundation grant, number of areas where they couldn't find any extra money for, and yet the Premier saw fit to increase his funding for his office staff by 50 per cent. It's kind of do as I do, don't do as I say and . . . or do as I say, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I noticed last year . . . we remember last year that the PST [provincial sales tax] was jacked up 1 per cent, which I believe brought in about \$140 million into the provincial coffers. Wouldn't it have seemed realistic then this year after the billion dollar windfall that the government had last year, and the 4 to 500 million extra dollars that are coming into general revenue this year, wouldn't it have seemed a good thing to do is to cut that 1 per cent at least off the PST and return it to at least where it was when the former premier had left as premier of the province?

Mr. Speaker, there's a number of things in this budget I think that we find many, many problems with, as I've said before. Let's just review some of them, Mr. Speaker.

There was no increase, as I said before, in revenue sharing for urban and rural municipalities. No reduction in personal income tax, which means the NDP continues to break an election promise on lowering taxes, and that's not the only one, Mr. Speaker. No business tax reduction, something that we really need in this province if we ever expect to grow the economy, Mr. Speaker. No tax relief for low-income earners as a part of

society that is in desperate need, pay lower taxes so they have more funds available to raise their families and to actually live in Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker. No commitment to fund the CAIS program, as I said before. No commitment to index the basic allowance for social assistance recipients. No commitment to additional treatment beds for those suffering from addictions, Mr. Speaker. No specific targets on waiting lists, Mr. Speaker. And I think each member on this side of the House has examples that they could show of people in our constituencies that have been caught in the long waiting lists whether it's 6 months, 1 year, 18 months, 24 months.

I know I had, the one that comes to mind right away, we had a lady in our constituency, Mr. Speaker, I believe had waited 18 months for her surgery, got in here — I believe it was the General Hospital — was prepped for her operation, was right beside the operating room door about 10 to 4, and you know what happened, Mr. Speaker? The operation was cancelled because they would have had to pay overtime after 4 o'clock.

Here's a lady that waited for 18 months at least for her operation, got all prepped, was right ready to go. And Mr. Speaker, I've never been in that situation, but I imagine the stress that that puts on a person and you build up your confidence to have the surgeries done and the procedures done. And all of a sudden they tell you that's not going to happen today; you've got to go home and come back another day. I don't believe that lady has had that operation at this point.

But what they don't seem to realize is that lady had a three-hour drive into Regina for every appointment she had with every specialist in here. Then she turns around and has to drive back in, gets her courage up to have the operation. I mean do we not have any compassion for the people of Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, when it comes to health care?

Mr. Speaker, I think it all boils down to priorities of this NDP government. They seem to be able to grow the Premier's staff but forget about the staff that's really important in such things such as teachers and nurses, the professionals that we absolutely need in this province, Mr. Speaker.

So, Mr. Speaker, I would like to support the amendment that was put forward by my colleagues, and the amendment reads:

“That the Assembly” be deleted and the following be substituted therefor:

disagrees with the general budgetary policy of the government because the Premier and cabinet have betrayed low- and modest-income earners by not increasing the basic personal exemption for people who earn less than \$35,000 each year, have not included indexation to the food allowance for people living on social assistance, have predetermined the outcome of collective bargaining for teachers and nurses, have frozen funding for the K to 12 education, have not committed to fully fund the province's share of the Canadian agriculture income stabilization program, have not addressed revenue sharing with municipalities, and have not laid out a long-term vision for the province for the next 100 years, therefore this provincial government does not enjoy the confidence of this Assembly.

I would support that amendment, Mr. Speaker, and I'm very disappointed in this year's budget.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the member for Saskatoon Meewasin.

Hon. Mr. Quennell: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise, pleased and proud to support the budget introduced into this Chamber by the Minister of Finance.

There has been considerable reflection and comment this year, as is fit and proper, surrounding the fact and the event of our centennial as a province and how this is an opportunity both to reflect upon the achievements and accomplishments of our pioneers and elders, but also an opportunity to think in terms longer than, at budget year terms, longer than a term of government; to think in the future in terms greater than that, Mr. Speaker.

And although any budget deals with the revenues raised in that year and expended in that year — and that may seem like a simple concept, Mr. Speaker, but I think some people have difficulty grasping that — although any budget will have that annual effect and that annual focus, this is a budget that we've brought forward in our centennial year and, I think, reflects upon a future, looks forward to a future beyond the simple budget year. And I would like in my comments, Mr. Speaker, to centre upon the youth of our province and the important investments that this budget makes in our youth and therefore in the future of our province as we enter our second century.

And if I may proceed chronologically through the stages of life, Mr. Speaker, I first of all want to speak just very briefly about the KidsFirst program, one of the initiatives to intervene, effect, change in positive ways the lives of children from zero to six. And KidsFirst provides intensive support to families in communities across the province where the need is the greatest, Mr. Speaker, and this is accomplished through partnerships with families, with communities, with community organizations, with schools, health authorities, Aboriginal organizations, and other governments. This program is based upon the concept of prevention. It's based upon the concept of early intervention.

Mr. Speaker, as you know, as the members of the House know, as some members of the public know, I am the Minister of Justice. And the justice system, particularly the criminal justice system, is a very reactive system, Mr. Speaker. When families break down, when families don't work, when communities don't work, when neighbourhoods don't work, the criminal justice system is called in as the system of last resort to attempt to repair the damage that may very well have been prevented. The KidsFirst program is an important part of that kind of preventative programming. I think its successes, although some of them will be in the future — most of them will be in the future — some of them are already being seen.

I think the concept behind it is so clear, so self-evident that I fully expect that it will be in the next pamphlet of the Saskatchewan Party, which I understand will be called 100 more ideas to make us look more moderate and reasonable.

Like many of the ideas in the first pamphlet, of course, it's already in the process of being implemented. It includes dedicated mental health and addictions workers working with KidsFirst families and provides for 252 child care spaces for KidsFirst families.

There's no question that our communities, our province, would be a better place today if this program had been in place 20 years ago. And, Mr. Speaker, you may be familiar with the Russian proverb about the best time to plant a tree. And the best time to plant a tree is 20 years ago. The second best time, according to the proverb, is today. And with the KidsFirst program, we have been planting trees that will bear fruit for the next generation and the generation after that.

As well, Mr. Speaker, the budget makes provisions for . . . again, with early intervention, with prevention, with building better citizens and therefore better families, better communities, better neighbourhoods for the future. Enhancements to early childhood and learning including in this budget enhancing the child nutrition development program and providing an additional \$1.1 million to First Nations child and family service agencies.

And we're working with the federal government and with early childhood and learning. We are working with stakeholders, and I expect that we will be making considerable advances over the next very near future . . . and over the next year, two years, three years, making great advances in this area in respect to early childhood and child care.

Also in this budget, Mr. Speaker, are investments in education in K to 12 [kindergarten to grade 12]. Investments in education yield long-term benefits for individuals, families, and the entire province. Supporting youth to stay in school and succeed in learning are keys to success in life. In this budget, there's \$26.6 million in capital spending for K to 12 school facilities. There is establishment of 15 school service areas to collaborate at the local level for the learning successes and well-being of children and youth. We are enhancing online resources for the K to 12 system with a further \$300,000, and we are expanding partnerships within the K to 12 system through the Aboriginal employment development program to promote a stay in school message.

And there is nothing more important, Mr. Speaker, other than early intervention and avoiding the costs being borne within the justice system, than attachment to school and attachment to the neighbourhood that follows from attachment to school, Mr. Speaker.

Now I've spoken about the very beginning of the youth's life. I've spoken about the K to 12 and how provisions are being made in this budget for advancements and progress in both those areas. And I now want to address, Mr. Speaker, briefly investments that we are making in post-secondary education.

Investment in Saskatchewan's universities, regional colleges, and SIAST [Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology] campuses encourages our young people to build their lives and careers right here at home. I believe a keystone, or certainly one of the most important components of this budget, was the \$6.7 million provided for the two Saskatchewan

universities in the form of the Saskatchewan centennial university tuition grant, which will allow those universities to hold the line on tuition so that we will see no tuition increase over the 2004 level, Mr. Speaker. Students asked for such a program. This government has delivered that program to them.

[15:00]

In addition — and this is over and above the tuition grant; it's over and above the other spending in the investments in post-secondary education — \$3.8 million towards the accreditation of the College of Medicine; \$900,000 for the expansion of the nursing education program; \$3.4 million to expand the bursary program so that approximately 10,000 students will have additional non-repayable students' assistance this year; and an additional 34 bursaries for Aboriginal students through a Crown Investment Corporation program.

Further, Mr. Speaker, partnering with the Crown Investment Corporation, the First Nations University of Canada, there are plans to implement the Aboriginal student recruitment and retention office, the undergraduate student leadership program, and intercultural leadership centre.

Mr. Speaker, we have learned of the growing prosperity of our province. This is now a have province, Mr. Speaker. We have . . . Resource prices are high, Revenues to the government have increased. This has not escaped the notice of anybody in this legislature. It hasn't escaped the notice of the opposition. It is important that this prosperity be invested in all the people of Saskatchewan. And you will note it in what I have spoken about already, both at the K to 12 level and the post-secondary level, a commitment to ensuring that Aboriginal students are well represented in the graduating classes of our schools and our universities and our other post-secondary institutions as we go forward.

Crown Investment Corporation also has a math and science enrichment program at the U of S [University of Saskatchewan] for an estimated 50 students per year. Now some people might suggest that the Finance critic, the member from Saskatoon Silver Springs — some people call unkindly the man who would be king, having spent well over \$1 billion out of a \$900 million increase in revenues — might benefit from this math enrichment program, but then again he might not, Mr. Speaker. I understand he was a political staffer here in 1980s, and if that didn't teach him that you can't spend more than you bring in, I don't think anything will.

In addition there is \$3 million in capital to the U of R [University of Regina] for design and construction of a new lab building, the University of Regina; \$1.8 million to SIAST, and \$700,000 to the regional colleges for sustaining capital.

And for the students who graduate from our post-secondary institutions, remain in the province, are employed in this province, making a contribution in this province, an increase in the post-secondary tax credit to \$675 this year, up from \$500.

