

The Assembly met at 1:30 p.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRESENTING PETITIONS

Mr. McPherson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to present petitions of hundreds of names regarding the Plains Health Centre.

The prayer reads as follows, Mr. Speaker. The prayer reads as follows, Mr. Speaker:

Wherefore your petitioner humbly prays that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to reconsider the closure of the Plains Health Centre.

The people that have signed the petitions, Mr. Speaker, are from communities all throughout southern Saskatchewan — some in Regina, in Shaunavon, Broadview, Pilot Butte. We have hundreds of them here from the south half of the province, Mr. Speaker, and I would like to table these today.

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I too, as well, have petitions today with respect to SaskPower. And I'll just read quickly the prayer for you, Mr. Speaker:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to reverse the decision to raise SaskPower rates and freeze any further utility rates until an all-party utility review committee is in place in order to debate, review, and revise any utility rate increases in the future in order to restore fairness to the utility rate process in the province of Saskatchewan.

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

Mr. Speaker, these petitions come from . . . all from the area around Colonsay, Saskatchewan. I'm pleased to present them on their behalf today.

Mr. Belanger: — Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present petitions of hundreds of names regarding the Plains Health Centre. The prayer reads as follows, Mr. Speaker:

Wherefore your petitioner humbly prays that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to reconsider closure of the Plains Health Centre.

The people that have signed the petition, Mr. Speaker, are from Canora; they're from Invermay; they're from Buchanan, Saskatchewan; Moose Jaw, Swift Current, Punichy, Estevan, Kamsack; all over throughout Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you very much.

Mr. Osika: — I also rise today, Mr. Speaker, to present petitions of many names regarding the Plains Health Centre. The prayer reads as follows, Mr. Speaker:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon.

Assembly may be pleased to reconsider closure of the Plains Health Centre.

The people that have signed this petition, Mr. Speaker, are from Regina, Canora, Broadview, Fort Qu'Appelle, Moose Jaw, Yorkton, Oxbow, Davidson; virtually all over southern Saskatchewan as well.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Mr. Speaker, I arise today to present petitions of hundreds of names regarding the Plains Health Centre. The prayer reads as follows, Mr. Speaker:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to reconsider the closure of the Plains Health Centre.

The people that have signed the petition, Mr. Speaker, are from such places as Regina, Langenburg, Lumsden, Avonlea, and Fort Qu'Appelle.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have petitions to present today in reference to SaskPower:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to reverse the decision to raise SaskPower rates and freeze any utility rates until a three-party utility review committee is in place in order to debate, review, and revise any utility rate increases in the future in order to restore fairness to the utility rate process in the province of Saskatchewan.

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

These petitions come from the Punichy, Hazlet, Bromhead, Oungre, Tribune areas of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, I so present.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I present a petition to this Assembly as well, and I'll read the prayer:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to reverse the decision to raise SaskPower rates and freeze any further utility rates until a three-party utility review committee is in place in order to debate, review, and revise any utility rate increases in the future in order to restore fairness to the utility rate process in the province of Saskatchewan.

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

And this petition is signed by individuals from the Montmartre, Kendal, Francis area of this province. I so present.

Ms. Julé: — I rise today, Mr. Speaker, to present petitions of hundreds of names regarding the Plains Health Centre. The prayer reads as follows, Mr. Speaker:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to reconsider closure of the Plains Health Centre.

The people that have signed the petitions, Mr. Speaker, are from Estevan, Balgonie, Moose Jaw, Creighton, Marquis, and throughout Saskatchewan. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We'd like to present a petition. I'll read the prayer:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to reverse the decision to raise SaskPower rates and freeze any further utility rates until a three-party utility review committee is in place in order to debate, review, and revise any utility rate increases in the future in order to restore fairness to the utility rate process in the province of Saskatchewan.

Signed by people from Limerick, from Saskatoon, from Assiniboia. Thank you.

Mr. Whitmore: — I would like to present a petition, Mr. Speaker, regarding Highway 16. I will read the prayer:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to reverse its decision to route Highway 16 through the village of Borden, and that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to route the said highway around the north side of the village of Borden on land already purchased by your government for that purpose.

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

This petition is signed, Mr. Speaker, by individuals from Saskatoon, North Battleford, Lloydminster. I wish to table such petition.

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to present petitions of hundreds of names regarding the Plains Health Centre. They prayer reads as follows, Mr. Speaker:

Wherefore your petitioner humbly prays that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to reconsider closure of the Plains Health Centre.

People that have signed the petitions, Mr. Speaker, are from Preeceville and Endeavour and Weyburn and Regina and Yorkton, Melville — whole host of communities. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Goohsen: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have been receiving thousands of petitions from people and we're delivering some more of them today:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to immediately repeal the Crown Construction Tendering Agreement and replace it with a fair tendering policy which awards all government contracts to the lowest qualified bidder, union and

non-union, with no union hiring quotas.

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

These come from Saskatoon, and we will be adding a lot more in the future.

Mr. Gantefer: — Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present petitions of hundreds of thousands of names regarding the Plains Health Centre. The prayer reads as follows, Mr. Speaker:

Wherefore your petitioner humbly prays that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to reconsider closure of the Plains Health Centre.

The people that have signed the petitions, Mr. Speaker, are from all over the south part of the province, and particular Regina, Moose Jaw, Canora. Mr. Speaker, thank you.

Mr. McLane: — Mr. Speaker, I rise too to present petitions of millions . . . I mean dozens of names regarding the Plains Health Centre. The prayer reads as follows, Mr. Speaker:

Wherefore your petitioner humbly prays that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to reconsider closure of the Plains Health Centre.

People that have signed this petition are once again from all across Saskatchewan: from Crane Valley, from Big Beaver, from Tribune, from Assiniboia, and all over.

Mr. Aldridge: — Mr. Speaker, I also rise today to present petitions on numerous names regarding the Plains Health Centre. And the prayer reads as follows, Mr. Speaker:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to reconsider closure of the Plains Health Centre.

The people that have signed the petitions, Mr. Speaker, are from McLean, from Indian Head, from Montmartre, Wolseley, Sinaluta, as well as Regina. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

READING AND RECEIVING PETITIONS

Clerk: — According to order the following petitions have been reviewed, and pursuant to rule 12(7) they are hereby read and received.

Of citizens of the province petitioning the Assembly to oppose changes to federal legislation regarding firearm ownership; and

Of citizens of the province petitioning the Assembly to allocate adequate funding dedicated toward the double-laning of Highway No. 1; and

Of citizens of the province petitioning the Assembly to order a moratorium on hospital and nursing home closures; and

Of citizens of the province petitioning the Assembly to

reverse the decision to raise SaskPower rates.

NOTICES OF MOTIONS AND QUESTIONS

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I give notice that I shall on Friday next ask the government the following question:

To the minister responsible for Agriculture, regarding the approximately 12,000 farmers who received gross revenue insurance program, GRIP, bills from the government: (1) how many of the approximately 12,000 farmers who received GRIP bills from the government have paid those bills to date; (2) what is the rate of interest the government is charging for those producers who are late in paying those bills; (3) what is the amount of the largest GRIP bill set out by the government to an individual farmer?

I so present.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Hon. Mr. Mitchell: — Mr. Speaker, in your gallery are visitors from the board of governors of the Southeast Regional College, and I would like to introduce them to you, and through you to my colleagues in the legislature. Lorraine Hanson is the acting chairperson of the board; Carroll Cantlon, a member of the board; Bill Haussecker, also a member of the board; and Roger Rasmussen, a member of the board. Also present is Arthur Whetstone who is the president of the Southeast Regional College. I'll be meeting with them at 2:30, Mr. Speaker, but I wanted to take this opportunity to introduce them to members of the legislature.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I would like to join with the minister in welcoming the representatives from the Southeast Regional College. Certainly it's been a pleasure to meet with these individuals on numerous occasions, and I know the college really does a fine effort in working to help with the education of young people in our area. And I commend them for their hard work and welcome them to the Assembly. Thank you.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Gantefoer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and to all of my colleagues in the Assembly a person that is very, very special to me. For the past 26 years I've had the great pleasure to have this lady call herself my wife. Together we've had three beautiful daughters, and I really want to introduce Carole Gantefoer to this Assembly to give me support today.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce today to you and through you to the members of the Assembly some friends and associates that I see seated in the west gallery. There's June Mitchell, a long-time community activist and person who has strong principles and values that