And in addition, Mr. Speaker, the budget makes provisions for transition to the workforce for young people. The government has played and will continue to play a critical role in developing skills individuals need for participation in the labour force over

their lifetime and in responding to the needs of industry.

Two million dollars has been put aside to increase training capacity for the JobStart/Future Skills program, adult basic education and apprenticeship programs by 1,000 seats. Crown Investments Corporation's investing in young people by offering the grad works intern program. And as of March 1, 2005, 38 crown internship opportunities are posted on the grad works website with an intent to provide 85 this year. The Green Team initiative will provide 100 students with career relevant employment in the environment sector.

The centennial student employment program will provide 700 students with career relevant employment in government, community-based organizations, and post-secondary institutions.

These are all investments made in this budget in the youth of our province from preschool to post-secondary to transition to the workplace, Mr. Speaker. These are investments that show this government's commitment to the future generation as we enter our second century.

But there is another overarching commitment that we are making. And if I could speak just briefly, Mr. Speaker, of an event that I attended yesterday morning where I had the honour of presenting a medallion to a citizen in my constituency, who turned 100 years old this year, the same year as the province, born the year that we entered Confederation, turned 100 years old today, or this year.

Mr. Speaker, there were four generations of his family at this event, and his great granddaughter who's 10 years old, rose to speak about her great-grandfather who was being presented with this medallion. And I tell you, a gold medallion, it's a beautiful thing, Mr. Speaker — you've probably seen one, although I know you wouldn't have been presented with one, of course.

But it could not possibly, possibly match the pride he must have felt when this 10-year-old girl rose and gave an eloquent speech with no notes — that she had memorized but that she gave not as if it were recited but with feeling — and talked about her great-grandfather: when he was born, the youngest son, on a farm in Saskatchewan, and how he became a teacher. And how during the Depression, people didn't have money to pay their taxes, and the school board didn't have money to pay his salary, and he was paid in eggs and butter. And how he and his family lived through and endured and prospered. And her great-grandfather's recommendation for a long life: balance, eat nutritious meals, exercise every day, and always do your homework.

And this year we are taking this time to acknowledge the accomplishments of the great-grandfather. But what is as important is to recognize the importance of our investments and our attention in that great-granddaughter. Now her ambition — well she has two — she wants to be a plastic surgeon and she wants to be prime minister of Canada. Well I told her to be a plastic surgeon first. And her interest in being prime minister of Canada is because she doesn't think we have the proper amount of attention directed to environmental issues and she wants to see those taken care of.

And so our debt to her great-grandfather we well know. People like him built this province. Our obligation to her, we also have to pay attention to, both on providing a sustainable economy so that there is an environment there for her to continue to protect and hold in stewardship for her children and her grandchildren, but secondly there's a responsibility — perhaps not as grand, but very important — to be responsible in our stewardship of the finances with which we are entrusted.

And, Mr. Speaker, this year we have seen the total public debt for the province of Saskatchewan at 28 per cent of the gross domestic product of this province — the lowest, the lowest it has been since 1982. This is a government on this side of the House that takes the responsibilities entrusted to it by the people of Saskatchewan to provide both a green and prosperous economy for the great-granddaughter, but also to provide the circumstances in which future investments can be responsibly made. That, Mr. Speaker, truly is a centennial budget. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Deputy Speaker: — Why is the member from Saskatchewan Rivers on his feet?

Mr. Borgerson: — Mr. Deputy Speaker, leave to introduce guests.

The Deputy Speaker: — The member has requested leave to introduce guests. Is leave granted?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Deputy Speaker: — Leave is granted.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Mr. Borgerson: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The other day, Deputy Speaker, I had the privilege of introducing six Borgersons to the House. I have the honour to introduce another Borgerson to the House, my sister Gail, Gail Smith, who is here from Stony Plain, Alberta. Whenever she wants to have a good experience of family and community, of course she comes from Alberta to Saskatchewan for a visit, and that's why she's here today. I'd like the members to welcome Gail to the House.

Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Deputy Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the member for Thunder Creek.

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. Cheveldayoff.]

Mr. Stewart: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It's my pleasure to join in on the budget debate in this Hon. Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, this NDP government, or this province for that matter, has never seen such a windfall on the revenue side with revenues exceeding expectations in the budget year just ending to the tune of \$1.1 billion — revenue generated by unprecedented oil and gas prices, steadily increasing prices for potash and uranium, and nearly half a billion dollars in unexpected, one-time federal transfers. That \$1.1 billion was generated in the fiscal year just ending, Mr. Speaker, and for the new fiscal year that is about to begin they project an additional \$400 million on the revenue side.

Heady times indeed, Mr. Deputy Speaker, especially when one considers that the additional 400 million that is projected for this upcoming fiscal year is based on only \$41.50 oil. Pretty conservative, Mr. Deputy Speaker, when we consider that oil is up around \$57 a barrel and the fundamentals that we are aware of today indicate that it will likely stay up around the \$50 mark for the year. That makes the government's projection probably \$10 a barrel or about 25 per cent low, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Conservative indeed.

In other words, Mr. Deputy Speaker, never in the history of this province has any government had such an opportunity to show some leadership or to take a direction that will begin to propel us out of the economic and social stagnation that we have been mired in for six decades.

But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we see no direction in this budget and no leadership. In fact there is so little direction and leadership in this budget that it looks like they just couldn't agree on any kind of a direction and after squabbling for a period of time the Premier, or whoever's in charge over there, threw up his hands and said okay, then we'll just give every government department and agency a little money, we won't do anything for the real people in this province, and we'll once again abdicate our responsibility to lead.

You know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I didn't volunteer to speak in this budget debate until I saw the budget. I knew that the NDP government had a huge windfall of cash to spend. I assumed that they were smart enough to direct a good portion of that money where it could really make a difference. And I didn't want to be put in a position of having to criticize the government for trying to do the right thing. But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, they missed the mark badly and they're not making any kind of a serious effort to do the right thing.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, let's examine some of the specific shortcomings of this budget. Since the early 1990s, Mr. Deputy Speaker, this NDP government has been downloading on both rural and urban municipalities. But not only have they been downloading costs and responsibilities on municipalities, they have at the same time cut back revenue sharing grants to both rural and urban municipalities. There is nothing in this budget to address that injustice, Mr. Deputy Speaker. This will undoubtedly mean that property taxes will again be forced up right across this province, the province with the highest property taxes in all classes in the country.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, former Premier Roy Romanow got a lot of

credit for balancing the budget in the mid-1990s. He did that on the backs of every segment of the population except the provincial government, which continued to grow right through his NDP government. And no segment of the population, with the possible exception of farmers, paid a higher price for those balanced budgets than did property taxpayers. Mr. Deputy Speaker, not only are high property taxes a burden on our families and our agricultural sector, but they are making us uncompetitive in all sectors of our economy and they are one of the big three taxes that discourage investment in this province.

[15:15]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this matter of high property taxes needed to be addressed as soon as the government had the financial capacity to do so. This NDP government had the financial capacity to address it in this budget, and they failed.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, low income earners in this province pay the highest income taxes in the country. The Saskatchewan Party has a plan to give low-income earners the break that they so richly deserve by substantially increasing their personal exemption. Often when this tired, mean-spirited, old government can't come up with a workable idea of their own, they steal ours, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I have never so sincerely wished that they would steal one of our ideas than I did in this case.

We on this side of the floor have compassion for good productive people who work hard and still can't get a break. And we have a plan to do something about it. This government had the opportunity and the financial means to do something about it, and they refused.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, Saskatchewan has the highest business taxes in the country. The NDP don't like business. They are socialists. They believe in the *Regina Manifesto* which is the document that their ideology is based on and it vows to destroy capitalism. What the NDP either don't know or intentionally ignore is the fact that it takes a vibrant and growing private business sector to make the investments and create the jobs that will cause an economy to prosper.

This province, Mr. Deputy Speaker, has the highest basket of taxes not based on profit of any jurisdiction in Canada. These are taxes like corporate capital tax, PST, and property taxes.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, business expects to pay a fair amount of tax in one form or another, but the taxes that they find most repugnant are those taxes that are not based on profit. And they will invest in jurisdictions where those taxes are lower or don't exist, and they will continue to avoid places like this where they are unreasonably high. Mr. Deputy Speaker, this government had the financial ability to deal with these taxes that kill investment and prosperity in our province, and chose not to.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in this budget the government actually broadened the base of the corporate capital tax that applies to oil and gas industry by applying this job-killing tax to energy trusts. Is it any wonder, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that this incompetent government predicts less drilling starts this year — this year, Mr. Deputy Speaker, with \$57 oil — than we had last year? And is it any wonder that there were less drilling starts

last year than the year before?

Our school teachers contribute to this province like they never have before, Mr. Deputy Speaker. These days they are expected to be social workers, policemen, psychologists, and parents as well as teachers. They have done their part to help this province and now, when they expect and need a little fairness in return, this NDP government imposes a 0, 1, and 1 wage settlement guideline on them which today we hear may not be firm after all.

Not only that, Mr. Speaker, but this NDP budget allows no new money for K to 12 operating grants, money that will be necessary to cover any kind of a negotiated wage settlement. Once again they had the means but refused to do the right thing by our teachers. This action, or inaction, has the potential to throw this province into a teachers' strike and eventually drive more of our teachers out of the province. Since this budget allows no new money for K to 12 operating grants, any settlement this government makes with our teachers will go straight into property taxes and further exacerbate that already grim situation.

Our agricultural producers have been this government's favourite whipping boy since Roy Romanow and his bunch failed to honour signed GRIP [gross revenue insurance program] contracts with producers in 1992 and got away with it. This government signed on to the CAIS program knowing full well that the province's share was to be 40 per cent. Then, Mr. Speaker, they capped the provincial contribution at \$99 million, knowingly breaking their word and violating the terms of the agreement that they had signed with the federal government. They then steadfastly refused to live up to their signed commitment and fully fund the 2003 program until the dying days of 2004.

At first, Mr. Deputy Speaker, they claimed that the province couldn't afford the program that they had already agreed to, and then, when oil revenues began to roll in at a rate that even they couldn't conceal any more, they did what they always do when they're in a tight spot. They blamed the feds. They said that they were misled by them, that they were told that 99 million would always be enough to cover the program in Saskatchewan.

Then, Mr. Speaker, they began to challenge the 60/40 cost-sharing arrangement that they signed on to in order to stall some more.

Mr. Speaker, everybody knew what the cost-sharing formula was, and everybody knew that \$99 million wouldn't come close to funding 40 per cent of the program in Saskatchewan. And nearly everyone said so. As the opposition Ag critic at the time, I said so publicly. How stupid are they? Or how stupid do they think the rest of us are? The very fact that they floated this series of distortions of the truth indicates with clarity the lack of respect and pure contempt in which they hold our most important industry, agriculture.

They're doing it again, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Now they're refusing to fully fund the 2004 CAIS program and this budget makes no allowance for them to fully fund it. This at a time when they have the financial ability to grow the size of government in this province, particularly the communications

salaries in the Premier's office which are up 58 per cent, from \$856,000 to 1.35 million in this budget.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this government has gutted the crop insurance program. This will be the third or fourth consecutive year that they have increased premiums and reduced coverage. Crop insurance and CAIS are the only protection our producers have against the vagaries of our climate and a marketplace that is all too often interfered with by protectionist policies and products subsidized by foreign governments. They had the means to address these critical issues in agriculture and they turned their back.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the food allowance for recipients of social services hadn't been raised for 20 years. The Saskatchewan Party has repeatedly brought this issue to the government's attention and to the attention of the media. Finally in this budget they address the situation, but to such a small extent as to be totally meaningless. Neither is there any provision to index the basic social services allowance, Mr. Speaker. These are not measures that cost a lot of money, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but they do cry out for a commitment from this government which has once again turned its back on the poorest among us in the budget in favour of increasing the size of government.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, drug addiction is a very serious problem in this province and has been for a long time. But the introduction to our province of crystal methamphetamine is a whole new ball game. Crystal meth is the most addictive drug that is known to exist, with many users being addicted after their first usage. After becoming addicted, the average life expectancy of a user is six years.

My colleagues and I get too many calls and emails and letters from desperate parents who are watching their teenagers kill themselves on this drug. They tell us that there are not nearly enough treatment facilities, and that there is no specific program for this horrible drug that needs to be treated differently. This budget makes no provision for additional treatment beds for those suffering from addictions, and those caring families will continue to have nowhere to turn.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, northern Saskatchewan is rich with economic development opportunities, but it takes infrastructure to make development of the North's rich resources possible. That infrastructure is the responsibility of no one but the government of this province.

Once again, Mr. Deputy Speaker, there is no provision in this budget for all-weather roads in the North, roads that could be the key to unlock the vast potential of northern Saskatchewan. This government had the financial ability to address this issue as well, but once again we see the interests of real people in this province take a back seat to this administration's interest in growing the government.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this government is sitting on a windfall in excess of \$1.5 billion over and above what they expected in revenue at this time, and they are still trying to force teachers and nurses into a non-negotiable wage settlements of 0, 1, and 1. Sadly there is no money in this budget to allow for higher settlements. And this government is on a potential collision course with these professionals that will devastate education

and health care in the province and send more of our valuable professionals scurrying to more friendly jurisdictions.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, even though this government had 1.5 billion extra dollars to play with in this hapless budget, they managed to miss the mark on all of the important issues that I have discussed, and many more.

But they still managed to overspend. The budget document clearly shows that even with this windfall of cash, this bungling, irresponsible NDP government managed to spend more than they took in. And that, friends and neighbours, is a deficit. In order, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to make this appear to the unschooled to be a balanced budget, they drew down \$145 million from the Fiscal Stabilization Fund. Most people surely know by now that there is no money in the so-called Fiscal Stabilization Fund. It is nothing more than a bookkeeping entry and any money that is drawn out of this fund for any purpose must be borrowed by the province. That is what this budget proposes to do and it means that, clearly, there is a deficit this year of \$145 million and correspondingly the debt of the province will increase by that amount.

Last year this NDP government pleaded poverty and increased the PST by one point. This year, Mr. Deputy Speaker, they had the opportunity to reverse that PST increase, but reducing taxes to real people flies in the face of their philosophical bent to increase the size of government so they didn't do that either.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this budget should have used one-time windfall cash in a way that would build an economic future in this province and look after the least advantaged among us with compassion. It misses that mark badly, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and accordingly I will not support the budget but I will be supporting the amendment.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Deputy Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the member for Regina Northeast.

Mr. Harper: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, it's certainly my pleasure to enter into this debate on behalf of the fine people of Regina Northeast.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, on March 23 the Minister of Finance delivered a budget that is truly a budget that sets the foundations in Saskatchewan for the next 100 years. This being Saskatchewan's centennial year, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it's only appropriate that this budget set the tone for the future.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I looked over the budget very closely to find the one thing that would reflect the theme of the budget. What I found was that there were many messages that would describe the thrust of our budget. But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, there was one message that stands out for me, and it was a statement by a Minister of Finance and I quote, this is Saskatchewan's 12th consecutive balanced budget. That is amazing when you take into consideration that when the NDP became government in 1991, we inherited from the Conservative government of the members opposite a debt of \$14.6 billion.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it's only because of good work, good management, good policies since 1991, Saskatchewan has enjoyed 11 consecutive bond rating upgrades. Mr. Deputy Speaker, when we look at the fact that in 1991 Saskatchewan's debt to GDP [gross domestic product] ratio was nearly 70 per cent, while today Saskatchewan's debt to GDP ratio is under 30 per cent, simply put, Mr. Deputy Speaker, these are two independent indicators that show that this government is on the right track.

[15:30]

This budget, Mr. Deputy Speaker, contains many, many items that deserve mentioning. But time won't allow me to mention them all. But I would like to share with you my approach to measuring the quality of this budget. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to identify different people who are either my constituents or people who I simply know. Then I ask, how does this budget affect them?

First, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I thought of the retired seniors who live in my constituency. And I asked, how does this budget affect them? The seniors like the increased funding for health care that not only supports the health care services, but expands these services all across the province. Our seniors also like the millions in new funding for our youth initiatives, as they know their grandchildren will see the benefits.

But most of all, Mr. Deputy Speaker, our seniors like to know that there has been a \$179 million permanent debt reduction in 2004-2005. And today, Saskatchewan's government debt is the lowest it's been in 14 years. Our seniors look at this budget and they say, this budget helps me.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I think about the small-business owners who live in my constituency and I ask, how does this budget affect them? The small-business owners see a strong and growing economy, and they like what they see.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the small-business owners see a budget that contains one of the largest capital budgets at almost \$327 million. The small-business owners see a projected real GDP growth forecast at 3 per cent, and they like what they see.

The small-business owners know that the province's economy is performing well and measures in this budget will ensure that the economy continues to grow. Mr. Deputy Speaker, our small-business owners look at this budget and they say, this budget helps me.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I think of the working women and men of my constituency and I ask, how does this budget affect them? First, Mr. Speaker, they see our government's commitment to building a green and prosperous economy, and they like what they see.

They see more than \$20 million under the Canada-Saskatchewan infrastructure program. Mr. Deputy Speaker, they see \$5 million in rebates under the ethanol fuel tax rebate program. They see millions of dollars for our roads and our highways. Mr. Speaker, they see one of the largest capital budgets in Saskatchewan's history, and they like what they see. The working men and women of this province look at

our budget and they say, this budget helps me.

Mr. Speaker, I think of our farmers across this province, who for the most part have had a hard time of it all. Farmers have been dealing with low commodity prices, they've been hit with the BSE issue, followed by closed borders to our livestock which drove the prices even lower, then last summer's devastating August 20 frost which hit an already late crop, rendering much of that crop nearly worthless.

Our farmers look at this budget and recognize the government is acting on the priorities of the ACRE [Action Committee on the Rural Economy] committee. Our farmers appreciate that this budget contains the support for agriculture through the fully funded province's portion of crop insurance and maintaining the initial funding for CAIS. Mr. Speaker, our farmers know that in this time of real need, it's only the federal government that can and should step up to the plate with financial aid to pull our farmers through very, very tough times.

Mr. Speaker, I think of the young people and I ask, how does this budget affect them? Mr. Deputy Speaker, when we think of our youth, we think of the future. After all, that's what our youth represents — the future. When the young people look at this budget, they see a one-time centennial university tuition grant of \$6.7 million, which effectively freezes tuition until a full-scale review of the student funding can take place.

When students look at this budget they see an increase of 6.8 per cent in the education spending. They also see more than 27,000 training places; they see funds that extend nursing programs; they see 600 training opportunities through the northern skills training program; and they also see the graduate tax credit increased to \$675. Mr. Speaker, the young people look at this budget and they say, this budget helps me.

Then, Mr. Speaker, I think of Emma Bradley, who is not yet one month old, and I ask, how does this budget affect her? Well this budget provides the tools to keep the economy strong and growing so Emma's parents can continue to live in Saskatchewan and raise her here. This budget provides the tools to support our health care system so that if Emma needs health care, she will receive the health care she needs, and she'll receive it in a timely fashion. This budget provides the tools to strengthen our education system so that when Emma goes to school — both K to 12 and post-secondary — she will receive the very best in education.

Mr. Speaker, our Minister of Finance in this budget has laid the foundations for the future — a future of opportunity and prosperity — so that when Emma enters the workforce, she will do so here in Saskatchewan, and she will stay here, raise her family here because Saskatchewan is a happening place.

Mr. Speaker, I have just touched on a few of the reasons why the fine people of Regina Northeast have instructed me to vote against the amendment and for the budget. And that's what I'll be doing. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Deputy Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the member for Wood River.

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Well I'm very pleased to stand in the House today and enter the debate on the budget. Mr. Deputy Speaker, this centennial budget was touted by this NDP government as a budget that builds for the next 100 years.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would suggest that this budget didn't see past 100 days. And in fact today we even witnessed from the Minister of Learning that the Easter egg basket was good for him, and so there's been changes already to the budget with the financing for teachers. So it didn't even make the 100 days, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It made only partial of . . . a portion of a week.

Mr. Speaker, I want to talk about . . . This is a government release on the budget and what it says, and I quote — and the previous speaker also said — it's the "12th consecutive GRF balanced budget." Well I want to discuss that for just a minute, Mr. Deputy Speaker. If you look — and this is their own document — and if you look on page 12 of the document and page 13 of the document, it says, revenues \$7,006,800,000; expenses \$7,151,731,000.

Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, even in NDP math, that says to me that your expenses are more than your revenues. Now what do you call it if your expenses are more than your revenues? There's no doubt in my mind that it is a deficit budget. So how can members over there stand up and face the public and say it's a balanced budget? That is another, Mr. Deputy Speaker, limited information estimation. It's not being truthful with the people of this province.

And I want to go back and just touch on a couple of quotes and surprisingly where these couple of quotes came from. And it says:

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.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, that was the current Finance minister that said that. So therefore, going back to the budget document, where it says 7 billion, 100 million plus is in expenses and 7 billion and 6 million in revenues, according to the Finance minister himself, that is a deficit budget.

Now I'd like to continue with another couple of quotes from the current Finance minister. And he spoke on this in 1991, and he said:

This deficit, this deficit, Mr. Chairman, is not so much . . . [a] result of fiscal and economic conditions in this province. This deficit is the result of an attitude. This deficit is the result of an attitude by a government that simply fails to recognize that if you spend more than you bring in, you're going to get behind.

Now, we have the current Finance minister that is operating with a deficit budget, contrary to what he and members opposite may think, but those were his words from before.

I'd just like to throw another quote out from the current Finance minister:

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?

Well here we have typical of the NDP — says something one day, disagrees with it the next and does the opposite. Flip flop; flip flop totally.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, another quote from the Finance minister, and how these come back, how these come back to kind of haunt them:

Saskatchewan people know that, and one of the reasons that they're fed up with these people, they're fed up with a government that tries to deny the facts. They're fed up with a government that's always trying to pull the wool over their eyes.

Well, Mr. Speaker, we have a government now that has been doing that for some time, is pulling the wool over the eyes of Saskatchewan people, and no longer will they be taking it.

Mr. Speaker, there is absolutely no doubt that this budget is a deficit budget. Now the other day, the other day the Finance minister got up and it was after we had introduced our 100 ideas for the 100 years. And the Finance minister got up and he said, well that's gimmickry; that is just gimmickry. Well, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker, what is this so-called balanced budget, what it is not, if it's not gimmickry?

Here we have, here we have a Finance minister on one day is saying it's gimmickry if it doesn't suit his personal agenda, and yet he turns around and produces a budget that is basically based on gimmickry. And I would like to expand on that just a little bit because the next bullet in their release, the news release by this NDP government, it says, "No tax increases."

Well, Mr. Speaker, if you look at, if you look at what's going on within the budget, if you read it, it talks about the corporate capital tax surcharge on oil and gas income. And I want to repeat that because it's extremely important, because we have men and women on that side of the House that will stand up and say exactly that because they've been told to say it — there's no tax increases. But then it slaps the corporate capital tax surcharge on oil and gas income . . . trusts, and that amounts to an additional \$20 million this year and up to \$40 million in the future. Mr. Speaker, no, no matter how you look at that, that is a tax increase.

So looking at the document that's produced by that government for media release it says, "No tax increases." Well they just don't match. They say one thing and they do another. They're taxing, they're taxing the oil and gas companies, which the Finance minister had said the other day and suggested that we have awoken a sleeping giant. Well one of my colleagues said today, we have awoken a sleeping giant and with this tax we cut down the beanstalk. And that is just exactly how this NDP government works. So gimmickry, gimmickry again. I want to express that because again the minister used gimmickry.

And while I'm on it, it's just a little off the beaten track on this,

but look at the gimmickry that's been used in the past by this NDP government. How about SPUDCO [Saskatchewan Potato Utility Development Company]? And that's one of my favourites. SPUDCO was gimmickry. It was another limited information estimation to the people of this province, totally untruthful to the people of this province, so it was gimmickry.

How about the ethanol? How about the Belle Plaine fiasco in ethanol? That was nothing but gimmickry. So here we have a Finance minister that in one day has the audacity to stand up in front of this House and say, well they're just using gimmickry over there, where he, himself, is using gimmickry to say that we've got a balanced budget. They have used gimmickry to say that SPUDCO was good for this province. They used gimmickry to say that ethanol, we've got this whole ethanol strategy that never went, that was strictly gimmickry. So, Mr. Speaker, you can see that this budget to me is a bunch of gimmickry.

So now, now I'd like to . . . Now just on the corporate capital tax, just a week before, the Premier was so proud, he got up and he talked about royalties, that he was going to help oil companies in this province, come into this province and do more work. And then he turns around and slaps a corporate capital tax on trusts.

[15:45]

And this is the NDP motto. This to me should be the NDP motto forever — we got what it takes to take what you got. Because that's exactly what they're doing with the oil companies. And I want to repeat that because I think that's a motto that they really believe in — we got what it takes to take what you've got. And that's how they're dealing with the oil companies.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to talk a little bit about what this budget does not contain. And one of my colleagues talked about it a little earlier, but talked about no increase in revenue sharing for urban and rural municipalities. Again, we have a government that will stand up and say we don't have tax increases. But there's no increase in revenue sharing, so what's going to happen to the municipalities?

We already know. And members over there should have these numbers imprinted in their mind — four and seven. Because Regina has already stated that they're going to have to up their taxes by 4 per cent, and Saskatoon by 7 per cent. Is that a tax increase? The NDP will say no, no, no that's not us, that's the municipality that's doing it.

Well what caused it? It was caused by this government not negotiating a fair-share agreement with the municipalities. They've downloaded for years and years and now say no, no, it's not our fault; we didn't put up taxes, just as the document says — no tax increase. But it's forcing tax increases.

Also, Mr. Speaker, when the Minister of Government Relations was talking, he talked about well, don't forget about the infrastructure fund that we're putting out for the municipalities. Well let's look at that fund. It's a 25/25/50 per cent fund — 25 per cent from the feds, 25 per cent from the province, but 50 per cent from the municipalities. Well, Mr. Speaker, with no fair

revenue-sharing formula, no fair-share revenue device, how can the municipalities afford the 50 per cent for revenue infrastructure? So on one hand it sounds good — yes, we're putting money on for revenue sharing. But 50 per cent of it has to come from the municipalities anyway and they don't have the money to do it. So what value really is that?

Mr. Speaker, no reduction in personal income taxes, which means that the NDP continue to break, to break its election promises on lowering taxes. No business tax reductions means our business community will continue to face the highest taxes in the country. No relief for, no tax relief for low-income earners, which means those needing the break the most will continue to pay the highest taxes in Canada. Mr. Speaker, this is sad. This is extremely sad for our low-income earners. They had the opportunity, they had the millions, in fact over \$1 billion to deal with. And yet those that are suffering the worst in this province did not see any tax relief.

No new money for K to 12 operating grants — this may result in a teachers' strike. No commitment to fully fund the CAIS program for 2004. And we hear the Agriculture minister, always boasts about how he supports the agriculture sector in this province, and I'll speak more to that after. But here we have . . . we're diddling around again saying we're only going to fund CAIS 2004 to the 2003 level — initial level — which is 90-some million dollars. And so again farmers are left in the lurch. And no promise to go off of the 0, 1, 1 public sector wage mandate and no money for roads in the North.

Those are just some of the things that were not in the budget, Mr. Speaker. Now I want to get into the budget document and what it basically talks about. On page 8 of the document it says, create a positive business climate. Well isn't that a dichotomy. We have a socialist government that wants to create a positive business climate when, right in their own document, own document, and I'll quote it from the manifesto, it says:

No socialist government will rest content until it has eradicated capitalism and put into operation the full program of socialized planning.

Well how can you on one hand say that you are going to create a positive business climate, when on the other hand you're talking about how you will not rest until everything is socialized. Mr. Speaker, that is a real laugh.

Now we're talking about creating the business climate. Well how do they, how are they creating a business climate? What are they doing? Are they reducing business tax? Are they doing anything on the tax side of the business climate? No. They're going to review it. And going through this document, Mr. Speaker, I don't know how many times you pick up the word review or study. There's no action. It's review or study.

Now we talk about creating a positive business climate. And this little . . . [inaudible] . . . can come up in a number of places, but I'm going to throw it in right now. Creating a business climate — in where? The rural sector? Don't think so. Urban sector? What's there to create business? What's there for a business climate?

And I want to talk specifically . . . And I like talking about this

every year because this government has done nothing to help when it comes to the rural Saskatchewan. And I've mentioned this in my previous discussions on the budget and Throne Speech. We in this province right now, Mr. Speaker, ship 750,000 head of cattle to the province of Alberta to be fed. Now is there anybody over there that thinks that is correct? Why would we be doing that? Why?

Now not only that, Mr. Speaker. Behind every truckload of cattle that we send to Alberta to feed out, we send barley from Saskatchewan. Now I ask members over there again, do they think it's right? Do they think it's right that we should send two very important commodities from this province to Alberta?

But it gets worse because behind every one of those B-trains is a carload of our young men and women that are going to Alberta to feed Saskatchewan grain to Saskatchewan cattle. There is three very, very important resources that we ship out of this province to Alberta. And I ask members over there, any one of them, if they could stand up in their place and say that's the right thing to do.

So how do we stop this? We even had the Deputy Premier a year or so ago say, we've got to do something to change this. What has been done? Has there been anything in the business climate change to stop that from happening? Have we done anything in this province to help industry and business move back to this province? Why are we shipping three of our most valuable resources to some other province so they can create the jobs, have the economic spinoff, and have the salaries that go with it? Why? Is there anybody over there that thinks that is right?

Well, Mr. Speaker, I do not. And there is nothing in this budget, nothing in this to create a positive business climate that's going to change that. And that's something that really needs to be changed. Because look at the spinoff industries and businesses that can come from that.

Mr. Speaker, how things are going in rural Saskatchewan right now is extremely, extremely tough. And I'm not sure who the author of this is, but I would like to read it into the record, because I think it is extremely touching. It says:

Please open your hearts to hear a very important message from rural Saskatchewan. Remember, you are responsible for us, too. [I think maybe some members over opposite should listen.] I still can't believe you'd take away all hope from the ones who are feeding you. You shut out all our goals. What about us? Hey, we're hurting too. And every cent you don't share with us, we still give back to you. What makes you want to continue to push down our country folks until they drown? What could you possibly gain to take away a life that's honest, yet you filled with strife? You're making men go insane. What will it cost every man, woman, and child? Once you've trapped us in your city jail, can't you see we need to be wild to do the work God intended us to do. I don't believe you can hear him when you do these things you do.