had a lot to do with the whole development of Saskatchewan. Seated next to her, Brian Rands and Shelagh Malloy, involved in the Friends of Cuba, an issue that we've been hearing a lot about these days; Jim Elliott, who's very involved in recycling projects in the constituency that I'm from; and I think, if my eyes don't fail me, Mr. Spence, who has had a long-time involvement in first nations' issues and community support throughout the province. So I'd like the members to join me in welcoming them to the legislature today.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and to the members of the Assembly the young man seated up in the gallery opposite, from Canora, Saskatchewan, my constituency assistant, Jeffrey Hryhoriw. Jeff.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Bradley: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wanted to join other members of the legislature in welcoming the Southeast Regional College Board here, and Art Whetstone, the CEO (chief executive officer) for that regional college. They do do a tremendous job in our area and I appreciate the fine work that they've done. Thank you.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Renaud: — Thank you. I would like to introduce to you, Mr. Speaker, and to all members in the legislature today, Mr. Gary Carlson. Mr. Carlson's in the west gallery. Mr. Carlson originates from the town of Tisdale and is very involved in Saskatchewan Agricultural Hall of Fame. I'd like everybody to please welcome Gary.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, I would like to introduce to you and to the legislature, Ms. Florence Driedger, one of my constituents. She is the former director of the Family Service Bureau of Regina and she's also a member of the board of Family Service Canada. Welcome to you.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — I would also like to welcome my constituents, Brian Rands and Shelagh Malloy and Mr. Gary Carlson.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Haverstock: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd just like to add my welcoming remarks to the member from Regina Lakeview, to Ms. Florence Driedger. I've had the great privilege of being able to work with her from time to time. She's the consummate professional and has added greatly to the fabric of our society by serving people so very, very well.

So welcome to you.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Pringle: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to join the Minister of Justice, and the member from Greystone as well, to welcome Florence Driedger here. Florence of course is a 25-year friend, a social work colleague, a very active member of the Saskatchewan Association of Social Workers, and has contributed to not only Regina, Saskatchewan, and Canadians' public policy, public social policy, but also has been very involved internationally. And it's been a real pleasure for me to work with Florence over the years. And I also feel that she is, along with Otto, are just two outstanding citizens in the area, and I'd like to join the members to welcome you here, Florence.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Kowalsky: — Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to introduce a young man in your gallery today. His name is Jared Orynik. Jared is a student at St. Mary High School in Prince Albert, and he is so interested in politics and in the workings of the parliamentary processes that he's applying for the position of page at the House of Commons. He was here for an interview this morning, and he's spending some time with us and I think meeting with some pages. And we wish you the best, Jared, in your endeavours. Please welcome him.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Saskatoon Entrepreneurs

Mr. Koenker: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Whoever said that young people are leaving Saskatchewan hasn't heard about a Saskatoon business called Shuttlecraft, a group of young entrepreneurs in our community. This business recently had its official opening in Saskatoon, and designs and manufactures fibreglass boats. Just to put this successful enterprise into perspective, Shuttlecraft had its initial prototype developed in a family garage and since that time has progressed from a small operation to its present 34,000 square-foot facility in Saskatoon.

Shuttlecraft and these young people now employ 85 people and anticipate that the workforce will reach a hundred by the end of this year. Sales in just three years have grown to \$2 million. And this is just one of many examples of how businesses are taking advantage of the economic climate here in Saskatchewan to expand their operations.

And so I'd like to congratulate Dan Beaulac, Wayne Washington, and Trevor Hewison of Shuttlecraft for the initiative that they have shown and for their demonstration that young entrepreneurs in Saskatchewan can have not only a significant role but a growing role in developing our economy. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

War Games at Canadian Forces Base in Dundurn

Ms. Haverstock: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I respect the privilege of being able to make a member's statement, and while we typically focus on positive events, we

have a responsibility to not overlook the negative.

This weekend at CFB (Canadian Forces Base) Dundurn, soldiers played a war game which was the epitome of racism and stereotypical prejudice directed at Indian people. This is an issue which transcends politics because it goes to the very core of basic human dignity.

Canadian Indians were among the soldiers who fought against the racist atrocities of Nazi Germany and it is beyond comprehension to learn that their brothers in the Canadian military would engage in a game that undermines that memory and disrespects the citizens of our nation.

The mother who called my office about how the television report of this event distressed her two young sons of indigenous parentage is rightfully demanding a public apology from the military, and we should do no less. This is not only a fearful incident for Indian children to hear on the news; it affects everyone's children and their perceptions of others.

So I urge all members of this Assembly to acquaint themselves with the details of this situation and to publicly denounce the actions of these soldiers and their commanding officers.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Scott Tournament of Hearts

Mr. Gantefer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Although this event is of the recent past, I wish to recognize the community of Tisdale for an outstanding job of hosting the Scott Tournament of Hearts. The ladies provincial curling was really something to see January 26 to 28. The Tisdale Recplex was a hub of activity. It was a great honour for my wife Carole and I to participate in the opening ceremonies, Friday evening banquet, and incredible curling.

The Hon. Mrs. Wiebe was in attendance and I share her observations of how a small rural community can display such a wonderful event, well organized and full of warm hospitality.

Bonnie Dagg and the host committee of the Tisdale Community Curling Club did a spectacular job. It was exciting to see Melfort's own Kay Montgomery, third for Sherry Anderson of Prince Albert. Sherry Scheirich emerged as a winner representing Saskatchewan at the Scott Tournament at Thunder Bay.

I ask this Assembly to join with me in congratulating the community of Tisdale and Sherry Scheirich who we're very proud of when she was in Thunder Bay. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Certificate for Bravery

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to recognize an outstanding young citizen and a member of my constituency, Anne Paula Jeanne Lavergne. Miss Lavergne is a 12-year-old grade 7 student at St. Louis School. She was awarded a certificate for bravery and the award of merit medal on June 30, 1994 for her selfless actions during a fire at her family's home

in St. Louis on April 22, 1994. And just recently she was awarded a certificate of commendation from Government House which states:

A commendation is awarded to Anne Paula Jean Lavergne for an act of great merit in providing assistance to others in a selfless manner at St. Louis, Saskatchewan, on April 24, 1994. On behalf of His Excellency, the Governor General of Canada, it gives me great pleasure to present to Anne Lavergne this prestigious award.

And I would like to offer my sincere congratulations to Anne Lavergne on her bravery. Congratulations, Anne.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Wolverine Resources

Mr. Johnson: — Mr. Speaker, I want to report a Saskatchewan project in the town of Humboldt that will increase the economic activity, create jobs, and protect the environment — three very important goals — following the motto: reduce, reuse, recycle, and reclaim. Wolverine Resources, a privately owned and operated corporation, has built a facility that will process used oil into synthetic crude that can be used by any refinery. The products that will be produced are the same as from any other crude. Construction of the facility has been completed. Oil is now being collected. Processing is scheduled to begin in mid-May.

Mr. Speaker, in Saskatchewan, surveys suggest that there is probably 27 million litres of used oil that could be collected. When the plant is fully operational, Mr. Speaker, it will be able to process 75,000 litres a day, with the possibility of expansion in the future. Initially 12 people will be employed at the plant.

Mr. Speaker, this is good news for the Saskatchewan economy and the environment. I congratulate Wolverine industries for its contribution to both.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Repercussions of William Dove Slaying

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, in August of 1992 the entire province was shocked to hear of a horrendous crime that was committed in the Whitewood area. On August 15, William Dove left his summer home at the Maple Grove resort to help three young men who said they were having car problems, and we are all aware of the results of this assistance that was offered and the fact that Mr. Dove lost his life in such a horrendous fashion.

I know many people in the Whitewood area continue to be concerned about how justice has been handled, and I think it's not just Whitewood but it's certainly across the province. And I would like to add, Mr. Speaker, that while we have questions about the parole board and while we have questions on the way justice is meted out, one can only hope that the Dove family will finally find comfort in knowing that hopefully justice has been served.

But I think the fact that the perpetrator, or one of the perpetrators of this crime, who is now being given the okay for a parole, has said that he prays all the time, that he's sorry, and that he asks for forgiveness, we truly hope and pray that this individual will seek that forgiveness and will show to the Whitewood community and to our society as a whole that there is a place for forgiveness to be meted out. Thank you very much.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Country Music Week

Mr. Wall: — Mr. Speaker, it has long been recognized that the two most important things in a country music fan's life are his or her half-ton truck, and of course country music. For proof of this claim, one need look no further than the Lumsden valley, which is home to one of the world's country music festivals every July.

An Hon. Member: — Not this July.

Mr. Wall: — Well, oh, this July it'll be bigger and better because now it is being sponsored by the Kinsmen Club.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — Well, Mr. Speaker, this week country music fans and industry people will be getting into their half-tons, cars and buses and heading for Regina because this is Country Music Week in Saskatchewan, and Regina is this year's host city.

From Wednesday, March 6, through Sunday, March 10, the people of Regina will be hosting Country Kicks in '96, showcasing Saskatchewan's best country music artists, entertainers, songwriters, managers, promoters, and broadcasters in a celebration of what has become Canada's largest provincial country music event.

This week includes performances at Regina's country music night clubs by Saskatchewan performers, as well as educational seminars.

The annual SCMA (Saskatchewan Country Music Association) president's dinner will take place on Saturday night at the Saskatchewan Centre of the Arts, followed by a cabaret in Hanbridge Hall, featuring the Johnner Brothers of Midale; Marilyn Fay Parney of Rosetown; the Poverty Plainsmen of Regina; Rob McLane and Against the Grain from Yorkton; and Lorrie Church and the Last Train Out from Meadow Lake. Sunday's events include . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. I'm sorry, the member's time has expired.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Protocol Agreement Signed

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to recognize the historical signing of the protocol agreement between the Metis Nation of Saskatchewan and north west

municipalities. This agreement was signed February 23 and supports and recognizes the inherent rights of Metis people to self-determination, a land base, self-government, and hunting, trapping, and fishing rights. The municipal governments of the north-west are primarily Metis people . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. I have not yet called for oral questions. I recognized the member. I was thinking that he was wanting to make a private member's statement. I will take one more as it still is in order, and I recognize the hon. member for Saskatoon Eastwood.

Mr. Pringle: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I had the recent . . .

The Speaker: — Was it a member's statement? I'm sorry. The Speaker, the Chair, apologizes to the House and I will recognize the hon. member for Athabasca. I apologize for my error.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to recognize the historical signing of a protocol agreement between the Metis Nation of Saskatchewan and the North West Saskatchewan Municipalities. This agreement, signed on February 23, supports and recognizes the inherent rights of Metis people to self-determination, a land base, self-government, and hunting, trapping, and fishing rights.

The municipal governments of the north-west are primarily Metis people and therefore have a tremendous amount to gain if these Metis issues are addressed.

However, this protocol agreement, while intended to highlight a potential allegiance between the two organizations, will also recognize municipal governments, their role, the jurisdictions, and endorsement of any future settlements of the Metis issues under this agreement.

It is the first in the call for social and economic justice for the people of the North, and specifically for the Metis communities of this particular area. Thirteen Metis locals in ten communities signed this protocol agreement along with Jim Durocher, president of the Metis Nation, and Mayor Louis Morin of Jans Bay, who is the chairman of north west municipal association. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ORAL QUESTIONS Municipal Government Amalgamation

Mr. Bjornerud: — Mr. Speaker, my questions today are for the Minister of Municipal Government. Mr. Speaker, representatives from rural municipal governments will meet next week at their annual convention and one controversial issue is expected to dominate discussion — amalgamation.

The Premier set off this debate by speaking during a recent SUMA (Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association) convention and in his province-wide address about the need for municipal governments to merge and work more closely

together. Furthermore, the Premier used Alberta as a model of what this province should strive for. Would the Minister of Municipal Government explain why her government would point to Alberta as an example when studies have shown the cost of municipal government per citizen in Alberta is greater than that of the average Saskatchewan resident under this province's present system.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker, I'll answer the question because the question refers to the television address that I made and various speeches that I made at SUMA and around the province of Saskatchewan.

I want to say to the members opposite and repeat again to the people of the province of Saskatchewan that the government of the province of Saskatchewan is embarked on a task that the people want us to engage in and that is to prepare our province for the 21st century in several key areas — one of which is the question of governance, making sure that the infrastructure of local governments and local services is the best that it can possibly be in the year 2000 and beyond in the face of the Crow rate changes, in the face of the technological changes, the global economy, and the like.

We are approaching this from a partnership point of view. We're asking our urban governments and our rural governments to sit down with the government of the province of Saskatchewan and have input from the opposition members and from the community at large in devising the most effective, most sensitive infrastructure scheme for the future.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Bjornerud: — Mr. Speaker, the Premier speaks about the urgent need for local government to become more efficient, when in fact he couldn't be further from the truth. Rural municipalities have suffered a 36 per cent drop in revenue-sharing in the past eight years under the current government and the previous Conservative government. However, during the same period of time rural municipalities have raised their mill rates only 10.8 per cent. They should be applauded not jeered.

Does the minister have any studies which show amalgamating of our rural municipalities would achieve any monetary savings?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Mr. Speaker, I thank the member opposite for that question. What we are doing, in concert with the municipal organizations and their member municipalities, is talking about a vision for the future of Saskatchewan and how to increase the capacity of municipalities, how to increase their capacity to respond to the challenges that are going to be facing them in the loss of the Crow, changes in transportation, reassessment, the settlement of treaty land entitlements.

There are challenges facing municipalities in this province at this time and in the future that are equal to, if not greater than,

those that were faced by our pioneers. We want to work together with that sector to make it as strong as it can be. Work with us. Join us. We respect their ability. We respect the ability of those people elected at the local level, leaders in their own communities, to show innovation and initiative and to be able to respond to those challenges. We want to be there with them. Where are you?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Bjornerud: — Mr. Speaker, municipal governments in this province have been the model of efficiency. If only this government would take a lesson and stop its holier-than-thou attitude of telling municipal governments what's best for them. It is the people of these municipalities that do know what is best for them. Yet the Minister of Municipal Government insists in a February 23 *Leader-Post* article, and I quote:

... changes are needed and is counting on municipal politicians to arrive at the same conclusion.

What changes is the Minister of Municipal Affairs counting on them to make?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Mr. Speaker, I'm very glad to have the opportunity to answer that question. Municipalities all over this province are sharing services, are sharing administrations, are entering into inter-municipal agreements to provide services to the residents of their communities, urban and rural. We want to encourage that. We want to be with them, to make it easier for them to do that. We plan to introduce legislation that will help them do that.

It's not a top-down approach. We're responding to the measures that they want to take. They do know what's best for them. That's why we're listening to them. That's why, Mr. Speaker, we are engaging in consultations with them, to design a system in rural Saskatchewan that will lead us into the next century and beyond.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Bjornerud: — Mr. Speaker, municipal leaders are getting a mixed signal from this government. On one hand the minister states there is no top-down plan, but on the other she is quoted on February 23 *Leader-Post* article as stating, and I quote again: "... for now, the government won't force them to amalgamate." For now.

Will the minister stand in this House today and assure the people of Saskatchewan that municipal governments will not be forced to amalgamate?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Mr. Speaker, I certainly can confirm that there is no plan to force rural local governments to amalgamate. What they will have to do, Mr. Speaker, is join together in the face of some challenges that have been given to them by your counterparts at the federal level, when they

privatize railways, leading to railway abandonment, leading to elevator closures which affects the tax base of rural municipalities and small towns and villages in this province. That's the kind of challenge we have to ready them for. You should be helping them.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Bjornerud: — Mr. Speaker, I would suggest that railway abandonment has nothing to do with the efficiencies, has nothing to do with the efficiencies of rural municipal government.

Mr. Speaker, municipal governments cannot be blamed for being somewhat suspicious of this government's motives. Health care serves as a perfect example. Let's not forget it was this government that promised to consult at the grass roots level, and then proceeded to close 52 rural hospitals, providing local residents with no say in these decisions.

Will the minister make it clear what her government's complete intentions are on the issue of amalgamation.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Mr. Speaker, these are the same people who were against medicare now talking about health. The member opposite says, and he should know better, that elevator closures have nothing to do with the capacity of rural Saskatchewan to meet its challenges. He should know that in a lot of smaller towns and villages the grain elevator is the major source of revenue through taxation. If that elevator closes, the town loses that source.

And you're trying to tell me ... Mr. Speaker, is the member opposite trying to tell me that the changes to the grain transportation system that will affect the road network in this province and affect the rural and urban municipalities' ability to deliver transportation services, that the actions of the federal government are no challenge to those communities? He's wrong, and he knows it.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Potential Lay-offs at Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology

Mr. Heppner: — My question is for the Minister of Post-Secondary Education. Mr. Minister, we see that you're running your department with the same negligence you ran the Department of Justice. Yesterday I asked you to confirm that major lay-offs were coming to SIAST (Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology). You said, and I quote:

I doubt if it's true, because if it is true, I think I'd have been notified about it.