So give it one more try, to be fair and realize it's what Saskatchewan needs to get back on its feet. You've got to get us off our knees. Don't try to keep on taking what we

don't have to give. Hey, we're just like you. We have needs to live. Look into your soul. The answers lie within. It will get our province on our feet when fairness does begin. Please stop biting the hand that feeds you. If you believe in justice, stand up now and be counted. Come back with a budget that also reflects the needs of those who produce your bread and butter, and you literally save hundreds of lives just this year alone. Got a price tag on that one?

I think that's very touching, Mr. Speaker. Now here's the real touching part — recently widowed with three children by a hard-working and proud farmer who had no more hope.

I think that members over there should be listening to something like that. And they laugh. And they laugh. That's pretty serious, and members over there are laughing at it. That in itself is extremely sad. That is sad, Mr. Speaker. They must be very, very proud of that, to have a very serious item like that and they laugh at it.

Mr. Speaker, I also want to go into some other issues in the budget. And just thumbing through the book a little bit, my next page that I come on to is health care. . . provide the best health care in Canada. Well this is a spin that's put on every year. We know health care in Saskatchewan is getting worse and worse and worse — not the care itself, it's the waiting lists.

Now what has this government done and talked about in the last while? Well I want to read you just a little bit of background — 2001 Throne Speech:

This province introduced medicare and will continue to provide health care that is a model for the rest of Canada.

That's 2001 — going to provide a model. That's good. Well how did they make out? How did they make out? 2001.

2002:

One of my government's highest priorities in its action plan for Saskatchewan is the provision and renewal of sustainable, publicly administered health care that is accessible to all.

How are we making out? How is this province making out with accessibility to our health care? The longest waiting lists in the country. Well that was 2002.

What did 2003 say?

A surgical registry is being implemented to manage waiting lists province-wide.

Well that sure did an awful lot to take people off of waiting lists didn't it. The waiting lists get longer and longer.

2004 what did they say?

We will do more to reduce waiting times for surgery and diagnostic imaging . . .

Well, Mr. Speaker, how are we making out. It's the age-old

question, how are we doing on that.

So what do we say this time in the budget?

Timely access to surgery and diagnostic services are important to the people. Work has been taken under way for some time to better monitor and manage [the system]
...

Monitor. It doesn't do anything to help people that are on waiting lists. The waiting lists get longer and longer. They just don't get it over there. They get longer and they talk about it. All they can do is talk about it.

And there's another interesting note in the budget document, Mr. Speaker, and I really have to touch base on this one because it says, "Increase capacity in other specialized imaging areas to improve access (i.e., nuclear medicine)."

Nuclear medicine. Well, I wonder if the member from Greystone will support a budget document that talks about nuclear. I mean he's such a strong proponent of the nuclear industry.

How about the Minister of the Environment, his talk about nuclear. In fact I think his quote was, as long as I am Minister of the Environment there will never be another nuclear reactor in this province. Well, I didn't even know we had one. So he's extremely against the nuclear program.

How about even the Premier? What did the Premier even say? How is the Premier going to support this, because the Premier has said, the Premier has said and I'll give you a quote from the Premier: "And this isn't a clean source of power. It's probably the dirtiest." Talking about nuclear.

And here it's in their budget document of how they're going to create nuclear medicine. I wonder how many people on that side are actually going to vote because it's got the word nuclear in it. And I'm a supporter of the nuclear industry, Mr. Speaker, but I know there's members opposite that definitely are not.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I want to talk about building a future for the youth, keeping young people in the province. Well, we get the same old rhetoric, the same old, same old, and I want to go back again to the 2001 Throne Speech. It says, "We plan for a bright future for our children and ourselves." Yes, we sure do. How many children have we lost age 19 to 40 since 2001. It's thousands and yet we're planning for a bright future for them. 2000, later 2001: "Connecting to young people means connecting to the future . . ." Young people are the future of this province. I couldn't agree more. Why are we chasing them away? . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . You are. They're going to seek work elsewhere, where there's work, where there's full-time positions, where there's jobs. When we chase businesses out of this province, how do we expect to have work for young people?

[16:00]

"It is a vision where all children will have the opportunity . . . to build successful families and careers here at home." Well how are we making out? In the chronological order of this, Mr.

Speaker, it just shows that this government has absolutely no vision, it has rhetoric and rhetoric alone.

2004: "Saskatchewan will become more youth friendly and the first choice of opportunity for all of our youth." Well that again is a laugh. That is just totally laughable, because if it is that good why are our young people leaving? Why are our young people leaving this province? Because there is no, no jobs. You have to have jobs to sustain our young people, to keep our young people in this province.

Mr. Speaker, I had the opportunity, just recently I spoke to a grade 12 class. There's 35, 35 students in the grade 12 class, and at the end of their quizzing me for a while, I said, okay I'd like to quiz you. I said how many of you plan on staying in Saskatchewan after you finish high school, trade school, or post-secondary? Thirty-five students, and three put up their hand. Three out of thirty-five said that they would stay in Saskatchewan. And I said, why? What would make you go? Well I want a career and I want a job someplace. I can't stay here.

And you know if you talked to those same people and said, if we had jobs in this province, good jobs in this province — like if we expanded our energy sector, our nuclear sector, if we had jobs that had some career factor to them — how many of you would stay? And I think it switched around to about 32 out of the 35 would stay if there is jobs.

After the budget speech, Mr. Speaker, and here we again have people opposite saying, oh we've done everything in here to keep our young people in the province. Well the day after the budget here's what one young fellow said from Regina. What's the most important thing in the budget for you? He said, highways and education. Sounds reasonable, right? Highways for safety and education to give young people the tools to get out of the province. That's after the budget.

And here we have men and women that are sitting there saying, we're doing everything in our power to keep young people in the province. Now, Mr. Speaker, we talk about helping youth stay in the province, why would this government have a projection that the population is going to remain stable over the next 20 years? Talk about a backward way of thinking — that it's going to remain stable. Why can't we be a little proactive and say, let's grow this province? In one hand we're saying people in this province are getting older, and so if they're getting older where's our workforce going to be? Who's going to be here to work?

And yet we don't have a business climate that allows businesses to prosper in this province. Again prosper, because profit is a dirty word to a socialist. So how are we going to keep people in this province and here, at the government's own . . . their own book says we're going to stay stable.

And also they talk about losing 30,000 students in the next . . . to the end of this decade. So how can we look forward and be progressive when in fact that's all we're doing? We're doing nothing to create businesses in this province.

We look at the economic outlook and we get the same thing. 2001, "Saskatchewan economy is strong and it is growing."

Well I would submit we weren't and we were in a deficit budget. And we've had one budget that has not been a deficit in the last number of years and that was no thanks to the management of this NDP government; that was thanks to high oil prices. That was 2001.

2002, "Saskatchewan is quickly becoming Canada's province of opportunity." We've always had the opportunity here, we just haven't had a government that will set the framework to allow our opportunity to flourish.

Mr. Speaker, in 2003:

The ultimate goal of our province is to build an economic foundation in Saskatchewan to achieve the status of a 'have' province within the Canadian Federation.

Well that was short-lived because we're in a deficit budget situation as of today.

"New industries in tourism, culture and information technology will continue to diversify and expand our economy." How have we made out? How has that done? This is again a series over the last four years of what this government says; now we look at what they have done. And what they have done is impede the growth of this province through taxes, highest taxes, through numerous ways that they have hurt this.

Well, Mr. Speaker, talk about Government Relations just for a minute. Now it is extremely unfair this revenue sharing, and that's what we've seen in this budget for Government Relations. There's no increase in urban, rural, and northern revenue sharing. That is totally unfair.

With the amount of money that this government has been working with — the surplus, surplus of 1.1 billion last year, 400-plus million this year — that there could be \$10 million in there for revenue sharing . . . they say oh no, no. This is one-time money. We can't do anything with one-time money, except blow it of course. And you know, Mr. Speaker, it is unreal how this group get together and shotgun approach to their spending in this budget.

There is no increase in transit assistance for the disabled. No increase in grants in lieu of property tax. And I've already explained the four seven and that should be imprinted on the minds of the people because, again, most of them are from the urban setting of Regina and Saskatoon, and yet four and seven is going to be what they should be confronted with on a daily basis from the taxpayers of those cities, is four and seven.

Now again in agriculture, and I'd just like to touch base a little bit more on the agricultural side. And we've heard it from my colleagues on this side of the House. Crop insurance premiums have increased and coverage is declining. That is one good way to help rural Saskatchewan, isn't it? Not fully funding CAIS . . . where are the farmers? Where are they going? They don't have the resources. They can't go to the bank and borrow money on a whim and a prayer from a socialist government.

So, Mr. Speaker, their support to agriculture is a laugh. So what are they doing? What are they doing? I missed it in here, but it's in the book where they're creating a new Department of Rural

Development. Well how did the department of rural depopulation make out? Or no, it was called the Department of Rural Revitalization, but effectively it was the department of rural depopulation. As far the depopulation, it was very effective. As far as rural development, it was pretty sad. I don't know if any member over there can get up and say one thing that that department did for rural Saskatchewan in the time that it was there. Is the new one expected to do any better? I doubt it. It's again smoke and mirrors.

So, Mr. Speaker, I know there's other people that want to get involved in this budget, but I think I can sum it up. I think I can sum it up the best by a statement that was told to me right after the budget. As an individual said to me, anybody that thinks this is a good budget should visit a proctologist and have a cranium scan. Thank you.

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the member for Regina Coronation Park.

Mr. Trew: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to join in this budget debate to brag, to talk about our 12 consecutive balanced budgets — 12 out of the last 12 budgets, balanced, consecutive budgets.

And we hear Sask Party members talking and complaining about the Fiscal Stabilization Fund like it's some evil, sinister fund put-up and that's how we somehow balance the budgets. Well let me just remind you, Mr. Speaker, that the Fiscal Stabilization Fund was created by this government. We created the Fiscal Stabilization Fund, the rainy day savings fund, so that we could draw it down on years when the revenues aren't as full as they are on other years. And naturally you top it up on years when we have excess, particularly oil revenue, which we've got this year, Mr. Speaker.