Today, Mr. Minister, we have received SIAST budget planning for the next three years. It indicated that SIAST is planning to eliminate between 180 and 330 positions, resulting in the elimination of over 2,800 student positions. This information was distributed to SIAST employees on Monday.

Mr. Minister, why did you mislead this House? And when are the lay-offs and student . . .

The Speaker: — Order. Order. Order, order. I want to call the member to order. I recognize he's a new member, and I remind him that it is out of order to infer or to accuse a member of misleading the House. And I'll ask him to withdraw that remark and complete his question.

Mr. Heppner: — I withdraw that remark.

Hon. Mr. Mitchell: — Well, Mr. Speaker, if the member knows things I don't know, I'd appreciate receiving a copy of the material that he has, because the fact of the matter is that the SIAST board of governors and the SIAST administration have not made any decisions with respect to any adjustments that they're going to have to make.

Now the member will know, assuming that the member even reads the daily papers, that SIAST is faced with particular problems as a result of the changes in the federal government's funding from the Unemployment Insurance Commission. The total pill that SIAST is going to have to swallow over the next three years is something like \$31 million. That's a very, very significant item as far as SIAST is concerned. And they have been actively planning how they're going to cope with those cut-backs as they occur.

Now we don't know what the pace of those withdrawals will be. We know they'll take place over three years. We're negotiating with the federal government about it now. But there has certainly been no decisions made as to what kind of lay-offs or cut-backs will take place at SIAST.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Heppner: — Mr. Speaker, in his speech the other day, the Premier talked about promoting training that meets the demands of today's job market. Well I guess that's what's happening; there are no jobs, so there may be no training programs needed either.

Mr. Minister, how do the massive reductions square with your commitment to provide good quality education for the young people in this province?

Hon. Mr. Mitchell: — Well, Mr. Speaker, the member is asking a question of the wrong minister. He should be asking the question of Ottawa when they cut back funding for training programs that amount to \$31 million in a small province like Saskatchewan. Now we're trying to cope with those reductions, Mr. Speaker. It's a difficult matter. For example, our whole apprenticeship program has been put under a very dark cloud as a result of withdrawals from the federal government. Now we're trying to cope with that. We're trying to cope with that as best we can and we'll do the very best we can. But for the member to suggest that it's something this government did to withdraw funding from these programs at SIAST, the member is just dreaming.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Heppner: — Mr. Speaker, the information on the budget that we have is a decision made by that government; it was their choice and I suggest they take the responsibility for it. Either you're negligent in your duties or you . . . either way one really has to question your competence.

Mr. Minister, your Premier promised cuts in your government that would start at the top. Yet today we see between 180 and 330 jobs gone and going to be gone shortly, about to be eliminated — instructors — 2,800 student positions gone. Yet you keep your job, even though at this rate there's going to be next to nothing for you to be the minister of.

Mr. Minister, why don't you show some leadership by making a real cut at the top? Why don't you resign your make-work job and resign your ministership of Education?

Hon. Mr. Mitchell: — Mr. Speaker, it doesn't matter what kind of an answer you give to that particular member, I guess he's going to go ahead and read the questions anyway.

I repeat for the third time and maybe — the member's looking right at me now — he may hear it this time: the cuts are not ours. The withdrawals are being done by the federal government. They total \$31 million. Is the member suggesting that the SIAST administration should not be planning as to how they're going to swallow these bitter pills that are coming down from Ottawa? Is the member suggesting that they should just whistle in the dark and pretend these cuts aren't coming?

We'll do the best we can, but the member knows that this government is not in a position to back-fill behind these federal cut-backs, either from the CHST (Canada Health and Social Transfer) envelope or from the Unemployment Insurance Commission. We simply don't have the resources to do it. But we will do the best we can because training, post-secondary education, indeed all of education, enjoys a very high priority from this government.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Size of Cabinet

Mr. Boyd: — Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Premier because it's obvious the minister for Post-Secondary Education doesn't want to take any responsibility for his decisions or his department.

Mr. Premier, you said cuts would start at the top. You said that you'd be showing leadership by cutting the size of your cabinet. Yet where do the cuts start? Two hundred and fourteen people cut at Crop Insurance and now as many 330 people may be cut at SIAST, not to mention the number of student reductions in class reductions. Yet the do-nothing Minister of Post-Secondary Education, who doesn't even seem to know what's going on in his department, he gets to keep his job.

Mr. Premier, will you show some real leadership here today? Will you fulfil your promise to cut the size of cabinet by cutting the Minister of Post-Secondary Education, obviously a portfolio that is no longer needed?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, the question by the Leader of the Conservative Party is amusing, to say the least. Here we have a situation where the federal Liberal government, probably reinforcing it in about an hour's time or less as they present the federal budget, has decided to eliminate \$80 million on the post-secondary portfolio, has decided by constitution to devolve manpower and training to the provinces. And the Tory leader gets up and says that the provincial government should not be prepared to respond to that.

Now if that isn't a head-in-the-sand approach, if that isn't an attitude that goes back to the Dark Ages, if that isn't an attitude which is outdated, if that isn't an attitude which is typical Tory, I don't think I've ever heard of one.

Mr. Speaker, this government is about managing change. We don't like what Ottawa is doing. You shouldn't be criticizing us; you should be joining us in attacking the Liberal Party for doing what they're doing to the students of the people of the province of Saskatchewan and the educational system.

This is not a question of where you and I are at odds. We should be joining our hands against the Liberals. And for that matter, the provincial Liberals should be joining this legislature in condemning their federal counterparts for what they're doing.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Gross Revenue Insurance Program Overpayments

Mr. McLane: — Mr. Speaker, during the past few days in this legislature I have debated with the Minister of Agriculture the matter of GRIP (gross revenue insurance program) wind-up bills and his failure to keep a promise not to collect these bills.

Mr. Minister, each one of these bills represents a Saskatchewan farm family, and each of these families are affected in a different way. And they're affected by the actions of you and your government.

I would now like to refer to a letter from one farm wife. And, Mr. Speaker, I would like to table this letter and bill, and I quote from it:

My husband was accidentally killed on January 1. Since that date, I have received GRIP bills, bills for the wind-up of the GRIP program. I don't have the money to pay this bill, let alone the overpayment cost.

Mr. Speaker, does the Minister of Agriculture not understand the anxiety he has created among farm families because of his broken promise?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my condolences go out to this family. A very sad situation, although I'm not familiar with it. I would like to say to the member opposite I'm a little bit disturbed about him dragging a

family's crisis in this legislature when this issue has been debated very many times, and he knows very well the rules and how the rules are going to be carried out.

And he also knows that I've said over and over again, if farm families cannot pay their bills — as this is the case in this situation — all they have to do is call the corporation, go to the corporation and sit down and talk to them, discuss what options are available to them.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the farmers of Saskatchewan did not budget for your GRIP wind-up bills because the former minister of Agriculture, the Premier, and in fact this government, broke a promise.

Mr. Speaker, I would now like to refer to a letter from a young farmer, and I'd like to table this bill and letter as well. And I quote:

For a young family of three, \$3,000 takes a lot of clothes off my child's back.

Mr. Speaker, will the minister explain why he refuses to honour this promise to our farm families, both young and old.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, yesterday I asked for clarification of the Liberal policy on overpayments because we produced a letter that was sent to farmers from the federal Liberal government for overpayments in the WGSF (western grain stabilization fund) wind-up from 1990-91.

Now I think if the member for Arm River would be consistent, he would ask that all those farmers who received all those federal overpayments . . . be having them send to him the bills. But you know, Mr. Speaker, that would be as irresponsible as he is being by trying to create false hope for the farmers of these bills that will not be paid.

For the last time, Mr. Member, the bills have to be paid. If you can't pay them, you can make arrangements to pay them. The important part here is that you and your Liberal opposition over there are being totally irresponsible in the light of a serious issue in agriculture.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to remind the members opposite that this is provincial legislature, not federal. The actions of the Agriculture minister and that of this government represent everything that is wrong with government today. Their actions have only contributed to a growing feeling of cynicism.

I would now like to refer to a letter from a farmer whose finances are already stretched to the limit. And the farmer states and I quote:

It will be a long time before we fall into another program of this type that is nothing more than a government scam.

I'd like to table this, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, can the minister explain why the farm families of this province should have any confidence in this government when it does not know the meaning of the word honour or the definition of promise.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — Well, Mr. Speaker, I find this quite interesting. Yesterday during the debate one of the Liberal members over there was trying to describe what a Liberal is. Well it really is easy, Mr. Speaker, because a Liberal is a Liberal is a Liberal is a Liberal.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — Unfortunately this Liberal member either can't understand the program or refuses to understand the program.

The farm families of this province know the GRIP wind-up has been completed; 40,000 families got cheques . . . I'm sorry, \$40 million of cheques were sent out and there were some bills that were sent out. Over half of those bills — in fact more than half of those bills now; I haven't checked in the last couple of days — have come in, and they will be coming in.

Because you know why, Mr. Speaker? Because farmers in this province are responsible. They know when they get an overpayment it has to be paid back. And no matter if it is in unemployment insurance, as is the case — and maybe the member would like to say, does this go for UI (unemployment insurance) overpayments as well?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Agriculture, and for that matter this government, refuses to acknowledge the pain and suffering they are creating in rural Saskatchewan. One Saskatchewan farmer writes, and I quote:

The changes which the New Democratic Party made to the GRIP program have helped me and my family farm go through a farm bankruptcy, the loss of two-thirds of my land, the loss of my credit rating, and untold and uncountable stress to my family.

And I would like to table this, Mr. Speaker. And this envelope shows the frustrations, if I may, of this farm family. And I'd like to quote.

Mr. Speaker, this is another example of a farmer who signed up for the GRIP program in good faith. Will the minister demonstrate the same good faith and deal with each one of these cases on an individual basis?

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I

want to identify, I think, what is a problem here. And I want to recall and have members recall an interview that the Liberal member opposite did with, I believe it was the CBC (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation) a few weeks ago.

When referring to the process of how farmers were informed, we said there were letters sent out in September and January of . . . September '94 and January '95. The member opposite said something to the effect — I paraphrase — that he had remembered seeing a letter but he didn't think the letter said anything about how the payment had to be repaid. I think that's the problem here. Maybe it's denial; or maybe it's an inability to comprehend this.

It's a simple concept. It's a simple concept and I just want to reread something, Mr. Speaker, that I read yesterday. This is a quote from the *Fort Qu'Appelle Times*:

Party strategists have given the Liberal MLAs bad advice. Haven't they caught on that people want their politicians to (be politically) . . . to do politics differently? Isn't that . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order, order. Last question.

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the only people that don't seem to understand is the members opposite, including the Agriculture and Food minister. This whole issue comes down to integrity, honour, and trust — virtues which have abandoned this government.

A letter from another Saskatchewan farmer contains the following and I'd like to quote:

I don't know if you have a personal thing against rural people or are you pushed by the higher-ups? I believe what you did was wrong, unfair, and a breach of contract.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to table this letter and bill for the minister to deal with personally.

Mr. Speaker, if the Minister of Agriculture has nothing against the people of rural Saskatchewan, why is he and his government taking every opportunity to attack the very fabric of rural Saskatchewan?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank the member for that question. Mr. Speaker, the credibility is a problem with this member obviously. I tried to tell him that to be effective he's got to be credible. To be effective you have to be credible. In this respect, Mr. Speaker, the member is not being credible.

In one hand, he's saying that the provincial government should not — even though it's a federal-provincial agreement — should not ask for overpayments back, which is irresponsible and incredible. On the other hand, he says, well maybe — in light of not saying anything about it — he says maybe the federal government's overpaid, but it's okay for them to be paid back.

Mr. Speaker, the credibility problem lies with the Liberals, and I ask the member again: Mr. Member, what is your official policy on — I just spilled my water — on pay-back. What is your official policy on repaying overpayments? Please give us your official policy.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Order, order. I'll ask the members to come to order.

Order, order. Why is the member on his feet?

Hon. Mr. Cline: — I would ask leave to introduce guests.

Leave granted.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Mr. Speaker, I see in the west gallery, and I'd like to introduce to you and through you to other members of the House, Mr. Jerry Huget and Mr. Karl Austman. Jerry Huget is a fire-fighter in the city of Regina and is president of the Saskatchewan Professional Firefighters Association. And Mr. Austman is from Yorkton, and I believe he is the secretary of that organization.

I had the pleasure to meet with these gentlemen this morning, and I believe they're meeting with the Minister of Labour this afternoon. And they do a lot of good work for fire-fighters throughout the province, people that protect us on a daily basis. I'd like to recognize them and thank them for their contributions.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ORDERS OF THE DAY

SPECIAL ORDER

ADJOURNED DEBATES

ADDRESS IN REPLY

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the address in reply which was moved by Ms. Murrell, seconded by Mr. Thomson, and the proposed amendment thereto moved by Mr. Boyd.

Mr. Koenker: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to re-enter this debate on the Speech from the Throne today. And as I was saying yesterday, in some respects I think at least as important or perhaps more important than the Speech from the Throne itself is the document *MAKING CHOICES — for today & tomorrow* that was shared with the Saskatchewan public over the course of the last two or three months.

It is in this booklet here, the *MAKING CHOICES* document, that we really have revealed what the government is up to, not just for these next four years but to take us into the 21st century.

Bill Gates, the owner of Microsoft, has written a book called *The Road Ahead*, in which he talks about the electronic super-highway, the Internet, the whole computer revolution — technology and where that's taking us. And one of the constant themes of that book, *The Road Ahead*, is that the road ahead holds for all of society, incredible change and upheaval. And Mr. Gates tells the story that when he was a sophomore at Harvard university he was crossing the commons one day with a friend and they had a copy of *Popular Electronics* with them. On the cover of the magazine was a feature article about the world's first personal computer. This really dates Mr. Gates and many of us here in the room.

They read the article with great interest, but they not only read it with great interest they began to follow their instincts down the road to the future and never looked back, and so he is where he is today as the owner and chief executive officer of Microsoft Corporation and really leading the revolution in the high technology and the super-highway.

In many respects that's the way I look at Saskatchewan these days; that we are leading a revolution in the transformation of government and in setting an agenda for change for the Saskatchewan population that rivals the kinds of changes that were made by social democratic governments in Saskatchewan's past with the introduction of medicare. And I think that it will only be in retrospect that we will be able to understand the full implications of what is happening right now as we look back on the past and say what a tremendous turning of the corner has been achieved by the present government.

Mr. Gates goes on to mention the fact that there never is a reliable map for unexplored territory. The pioneers who came to this country did not have a map to lead them where they were going. A year or two ago I read Palliser's journals. It was an eye-opener. He talks about leaving Thunder Bay, the Lakehead, crossing what was then relatively known territory to Winnipeg and Fort Garry, Lower Fort Garry. But after he left Fort Garry there was the wide open prairie sky and very little else.

Yes, there were some native peoples in the area travelling around. They knew the paths through the territory, but from Fort Garry, Lower Fort Garry to the Rocky Mountains and beyond the Rocky Mountains, there really was no reliable map, and in fact really no reliable path to the west coast. And yet Palliser and his men set across the Prairies and opened this great country and brought map makers along with them so that those who followed could have a course and a path outlined for them so that they could reach their destination. And that essentially is what this government is doing, not just for Saskatchewan, but in many respects for the whole of Canada.

I want to pause for a moment, before I talk about the future, to look back on the last five years and see where we've come from because I think we have a bit of a map that's been drawn already these last five years. And we can look back and see where we've come from during the first term of this government, the legacy of debt and mismanagement that has been turned around. I would liken that in many respects to a salt shaker that for ten long years had been turned upside down, and the salt was running out of the salt shaker. That's okay if you

have something to use a salt shaker in that fashion, if you have something to salt. But to simply keep it upside down and let the salt run out isn't very appropriate.

And the provincial salt shaker, so to speak, had to be turned right side up. The province's finances had to be turned right side up. And it took four long years for this government to do that. It couldn't be done overnight, to exchange deficits for balanced budgets. And now we have the enviable reputation of being the first province in Canada, the very first province in all of Canada, to introduce a balanced budget this past year. What an accomplishment. What a road map for the rest of the country to balance budgets after more than a decade of consecutive deficit financing. No small achievement.

Well that wasn't the only thing that happened, Mr. Speaker. This government has sometimes been painted as being preoccupied with fiscal matters, and well we should have been preoccupied with fiscal matters where we found ourselves four or five years ago.

There was a lot of change in addition to the change in the financial circumstances in the province. Part of that change revolved around the reforming of our provincial health care system. And there was a lot of controversy and stress and anxiety and uncertainty and upheaval surrounding this change that was brought to bear on our health care system.