It is a such a wonderful problem for us to all have. Here we are in Saskatchewan, the third province in Canada that is a have province. Imagine that, Mr. Speaker — Ontario, Alberta, and Saskatchewan, have provinces. Three of us. Three. And we are a province they're saying that the cup is half empty, or even less, Mr. Speaker.

Well most of my life Saskatchewan's been a have-not province, meaning we have benefited from fiscal stabilization from all of the other . . . the rest of Canada, particularly the largesse of Ontario and the largesse of oil-rich Alberta, oil- and gas-rich Alberta. Well now it's our turn to take a little bit of time in the sun. It's Saskatchewan's turn thanks to record high oil and gas prices, Mr. Speaker, which . . . and all kinds of things, some of which we can directly take credit for, some of which we're just in the right place at the right time, and I don't think there's a government member that would argue with that basic fundamental tenet.

We've made some very good decisions along the way, Mr. Speaker. That's why we're 12 for 12 balanced budgets. I remember, I remember, I . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Oh, Mr. Speaker, the member for Canora should have been here when I talked about the Fiscal Stabilization Fund because then you would know we're 12 for 12. Then you would know we're 12 for 12. I look forward to your trying to somehow recreate history — 12 for 12 balanced surplus budgets.

That's why we have, after this year, we're going to have more than \$600 million in the Fiscal Stabilization Fund, Mr. Speaker. That's why this year, in this year's budget, we were able to invest a record amount of money in health care. We were able to invest a record amount of money in education, Mr. Speaker. We have done very many things in Saskatchewan, one of . . . Well we talk about health care and the record amounts of money that have come in this year — the oil and gas money primarily, but other parts of the economy that are performing very well with a notable . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . and thank you, the member for Canora says potash. You're right, with a notable — and thank you, the member from Canora says potash; you're right — with the notable exception of problems that we're having in the grains and oilseeds industry and in livestock, Mr. Speaker.

Imagine my consternation spending the Easter weekend at my son-in-law and daughter and two grandchildren's farm where last year they actually got a crop. They're in a dry, dry part of the Palliser grain belt. They actually got a crop last year, but they rely on livestock. And in this their third year of farming, things are pretty tough out on the farm.

And I don't need a lecture from members opposite to tell me how tough it is to try and make a living farming. We know it. That's why this Minister of Agriculture had spent record amounts of money or arranged for record amounts of money to be spent in agriculture last year. That's why we're again stepping up to the plate this year.

Is it enough, Mr. Speaker? Probably not. You know, it depends. What's your definition of enough? You know, never are you going to hit a situation where there's enough.

But back to health care. We're spending some one-time money. Mr. Speaker, \$58 million in health capital for buildings and equipment, for funds and facilities, like my first city, Swift Current, Ile-a-la Crosse, Preeceville, Moosomin, Maidstone, Outlook — which was our last port-of-call before we moved to Regina many years ago — Humboldt, Saskatoon and Regina all getting capital for buildings and equipment.

Mr. Speaker, we're very proud of that \$58 million. It includes 1.2 million for the first steps towards the new provincial lab which has \$27 million committed in total to that lab. Mr. Speaker, we're spending a 160 million in total to fund more than 27,000 training spots.

I am very proud of this budget. I'm also proud of . . . despite all of the cries about there being no tax cuts, Mr. Speaker, I don't know how you square that with \$110 million being spent on education property tax relief this year and next.

And it's there in the budget. Anybody can read it. Anybody can see it. And 110 million strikes me as real money for real education property tax relief and the promise to review that whole situation and look at it and hopefully be able to do similar things in the future after the two-year program is done.

Mr. Speaker, we've done all of this and at the same time, our percentage of debt to our gross domestic product has just driven down from 1993 when it was at a peak of 69 per cent of Saskatchewan's GDP, gross domestic product . . . was

provincial and Crown corporation debt, imagine 69 per cent. This year it's going to 28 per cent, Mr. Speaker — from 69 to 28 per cent of the GDP. We've done that through paying attention to detail to the budget. We've done it through paying down debt at every opportunity, including in this budget there is, I believe, it's \$179 million. Someone tell me if I got that number wrong, but \$179 million in real and permanent debt relief, debt reduction.

[16:15]

This year again we've done it. Every year we've reduced some debt, and we continue to do so. Our interest payments on the total accumulated debt are driving down, down, down. It's a fraction of what it was. It's the lowest debt — as my colleague says — the lowest debt load payment we've had to make in 14 years.

For that we'll take some credit because some decisions have been made on this side of the government in the time I've been around. I don't attribute them to me personally necessarily, but I've been a part of the team, Mr. Speaker, that has made some decisions. Many of the decisions have been real easy to make. Many of them have been fun. Some of them have been quite frankly challenging and very tough, very hard for my colleagues and I to make. But, you know, at every turn, at every turn we have proudly stood up and done the very best that we can — day in, day out.

We've stood . . . I've watched my colleagues. I'm proud of every one of them. None of us are perfect, with the possible exception of you, Mr. Speaker. None of us are perfect, and the member for Canora maybe is close as well. The member for Canora may be close to perfect. I can just see that quote going around now, Mr. Speaker. Though I'm fond of the member, perfection is not exactly what I'd have thought.

Mr. Speaker, we heard the member for Wood River talking about Saskatchewan and about how members on this side were kind of proud that we're able to keep our population at 1 million people. And he said how terrible that is. Well you know, Mr. Speaker, in the North American Midwest plains — the great western plains or great central plains many of us know it as — in that entire area that includes something like 10 states, US [United States] states, and the three prairie provinces, Manitoba and Saskatchewan have relatively static populations. All — without exception — of the American states in the great western plains have had fairly significant and sharp population reductions in the last 50 years. The populations have diminished by hundreds of thousands of people in every instance, Mr. Speaker, and here we are holding our own.

And I hear, what about Alberta? And I'm . . . Just have patience, have patience. Alberta is the only province or state in the great central plains to defy that, to fly against, to fly against that reality — if I can describe it that way — of life on the great central plains, oil- and gas-rich Alberta, which has oil and gas eleven times the size of Saskatchewan's reserves.

And I mean, I'm happy for my relatives that live in Alberta. I'm happy for my friends that live in Alberta, you know, but I'm happy for my relatives and friends, the majority of whom are in Saskatchewan. I'm happy that our day in the sun is here, Mr.

Speaker. I'm happy that we're enjoying the benefit of a record-setting oil and gas industry right here in Saskatchewan. We are enjoying record prices and record potash production right here in Saskatchewan. We're blessed with the reserves. I'm happy for a great many things that are happening to keep our economy humming right along, Mr. Speaker.

I'm just wanting to move to a different part of my speech, Mr. Speaker, because I want to contrast the picture that I've just painted. Our side, we believe in Saskatchewan. We believe in the future. We believe that the sky is bright. We've named Saskatchewan the land of living provinces. And what do we have on the other side? We have this quote from a former leader of their party and now just a key player in the Sask Party putting together, in the back room, and the quote is out of the Saskatoon *StarPhoenix*, January 20 this year. And what's the quote? It says:

The Conservative side has always worn the pants in this marriage and the core of the party has always been rural conservatism. Not coincidentally, [Bill] Boyd remains a key player in the Sask. Party to this day.

You know . . . [inaudible] . . . He said . . . For those who are hard of hearing the quote is:

The Conservative side has always worn the pants in this marriage and the core of the party has always been rural conservatism.

You can deny that quote from *The StarPhoenix* all you want, but it's in January *Star Phoenix* this year. What did the member for Wood River have to say when he was the leadership candidate for that party? He said, general downsizing of government . . . yes, general downsizing of government, yes, what did the member for . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . What's wrong with it? he says. Nothing if that's what you believe in. Not a thing, not a thing wrong with downsizing government if that's what you believe in. It's not what we're believing in on this side of the House, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, what's the member for Melfort Tisdale have to say on this? He says, and I quote — while he was the leadership candidate — I quote: "Once reviewed, government should be redefined because it cannot offer all the same services it does now," says the member for Melfort Tisdale, when he was the leadership candidate.

Well what is it? Define what it is less that the government would do? Define what it is less? We know that at one point they were saying they wanted to do away with Crown corporations, Crown corporations like Crop Insurance that pumped \$1 billion into rural Saskatchewan last year. They wanted to do away with that and more.

Mr. Speaker, the ultimate winner of that leadership race, the member for Rosetown-Elrose, said one initiative that I believe holds tremendous value for Saskatchewan is a project launched by Premier Campbell of BC called the core services review. The quote goes on, a Saskatchewan Party government will launch a similar core services review in this province within 30 days of taking office. Well, Mr. Speaker, that's why they're not going to take office. Can you imagine that, while they're

moaning about our inefficient civil service which I want to tell you is one of the most efficient and professional civil servants . . . services in the universe, Mr. Speaker. Saskatchewan is blessed with a great many hard-working, dedicated and loyal civil servants who put Saskatchewan number one, Saskatchewan first, and they're proud of it.

While, while they've been saying, while they've been saying that the civil service is . . . should be decimated, while the Sask Party, Conservatives, want a review — review, a Gordon Campbell review — New Democrats have . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . What have we been doing? We have funded health care in record amounts year after year after year. Health care funding has grown every year. Education funding has grown every year and, Mr. Speaker, and Saskatchewan has become Canada's third have province.

When I was growing up, when I was a little guy — I know it's a fair number of years ago, Mr. Speaker — but I can remember when we had have provinces, when equalization first came about. And it was Ontario, British Columbia, Alberta were the have provinces. They were the three have provinces. Saskatchewan flirted with it in the late '70s; we flirted with being a have province, Mr. Speaker. Then along came the Conservatives and boy, it's just by the . . .

An Hon. Member: — Downhill ever since.

Mr. Trew: — It's been downhill for the most part ever since. We're now back firmly entrenched as a have province for three years now.

Mr. Speaker, I remember when BC was a have province. BC is not a have province now. Can you tell me why those Conservatives there would try and take a lesson from BC's Conservatives? Can you tell me that? When BC's Conservatives cost one in four civil servants their job in British Columbia — one in four — how in the world can you possibly say that that's a good policy? Well, Mr. Speaker, unbelievable.