But change had to come. Change did come. And we took a system that was based principally on a sickness model, and we turned that model upside down to put it right side up again. And we came up with a wellness model for health care. A model that was predicated for years, for decades, on the growth of institutions and the funding of institutions irrespective of the actual care that in many instances took place in these institutions. It was the bricks and the mortar that were funded by taxpayers. And there's been a tremendous shift in that perspective and orientation over the last four or five years, and people are now being put first — as they should be — before bricks and mortar.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Koenker: — More change in health care. We took a system that was fundamentally predicated on a centralized bureaucracy out of Regina in the Tommy Douglas Building, and we said we're going to stand that on its head. And we're going to decentralize health care, and we're going to be putting the decision-making responsibility principally in the hands of local communities — a revolution in many respects.

And now we see the fruits of that revolution, this last year, with the first election of health care boards in the province of Saskatchewan. We took some 300 or 400 different health boards and consolidated them into — what was it? — 30 different boards here in the province of Saskatchewan. That's change. It threatened many communities, but it was positive change, and it's change that's working now for the betterment of health care in Saskatchewan.

Why do we have to change, the people of Saskatchewan ask? Because there are changing needs and changing circumstances.

Why, many people in rural Saskatchewan ask? Why do we have to have change to agriculture? Why did you change the GRIP program, they asked of this government in its first term? And they didn't just ask that. They opposed that change. And the opposition opposed the changes to GRIP — loudly and long.

But what we've done in agriculture is a sea change — from farmers farming government programs to see farmers farming the land and farming on the basis of the market-place. And Saskatchewan is a better province because of that. And the farm community is stronger because of that because they are dealing with the realities of the 20th century and the 21st century in not relying on government for hand-outs.

The same kind of change, Mr. Speaker, has also extended into the arena of labour relations and the business community with the *Partnership for Progress* and the *Partnership for Renewal*. The old model of confrontation between organized labour and unorganized business, so to speak, has been abandoned. And instead this government has opted for a change in relationships between the labour community and the business community and insisted that there is now a time and a place and a necessity for a partnership between these two communities of interest. And in fact this partnership is the only way we can build our province and renew it.

And so with that proper balance between labour and business, with those two communities cooperating together, the Government of Saskatchewan came up with a specific action plan with targeted dates for the renewal of the provincial economy. And those objectives were met in its first term. And one of the important changes, I might add in this respect, an important change for the psyche of the province was that government alone could not solve the problems of the business community and create jobs.

There's an old temptation for people across the province to look to government to create jobs — to come up with job creation programs. And this government, in spite of strenuous opposition, has said no, we aren't going to do things that old way. We are backing out of the give-aways — that's the old way. And we're moving forward into a new, sustainable, progressive relationship — cooperative relationship between business and labour — where they work together to create jobs and strengthen our economy. And this is exactly the way the pioneers built our province. Individuals in the business community and individuals in the labour community in the pioneer days didn't fight with one another over their territory or their rights or prerogatives. They worked together, and that's what we're relying on today, that value of cooperation, innovation, enterprise, community of common interest, and indeed hard work, to rebuild our province. And it's paying dividends.

I know, Mr. Speaker, that there are many people in Saskatchewan who wish that it weren't so. Oh, that we didn't have to change. Oh, that we could hang on to what we've known and loved and have had for years and years and years. Everything may not be working just fine, but let's keep what we have. Let's go for the status quo and not for change. And there are many that I encounter who hope somehow, knowing themselves beyond hope, that there might be a reprieve from some of the government's decisions and from the changes that

they face, a sort of lull in the storm after the changes of the last five years.

But, Mr. Speaker, I say that change is not only a constant in life, life itself is a continuum of change. We all start as a fetus in our life journeys. We're born into this world. We grow as children. We experience our teen years. We grow into adulthood. We grow into a second adulthood — hopefully around 45 or 55 — and begin to see life in new ways, in deeper ways, maybe more spiritual ways. And the inevitable ageing takes place, and we still grow. And change comes to us in the form of death, and for many of us we believe that there still is change at that point in our life and there is new and resurrected life. But change is a constant in all of life.

And certainly this was true of the pioneers who built this province. I think, for example, of Theodore Riegert who came to the community of Laird and spent the first year of his life here in Saskatchewan, spent the first winter here in Saskatchewan living in a hayloft in a barn as a young man. And to tell him that there should not be change, that everything is all right, would have been terribly, terribly cruel and unfair.

(1445)

And it was men and women like the Riegerts who built this province because they believed there was a better way of doing things. They left the old country and came to Canada and to a new life, holding on to a new vision and a new dream where there was equality and opportunity. There could be new models of community. And they could build their lives. And change would bring improvements to them and for their children.

And we have been the inheritors of what they worked for. And as the inheritors of the pioneers and what they worked for and poured out their sweat and their blood and their tears for, we too need to keep changing and evolving and building this province. We owe it to those pioneers.

In those days the crop was cut by hand. They were lucky in many instances if they had horses to help haul the crop. And change should not have come to agriculture? Mr. Speaker, I wasn't there when horses were replaced by tractors, but I'm sure there were many who argued that this is not right. This is not appropriate. This is not even good for the farm economy — that tractors should supplant horses and human labour.

But the change came. And we're living it with it now. We could go to the Western Development museums, and you can see the farming techniques of yesteryear and how change has come to agriculture. The great threshing machines and the first sod busters are there as museum pieces. Change came to Saskatchewan as well with electrification. Should people have left behind wind chargers and batteries? They ran the washing machines. They ran the radios. But change came with electrification.

And the old prairie trails that Palliser blazed and the Carlton Trail, for example, gave way to dirt roads and then to pavements and now to the information highway.

And so I say Saskatchewan has changed profoundly in the last

90 years — profoundly. There's been rail line abandonment, not all of which has been good. There's been the consolidation of farms, not all of which has been good. There's been displacement. Rural Saskatchewan is now largely distinctly grey in the hair. And while we may lament these facts, and even fight them, all of us find that we must adapt to change. And we must also always reapply the values that the pioneers brought to bear to build this province — the hard work, the compassion, the cooperation, and the sense of community that they shared, and the faith that they brought to their enterprise.

And that is exactly where we find ourselves today, at a point of decision, asking ourselves how do we apply those same values to the changing circumstances around us — the values of hard work and compassion and cooperation and community and faith in the future.

Yes the winds of change are blowing all around us, with huge demographic shifts between rural and urban Saskatchewan, with a huge differential between the aboriginal and the non-aboriginal population of the province. I sometimes think that we are ill-informed about some of these demographic shifts and that the government itself has an obligation, I would say, to better inform the Saskatchewan public as to what we are looking at just in terms of some of the demographics down the road.

The demographics, for example, between youth in the province and those who are over the age of 60 or 65 — tremendous implications for our social programs. And we think that the offloading from the federal government in Ottawa is a problem now. We have far larger problems looming on our doorstep in terms of the changing demographics that I'm talking about. And most importantly in some respects, Mr. Speaker, the gap between wealth and poverty in our province and in our country as a whole.

These are things that we might like to turn a blind eye to. That we might throw up our hands and say, well there's really nothing we can do, we have to hunker down and hold on, and deal with the status quo. And that is exactly what people said when it came to reforming our health care system five years ago. Heaven forbid that we should do anything to our rural hospitals. We've got to keep them at all costs. What will happen if there isn't a hospital in a particular community that has known one and loved one? What will happen to the people who need that care? What will happen to the people who are employed there? These were all legitimate questions. But at the end of day change had to be embraced. More change needs to happen in that regard, and more change will happen.

I look at the university systems in our province as well. I know having the University of Saskatchewan in my own constituency that there are many people at the University of Saskatchewan who are very threatened by the thought of change to university funding. There is talk of an ivory tower often, in terms of the university community. Some of that ivory tower is being threatened by the funding crisis brought on by the federal government. And yet there are larger changes in store for the university than simply the funding crisis from Ottawa.

The University of Calgary, for example, has recognized this a

number of years ago, the changing demographics, and said to themselves that we need to look at the new kinds of students that are requiring education. No longer do we get young people fresh out of high school who need education and a three- or a four-year degree and then maybe a master's degree and maybe, if they're really keeners, a Ph.D. What the University of Calgary found in looking around them and the changing demographics and the changing labour market was that they had people already long graduated from high school and university who needed particular skills.

Maybe it was a business person who needed to learn Mandarin Chinese in order to conduct their business. They didn't need another university degree, but they needed Mandarin Chinese. Or maybe it was a lawyer who needed some business accounting courses, or management or marketing courses, that didn't want a commerce degree but wanted some particular expertise.

And so the University of Calgary has shifted their emphasis to providing courses for a range of individuals, trying to meet their needs in evening courses, inter-session, summer session. Year-around lifelong learning is really the emphasis there.

All of this reminds me of Ancient Greece. I never lived in Ancient Greece, Mr. Speaker. I've visited Greece and seen the remnants of Ancient Greece.

But there were lots of philosophers roaming around in those days, more than we seem to have nowadays. One of them was Parmenides. Parmenides held to what was known as the first principle, the first principle of immutable change. And he said: change doesn't happen; reality is changeless and immutable. He denied the reality of change. That was Parmenides.

And along came Heraclitus. And Heraclitus says, I don't buy that. I don't buy that for a minute, that change is not real. Mr. Speaker, he said you cannot step into the same river twice, for new waters are always flowing on you and past you. Change is a constant to life, Heraclitus says.

And that's where we find ourselves today in some respects in Saskatchewan. There are some people who would deny the reality of change, who would hold to immutable first principles, like Parmenides, who said you can't change it because it ain't going to change even if you want to change it. It's going to stay the way it's always stayed. And they will deny reality.

What this government is about is what Heraclitus was about — recognizing the reality of change, and doing more than that, grabbing hold of change and embracing it. And so I would urge the Minister of Post-Secondary Education to look, for example, at what the University of Calgary is doing and to begin urging the University of Regina and the University of Saskatchewan to be looking at that kind of model.

And change is an opportunity for growth and renewal in our life's journey, an opportunity to forge our futures rather than to simply rely on the forces of circumstance or fate. That's why I say this government is trying to speak the truth to the people of Saskatchewan about what we face, even if they might not like to hear that truth, even if they might not like to believe that

truth.

And some of that is open to discussion. And thank God for an opposition in this House to test some of the decisions that we are making. And thank God for a media and a public press that scrutinizes these decisions, because these are very important — monumental in some respects — issues of public concern that need to be widely debated. And I for one don't feel that enough people in our province have an understanding of the implications of change and the choices that are being made, given the relatively low circulation of the *MAKING CHOICES* booklet. And information is power and knowledge in this day and age.

What can be done? Where do we go? Much can be done, Mr. Speaker. We have many places to go and many tasks to engage in. We can't rest on our laurels with the *Partnership for Renewal*. And this government has said we're going to institute a new program for economic renewal in Saskatchewan, building on the old one. The *Partnership for Renewal* program of the last five years will now shift gears into a *Partnership for Growth*. Part of the emphasis, a very important part of the emphasis or change brought to our economic development strategy, is a new emphasis on export growth — the entry of Saskatchewan into the global market-place and the need to be much more competitive now that we have consolidated some of the economic base and the fiscal integrity of the province over the last five years. We need to make choices that propel us into the international market-place.

(1500)

Ten thousand new jobs were created over the last five years, but we can't rest on our laurels there. We have a goal to create an additional 20,000 new jobs by the year 2000. Change has come about these five years: seven and a half percent growth in the gross domestic product between 1992 and 1995; a 2.2 percent growth in employment over that same period; and a modest, a very modest, growth in population over that period of time, some 7,600 new people in Saskatchewan.

And security has come to Saskatchewan from some of the changes brought about by the *Partnership for Renewal*. Now the strategic view of our economic development strategy is to concentrate our efforts on building on the strengths that we have, on our people, on our communities, in order to be world competitive, and to bring some of our market-place into the global market-place in terms of six key sectors — agri-value, forestry, mining and minerals, energy, tourism and cultural industries, information technology, and telecommunications.

This is a very expansionist vision, a very risky vision, I might add, in some respects. Again we're going into territory that is uncharted; that we don't have a map for; that there are vast new vistas for us to conquer and vast opportunities for us to seize.

That's the *Partnership for Growth*. And I might add that if anyone is interested in this economic development strategy, simply contact the government caucus office here in Regina. I'll see that you get one.

Another challenge that I alluded to earlier is the challenge for growth in education and the redirection of education — \$80

million less, Mr. Speaker, over the next two years for post-secondary education in our province. How will we meet that challenge? With a lot of wringing of hands, with a lot of shedding of tears, I suspect — with a lot of uncertainty among young people as to whether they'll be able to afford university education.

But with a determination and a partnership between the people of Saskatchewan and its government, and with positive suggestions from the opposition, we will rebuild our post-secondary educational system and make it resilient and proactive to the changes that are taking place in our world today. I have no doubt about that.

Part of what gives me confidence in this regard, Mr. Speaker, is what I see happening with the redesign of social services here in Saskatchewan. The very fact that we are able to take hold of such a mammoth undertaking as social services and restructure and reform our whole outlook to that, social services, gives me hope that we'll be able to do the same in education.

And I urge the people of Saskatchewan to stay tuned for that redevelopment of education. It isn't put together yet, but it will be coming.

I want to talk for a few moments about social assistance, Mr. Speaker. In its original design, social assistance was not expected to deal with large numbers of people — not the large numbers of people that we have across Canada or even in North America or even in the global community. It was a different day and a different age when social assistance was introduced to the arena of government. A relatively small number of employable clients received social assistance, and these were employable clients. And jobs were relatively numerous over the course of the last 30 years. So people didn't stay on assistance programs for the long periods of time. We didn't have chronic dependency, systemic dependency, the way we have nowadays because people were able to find their way back into the labour force and to find work.

But today society has undergone tremendous change from 30 years ago. The economy itself and the labour market have been stood on their head, and there's now much greater impact on social assistance programs for all governments. In the 1960s for example, unemployment ran about 4 per cent. In the '90s it's been running about 10 per cent across the country. Thankfully we have some of the lowest unemployment in all of Canada here in Saskatchewan, but it's still very high when it comes to dealing with the problem of social assistance and poverty.

And these programs have not been restructured over the last 30 years to meet the changing realities. Social assistance case-loads have risen dramatically due to higher unemployment. And while there's a perception that abuse is a problem, any significant study that has been done of social assistance, not only here in Saskatchewan but across the country, has shown that the vast majority of people who receive assistance from the public treasury are in need of that assistance and are honest.

But now bigger problems loom on the horizon and force a restructuring. As we all know, the federal government is eliminating the Canada Assistance Plan at the end of this year

and will reduce the amount of federal transfers for provinces and for Saskatchewan by more than \$100 million. The federal government is addressing its deficit problem, as it must. It is addressing its problem by shifting more of the costs for health and social programs and training onto the provinces. And the number of people receiving social assistance has risen over the last five years, due in large part to changes in unemployment insurance made by the federal government, including lower income benefits and shorter periods of time for the payment of benefits, which forced more and more unemployed people onto the social assistance rolls.

In 1993, in addition, Mr. Speaker, the federal government withdrew from providing social assistance for first nations people living off reserves in our province. And this in itself added a cost of \$40 million to the provincial social assistance budget; \$40 million each and every year to the social assistance budget, absorbed by taxpayers of Saskatchewan through the provincial government.

So this is a challenge, and a daunting one, for the provincial government. And we're committed to providing the programs, and the services, and the supports to this province's most vulnerable people. And I'm proud to say that the area of social services has been one of those areas that this government has not cut over the last five years, as the needs have increased amongst our people. And that's a tribute to this government, because it is putting people first and protecting those who are weakest and most vulnerable.

And it is critical that we continue to do this, but also that we continue to find new ways to protect people and to provide them with the support they need — not just to stay on social assistance, but the support they need to move off of social assistance and to find jobs in the new economy. And that's why job creation is so important to our government, because the real solution to social assistance is employment. As important as social assistance reforms are, employment is even more important and goes hand in hand with social services reform.

And so our objectives, Mr. Speaker, in terms of social services reform. First of all, to protect the most vulnerable; to reduce disincentives, secondly, to work. Thirdly, to reduce poverty and its effects. Fourthly, to encourage participation in the economic and social life of communities. And fifthly, to simplify administration and reduce costs and enhance public accountability.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Koenker: — Just a word about some of the specifics behind these goals, Mr. Speaker. We've already had a Saskatchewan action plan for children these last four or five years as part of our agenda of change. We've had new, preventative and support programs as part of our agenda for change. We've had integrated school-link services, community schools, for example, these last five years. A child nutrition and development program that's new to the province. And now we're proposing a Saskatchewan child benefit for low income families with children to reduce child poverty and make work for families receiving assistance.