And then, Mr. Speaker, and then, Mr. Speaker, we have, we have . . . I'm going to come to the 100 points of light. They might like that and they might not. They had Grow Saskatchewan before the last election. And what did they say about their Grow Saskatchewan document? They said, they said and I quote, Mr. Speaker:

[This] represents the very first time in 60 years that any political party has understood how we can grow this economy in a lasting way.

So my question is, if that was your view a year and a half ago, well what has changed so radically that now Grow Saskatchewan's out and now you've got 100 points of light?

The Deputy Speaker: — Order. I just remind the member to direct all comments to the Chair. I recognize the member for Regina Coronation Park.

Mr. Trew: — I thank you, Mr. Speaker. So the question is, how is it that Grow Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, was a great policy a year and a half, two years ago, and now they have 100 points of light program? Well what has changed, Mr. Speaker? What was

wrong with the Grow Saskatchewan program? Or is this the second time in 61 or 62 years now that a political party has understood how we can grow the economy in a lasting way?

Well, Mr. Speaker, I want to just remind members opposite we formed government way back in 1991, which in some ways is a long time ago. But we were faced at that time with a 1.2 billion, \$1.2 billion annual deficit, Mr. Speaker — 1.2 billion annual shortfall. The accumulated debt was the wrong side of 13 billion. It grew, it grew to about fifteen and a half billion dollars before we are able to stop that growth. Because it was in our third year in office that we achieved a balanced surplus budget, Mr. Speaker — from a 1.2 billion annual shortfall that they left, to the surplus.

Now, we have come a long ways. I outlined how the debt, percentage of debt to GDP has gone from 69 per cent to 28 per cent under our watch, Mr. Speaker. I've talked about record health care funding. I've talked about record education funding. Fortunately, we're able to put some money into highways again. We're doing twinning. And there's more twinning announced in this year's budget — east and west, there's twinning happening everywhere.

Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker, we have gone, we have gone . . . While they've been putting together this Grow Saskatchewan and 100 points of light, we've been quietly and busy putting together Saskatchewan's economy and making Saskatchewan the third have province in Canada, Mr. Speaker. Right here in this province, my colleagues and I and all of the people in Saskatchewan have participated — thankfully most of them, thankfully most of them willingly — but I confess, not all.

Mr. Speaker, I'm not anxious to continue this speech forever, and I know that members opposite are not. But while I'm on the budget speech, I do want to point out that there's some interesting things have happened budget wise and interesting things have happened just before the budget was delivered — just a day or two or three days before. I didn't take the time to check *Hansard*. But members opposite were calling for the firing of my colleague, the Minister of Agriculture. They called for his firing. They asked the Premier to fire the Minister of Agriculture. Why, why? Because he wasn't getting enough money for Saskatchewan farmers. Imagine that, Mr. Speaker. Imagine that, he wasn't getting enough. Well they're kind of quiet now today, kind of quiet now today on that front.

But, Mr. Speaker, the members opposite, the members opposite, when a caucus worker did a play on words around a certain US president's name, led the charge, led the charge — fire him, said they, fire him. Fire him, how dare him make a play on a president's name. Well, Mr. Speaker, it could have been a serious thing. Could have been a serious thing, Mr. Speaker. What about, what about, what about when an MLA says, my choice to be killed is. That's not a very, a very good thing.

[16:30]

Mr. Speaker, I am proud of this year's budget. I am proud that we have the 12th consecutive balanced budget. I am proud that there's \$110 million in there for education property tax relief. I am proud that Saskatchewan is the third have province in Canada.

I am less enamoured with the repeated calls that we spend this one-time wealth, one-time windfall money, and build it into the base of ongoing spending. We can spend it on capital, Mr. Speaker, and we have. I read a list of health care facilities and integrated health care facilities and hospital, regional hospital in Swift Current, and other facilities and equipment. I read that into my speech earlier, \$58 million in capital expenditures.

We can spend capital because that's one time and it improves the situation for all Saskatchewan people. That's what government really should be about, Mr. Speaker. And I'm very proud that we're able to do that. I am less proud of those who would have us build into our budget on an ongoing basis one-time revenue because it's a recipe for disaster.

It's a recipe that would take us right back to the 1980s, Mr. Speaker. The then-premier, Grant Devine, has moved on from the political scene here, but the policies — the Conservative policies from the '80s — are alive and well. They're alive and well and we hear it. We see it every single day in every single way from Sask Party members opposite. They say, spend, spend, spend. They say, you've undervalued the price of oil and underpriced the value of gas in the budget.

Well that's not what they did in the '80s. In the '80s, Mr. Speaker, they overvalued all the time, consistently. And so consistently they were 11 for 11 deficit, deficit budgets, Mr. Speaker. Eleven for eleven, that's their record. Can you imagine? Their record is so bad.

Earlier today, Mr. Speaker, the Premier introduced Ed Schreyer from Manitoba. And we were all kind of proud because that's a New Democratic Party premier from Manitoba. Our chests kind of stuck out. I was proud because I'd actually spent the best part of a day building fences on the Ed Schreyer build in my constituency, which is a bit of a different story. But we were very proud, and what did they have to do? They said, us too; we want to recognize Ed Schreyer, Mr. Speaker.

We have a history . . . And it's appropriate that you would recognize him. My point is, we have a history and we're proud of it. The Sask Party, the only history you've got is conservatism and Grant Devine. Mr. Speaker, I will happily be voting for this budget. I just am so proud of my colleagues; I'm proud of the Minister of Finance for putting this budget together.

Could we do more? Well I wish it were such that we could do more. And we will do more next year, and the year after, and the year after, and the year after that. We will do more, Mr. Speaker — our work is not complete. We have begun and we have moved where we've cut the debt almost to one-third in real terms of what it was when we formed government.

We have moved into being a have province. We have opened the chequebook for health and education, highways twinning, all kinds of good projects in this province. We have built the Fiscal Stabilization Fund this year, which is appropriate because the revenues are not always going to be there, but we can smooth it out.

And just watch. Next year I predict we're going to have a balanced surplus budget, Mr. Speaker. And I predict the year

after, we'll have a balanced surplus budget. And I hope, I hope that we're planning, I hope we're planning well enough that we can deliver a balanced surplus budget three years out. I hope that.

I'm confident we will, but you know our revenue sources are up and down in Saskatchewan. Right now we're blessed; we're blessed with a high in virtually everything except agriculture which is troubled. But you know what? We'll get a bounce on agriculture and things will get better.

Mr. Speaker, proudly I support this budget. Thank you very much.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the member for Last Mountain-Touchwood.

Mr. Hart: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it's certainly a pleasure to be able to enter into the budget debate, this historic budget, the budget of our centennial year, Mr. Speaker. And I think it's important that all members — or at least as many members who wish to enter into this debate — be given the chance to express their thoughts on this year's budget.

And I have been listening to the members on both sides of the House presenting their views on the budget and pointing out the shortfalls of this budget — of which there are a number — and pointing out some of the successes of this budget and there are also a number that we could say are at least a step in the right direction.

But overall, Mr. Speaker, the impression that I am getting from constituents in Last Mountain-Touchwood and citizens around the province and friends and neighbours pretty well coincide with thoughts that I've had — and many of my caucus colleagues have had — and that is that this budget is really a budget of missed opportunities, Mr. Speaker. We are in our centennial year. We are starting the second century of this province and this was an opportunity for this government to set this province, or at least outline a vision for this province, and we certainly don't see that in this budget, Mr. Speaker.

In fact if one looks at the budget document, there's no name on the budget. You know, you would think in a historic budget such as this that the Minister of Finance and his colleagues could have thought of an appropriate name for this budget. But because this government doesn't have a vision and a plan for the future I guess it's quite appropriate that perhaps we could call this budget the no-name budget, Mr. Speaker.

And that's in fact what it is. It seems to attempt to increase spending in certain areas and make a few minor adjustments here and there, but when you add it all up there's really . . . nothing's really changed. We hear members opposite talk about how proud they are of this province, that we're one of only three have provinces — and certainly that is something to be proud of. We on this side of the House are also proud that Saskatchewan is a have province.

But really, if one looks at the reasons why Saskatchewan has become a have province this year, there's very little that this

government can take credit for. I don't think that the sheik from Mount Royal went over to OPEC [Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries] and helped determine world oil prices — \$55 a barrel. Certainly this provincial government had very little if any influence in that, I would suggest no influence in the high price of oil — and that if one looks at the budget documents we can see, and the government readily acknowledges, that that is one of the reasons why Saskatchewan is a have province.

The other reason, of course, is the federal government. Federal Finance Minister Goodale has addressed some of the inequities in the equalization program and certainly we have supported this government's effort in all cases to address that inequity. So as some of the speakers on both sides of the House have said, this is one-time money and we should look at . . . but it's not necessarily one-time money if we look at what's happening with oil prices.

I would suggest, Mr. Speaker, that oil prices will continue at the fairly high levels that they are currently and will continue probably for the rest of the year and into the following year. If you follow what some of the analysts, market analysts, in the industry are saying, they seem to think that this will continue to happen as the demand for oil products grow and the resources of the various oil-producing countries are being tapped to the limit in some cases, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

But this also presents a huge opportunity for Saskatchewan. We have known resources, huge resources of oil that are there to be recovered. Certainly some of them are heavy oil resources that are more costly to recover, but at \$55 a barrel I would think that that price is more than sufficient to recover some of those oil resources and put them into the pipeline and so on.

But as I said, Mr. Speaker, the one criticism that I've heard over and over again is that there just seems to be no vision on that side of the House, and this budget is a prime example of that. I've listened to the former . . . previous speaker, the member from Regina, talk about how proud he is of his colleagues and the budget, this particular budget, and how this government has stepped up to the plate in agriculture.

Well if you look back over the short period of four or five years you'll see that the expenditures this year barely exceed the expenditures that were estimated last year. Certainly there was some money put in in the interim, and we are hopeful that, particularly with the CAIS program and so on, that the government will see fit to step up to the plate. But if we go back a number of years, go back three or four years, the budget estimates for agriculture were \$333 million. This year they're about 264 million, 265 million. So we're not really stepping up to the plate, Mr. Speaker. What we are doing is by and large maintaining the status quo in some of these areas.

I'd like to talk about a number of issues, Mr. Speaker, that are important to the people of Last Mountain-Touchwood constituency. And these are issues that are not only important to those citizens, but a number of them are issues that are important to people across this province. And as I'd already mentioned, agriculture, being my constituency is a rural constituency . . . If you'd like a definition of a rural constituency, come out to Last Mountain-Touchwood. We don't

have any large regional centres in our constituency. In fact the largest town in my constituency is about 800 or 850 people. And we've got quite a few smaller, very few small communities as a matter of fact, and we have seven First Nations communities in the constituency. So we have a number of issues that are unique to Last Mountain-Touchwood, but they are not unlike issues that are important to other areas of the province.

So as you can imagine, agriculture is the number one issue because it's the number one industry in that part of the province and it is largely, hugely important to the province of Saskatchewan. I know the members on the other, on the opposite side of the House falsely believe that the importance of agriculture is declining and I can understand why they would believe that. If they look at the way sectors of the economy are reported to contribute to the overall provincial economy and the method of reporting, that would lead one to believe, unless they dug a little deeper, that agriculture, the importance of agriculture is declining because at one time it was maybe 15, 20 per cent of the provincial economy in recent years and now it's down to 7 or 8 per cent. And there's a reason for that.

As I said, part of the reason and the confusion is the way the reporting is done, the way agriculture and other sectors of the economy, the way the reporting is done. As far as the amount they contribute to the provincial economy, in the case of agriculture the value of the goods and services provided at the farm gate is totalled and then added to the provincial economy and then of course the percentage is worked out. There is no consideration given as far as spinoffs and those sorts of things and therefore oftentimes this could be misleading. Certain sectors of the economy provide a whole lot more spinoffs to the overall economy than other ones do. And I would suggest that agriculture would probably be at or very near the top of the list as far as sectors of the economy that contribute in spinoff fashion to the economy.

So as I said, agriculture is a very important concern to many people in the constituency of Last Mountain-Touchwood: things like CAIS, which we've discussed in this Chamber on number of occasions; of course the BSE, ongoing BSE crisis is having a huge negative impact to many producers, since many producers in my constituency are mixed farmers such they produce livestock and they also produce grains and oilseeds and many specialty crops, and so on.

[16:45]

I think to maybe have the people of this province and particularly members on the opposite side of this House understand the nature of the crisis that we are undergoing in agriculture at this time, I should relate a conversation that I had with an independent business person who conducts business in my constituency. And this individual is an independent fertilizer and crop input merchant.

This individual, as you can well imagine, is very concerned with the state of agriculture, very concerned with the lack of cash flow that many producers are experiencing. Not just those producers who chronically from year to year are in a cash flow position, but all producers, including the very most efficient and top and best managers, are experiencing a very, very serious

cash flow problem, Mr. Speaker, as a result of the frost of August 20, the BSE crisis, and the ongoing and long-term decline in the prices for agricultural commodities.

And it's all seemed to have come to a head in the fall of 2004. As I said, the BSE crisis was ongoing in 2004 and it continues today, much to our disappointment. We thought perhaps by this time that problem would have been at least partially resolved. It isn't. And as this individual said to me, when individual producers, farm managers become quiet and don't talk about their problems and become withdrawn, that is a serious indicator of some very, very serious problems. And there are many, many examples of that out in rural Saskatchewan today.

And certainly a provincial government can't deal with commodity prices on the world stage and those sorts of things. But what a provincial government can do is help address the cost side of the equation, help reduce income, or production costs. And that is something that a provincial government can do.

Property taxes are one thing that a provincial government can do. And in this budget, this government crows about, we've got \$55 million that's going to address the property tax issue. And I see one of the members, the member from Athabasca, being very proud of that. Well maybe for that member's edification, I could present him with a few facts.

The province of Saskatchewan has undergone a reassessment and the net effect of reassessment is that overall the assessed values of properties is on the rise. In certain areas of the province it's going to rise, it's going to increase by a greater percentage than other areas of the province. There may be a few areas of the province that will see a bit of a decrease.

But I just actually this afternoon got off the phone from, off the phone with ... and had a conversation with an RM administrator. And this administrator did a little bit of work for me in a very short period of time and I would like to thank her for that extra effort. But this is the message that she gave to me as far as the overall effect of reassessment in her RM.

The overall assessment is going to increase by 9 per cent. So what that will mean that if mill rates stay exactly the same in 2005 as they were in 2004 — and there's no guarantee that that's going to happen — that taxes would go up by some 9 per cent.

Certainly there's going to be a bit of a credit for the education portion of taxes, but we're already hearing from cities and towns that due to the increase in costs and the lack of extra revenue in this budget that they may be forced to increase their mill rate, Mr. Speaker. And if they increase their mill rate, that bit of a credit that this \$55 million is going to provide to their tax bills is going to be eaten up very quickly. In fact, it's very possible, Mr. Speaker, that many property owners will pay more for property taxes in 2005 than they did in 2004. Even though this government is putting \$55 million towards property tax relief, we won't see any real property tax relief because we don't have a long-term, sustainable plan to deal with property tax, Mr. Speaker.

And we often hear and particularly from SARM [Saskatchewan

Association of Rural Municipalities] who has talked about property tax and the need to fix the way we fund the K to 12 education system, and many people — particularly those people who aren't involved in agriculture or don't own agricultural property — probably don't understand how serious a burden property tax . . . property owners in rural Saskatchewan and the burden that they're bearing as far as paying education tax.

I had an individual in my office during the Easter break who brought his income and expense documents for his farm operation along, and we sat down and we looked at them. And we looked at the various cost factors in his overall operation and this individual keeps very intricate and detailed records of his farm operation. And one thing that caught my eye and this . . . I know the operation that this individual owns and manages along with his family, and it's an average-size farm. It's not a large farm. It's a farm that's probably by today's standard is the size of a farm needed to support a family. And that farm paid over \$6,000 in education tax alone, plus an additional \$2,200 in municipal tax.

So you can understand why owners of agricultural property — farm people and other business people who own agricultural property — have been saying for a long time that we need to fix this situation and that problem of funding the K to 12 education system. Certainly those people recognize that other property owners in small towns, medium-size towns, cities, pay an undue portion or bear an undue burden as far as property tax and education property tax.

This is an issue that if it was addressed would certainly improve the competitive position of not only the agricultural producers, but other businesses within our economy. It would alleviate some of the pressures that residential owners are facing as far as taxes. And it would allow some flexibility for municipal governments to address some of their current issues and needs, Mr. Speaker.

And there was a plan that was put forward here just a little over a year ago, and I have a copy of that report, and that was the Boughen report. And Mr. Boughen, he laid out a plan, certainly there was perhaps a few flaws with it, but it was at least a plan that would address and put in place a long-term plan to deal with property taxes.

And I've heard the Minister of Learning say, well Ray Boughen recommended the forced amalgamation of school divisions. Well maybe he did and maybe he didn't. I'd like to read into the record what that recommendation . . . And by the way, there was 12 recommendations in this report and the recommendation dealing with forced amalgamation of school divisions is recommendation no. 5. If you listen to the Minister of Learning and other members on that side of the House, you would think that that was Mr. Boughen's first recommendation; in fact it was recommendation no 5.

And what does he say in his report? He says:

The province establish a task force to recommend to the Minister of Learning revised Saskatchewan school division boundaries to increase equity among school divisions and maintain local responsiveness and accountability.

Nowhere in this, in his recommendation does it say that the Minister of Learning should force the amalgamation of school divisions. But because of a plan to address the K to 12 funding issue, this government had to, was forced to deal, at least to respond to this report in early April of last year. And so what did they do? They brought out this amalgamation issue and used it as a smokescreen to deflect attention from the real issue of how we fund the K to 12 system.

And they don't have the foresight, the vision as to how they should tackle that problem. So we've got . . . they've got a little extra money, Mr. Speaker, and so okay we'll put a \$110 million towards it — \$55 million this year and \$55 million the next year. And hopefully that'll get us by and then maybe the problem will go away.

Well I've got news for them. The problem isn't going to go away; it's going to get worse. And because they haven't got an idea of how to deal with the situation, maybe I could offer a suggestion. The Minister of Government Relations, I believe, called the representatives of SARM and SUMA [Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association] and the School Boards Association together to seek advice as to how they should distribute the \$110 million. And once that advice was given, I understand that's the last time that that group met.

Well I would suggest to this government that perhaps they call those same three bodies together and they sit down with them and say look, this is a serious issue; property tax is a serious issue. We need to deal with it and let's sit down, roll up our sleeves and see if we can come up with a long-term solution, a long-term plan on how to deal with that problem. But I don't see any, any initiative on this government's part at all to deal with that issue, Mr. Speaker.

I barely touched on some of the topics that I would have liked to cover, Mr. Speaker. I see the hour is getting late. But I would like to conclude with a couple of comments, Mr. Speaker.

As I started out I said that this budget lacked vision, it lacked direction. And one of the disappointments that I have, and I know a number of other people around the province have, is in this province we have a golden opportunity. And you would think that in our centennial year that this government would have seized that opportunity.

And the opportunity I'm talking about is the innovation agenda. We have the Canadian Light Source up and running in Saskatoon. That could be the nucleus of an innovation agenda that we could create a whole sector, a new sector in our economy that would be shielded from the vagrancies of the commodity markets, whether they be the oil prices, whether they be the canola prices, whether it be the potash prices. And we have an opportunity to develop that sector of the economy.

There's members on that side of the House that I would suggest, Mr. Speaker, barely know what the synchrotron . . . where it is, what it does. They make no effort to inform even our science students in our schools. In fact the Canadian Light Source people had to hire a classroom teacher to prepare lessons so that they could be distributed to classroom teachers so that the classroom teachers could inform our new, our young scientists in our schools about the synchrotron. Now that pretty

well would sum it up as far as the initiative on innovation from this government, Mr. Speaker.

So in conclusion, I would certainly like to state that I will certainly not be supporting the motion but I will be supporting the amendment.

The Speaker: — It now being very close to the hour of 5 o'clock, this House will stand adjourned until tomorrow at 1:30 p.m.

[The Assembly adjourned at 17:00.]

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