Almost 44 per cent of the people on social assistance, receiving social assistance, Mr. Speaker, are children. And therefore we have to break the cycle of poverty where it starts: with children. Thirty-five thousand children in our province on social assistance, fully 44 per cent of the people receiving social assistance — Mr. Speaker, that's where we need to bring change to bear to break the cycle of poverty and to free these children for a positive future and a new model.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Koenker: — And so the Saskatchewan child benefit that is being proposed would be in the form of a monthly supplement based on a family's income and would take basic benefits for children out of welfare. It would also be available to low income families who do not currently receive social assistance, but families would be able to earn more income before benefits start to drop.

And another facet of the reform is that the Saskatchewan child benefit would provide supplementary health coverage for children so that families are able to leave social assistance without fear of losing the supplemental health coverage which is often a very big decision for them. Positive change. Integration of change between Social Services and the Department of Health, no longer having Social Services as a standalone agenda, but integrating decision making with Health in a way that hasn't been done thus far.

A second facet of social service reform has to do with the working poor. Across the country increasing numbers of families work for wages that are just at the poverty line or maybe even below the poverty line. They aren't on welfare, but they aren't living very far from the poverty line. And for many of these families then, the loss of a job, a sick child — any kind of little family crisis or big family crisis — can put them over the edge into instability and social assistance. The proposal for working income supplements would provide a continuous incentive to parents then here in Saskatchewan to increase their earnings and/or to pursue child maintenance, and would help families to move off assistance and to reduce or remove the disincentives to work by encouraging low income working families to pursue employment opportunities even if the work is part time.

The working income supplement would provide a monthly supplement to low income families based on the amount of income they earned and the child maintenance they received. In effect it would top up wages and maintenance and allow more families to become independent of social assistance. It would provide an incentive for low income families to earn as much as possible and to pursue maintenance support from non-custodial parents.

A third area where reform is necessary and is coming for social assistance is in the area of youth and social assistance. Over the last few years the number of youth receiving social assistance has been climbing steadily. Many of these young people aren't attending school or working. Seventy per cent of the youth who receive social assistance today don't even have a grade 12 education. Over 30 per cent have not finished grade 10. That means they have no future — no education, no job, no future.

(1515)

And the labour market and the economy are demanding at the same time that young people be well educated and highly skilled. And so to assist them in moving into the 21st century and into education and employment, we're proposing a youth futures program to ensure that young people under the age of 22 are involved in productive activities and will remain also connected to their families. No more going out on your own and living off of social assistance. A new approach would emphasize connection with your family and the importance of education or work or community service if you're going to be receiving social assistance.

And there are other proposals as well — a provincial training allowance for people sponsored in provincial training programs. Often, given the collision of federal and provincial programs, there needs to be a simplification to cut through much of the red tape, to help people maintain their independence while they are in training programs. And so a provincial training allowance will be introduced.

These are all terribly important reforms that are being brought to the arena of social services. And again I say to the public of Saskatchewan: if you have any interest or concern for these kinds of issues in social assistance, simply contact the government caucus office or myself and I'll see that you get a copy.

Mr. Speaker, change involves choices. And I'm proud to say that this government is making choices to prepare the province for the future and to deal with the changes that are happening all around us.

Mr. Speaker, do I agree with all the changes this government is making? Not all of them. Personally, sometimes I feel we don't look far enough into the future or act boldly enough when it comes to change.

I could go on for quite a while here this afternoon on this subject. I look for change beyond those changes mentioned in the Speech from the Throne. And I know many Saskatchewan people look for change that goes beyond what's contained in the Speech from the Throne.

I think, for example, of resource policy and forest policy. We need the new forest Act that's mentioned in the Speech from the Throne, and I applaud the government for that. It's long overdue. It was introduced last year. I argued it should have been passed last year. It's going to be passed this year. But we need change desperately in our forest sector to protect our resource and to share the benefits of the resource with all the people of Saskatchewan.

This is an old socialist principle, Mr. Speaker — that the resources of the province belong to the people of the province and should benefit all of the people of the province. And we need to get back to that principle. We need to look for a new forest economy, to rethink the very notion of forest tenure and look at co-management and community involvement in decision making.

And I'm very pleased that that's a component of the new forest Act. We need to look also at site-specific forestry as opposed to blanket clear-cutting — the reductionist forest practices that have come to be accepted too casually and too easily in this province, which are linear and extractive and single-issue and a one-way approach to the forest, which is just to grab and run, without any thought for the consequences of doing so.

We need to look at not only what we protect, but to watch what we do with those areas that aren't protected when forest harvesting is going on. We need to look at the value economy in relation to forestry and not simply the volume economy that is based on fibre and timber extraction.

We need to move from a focus and a preoccupation and an emphasis on capital to a focus on labour, and take a long-term view of jobs and the economy. And we also need to move from a corporate view of the forest to a collective view of the forest, a community-based strategy for the forest.

Another area where I look for more than I find in the Speech from the Throne is for tax policy. The opposition criticizes the Speech from the Throne and complains that there's no tax relief mentioned in it. That's not my beef, Mr. Speaker. My beef with the Speech from the Throne isn't that there's no tax relief but it doesn't talk about tax fairness. We need more tax fairness in this province, and for the opposition to simply call for tax reductions is irresponsible. It's how you implement those tax reductions that make the difference, and where they're done, and whether it's done fairly. And that's what this government needs to be committed to and what I will commit to work to within this government — is tax fairness.

I think, for example, that we ought to be looking at some of the luxuries of contemporary society and life, and whether there isn't some room to tax in this regard instead of simply calling across the piece for tax reductions. How simplistic!

I look at the Crowns, and there's a review of the Crowns being done by the government. And I would look for a more proactive view for the Crowns. To look, for example, at not only how the Crowns are presently doing, but how they might serve the interests of Saskatchewan people better in the future. How, for example, the Crowns might commercialize some government activities and return revenue from government activities itself.

I think, for example, of the international division of the Department of Health which is taking information from the prescription drug database and investing some provincial funding to commercialize that and to commercialize the management systems within the Department of Health to places like Taiwan and Bermuda. And we need to do more of that.

Government these days, increasingly, is nothing more than a repository of information and decision making, and we need to take a fresh look at how some of the information that government holds might be of commercial value given the emphasis on the information highway.

I look also for change to come to our energy policy in Saskatchewan; for a new emphasis on conservation and

alternative energy strategies. I look also, for example, for social housing initiatives. I know the federal government has pulled out of this area and that historically the federal government has taken the lead in social housing policy and provided a framework for the provinces to act. But in the absence of the federal government acting in that respect, I think it behoves us as a province to take a look at what we might be able to do on our own in terms of social housing.

The member for Athabasca said yesterday that Stony Rapids is waiting for roads and sewers. I think we need to look at that issue and how social housing and the infrastructure is important in terms of our wellness initiative in health care.

Mr. Speaker, as I look across the political landscape of this country, and indeed across this world, I see Saskatchewan standing as a beacon of hope and opportunity.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Koenker: — Saskatchewan isn't perfect but we are a beacon of hope and opportunity, a place where people can have confidence that they can retire from active work knowing that there is a medicare system in place where they won't have to worry about how much money they have in their pocket at any given time. How many other provinces can you say that of these days, Mr. Speaker? Not very many — not very many provinces across Canada.

I think for example of the importance of change that has come to Saskatchewan Government Insurance and the personal injury protection plan. If there ever was a hidden secret, it's got to be this personal injury protection plan that was introduced last year in legislation, and incidentally fought tooth and nail by the opposition parties.

The personal injury protection plan was implemented last year, as I said, and offers improved auto insurance rate protection for the people of Saskatchewan while avoiding . . . increased protection while avoiding increased fees. So how do you do that? You get rid of a lot of the litigation. You cut through the number of personal injury claims that are fought in the court system.

And it was these personal injury claims that were increasing by an average of 12 per cent each year for the past decade that threatened the very viability of our SGI (Saskatchewan Government Insurance) insurance program in this province. And people said, don't change it. We want to protect the right of people to sue and destroy the system of low cost insurance that we've enjoyed in this province.

If the personal injury protection plan had not been introduced, Mr. Speaker, it would have meant a rate increase for Saskatchewan drivers of at least 8 per cent for 1994, 1995, and 1996; 8 per cent each of those years — an overall increase of about \$100 per vehicle.

I for one, Mr. Speaker, and the members on this side of the House, didn't believe that people wanted to pay \$100 more for the privilege of the right to sue. And SGI knew that a rate increase wasn't the right answer either. And so we came up

with a made in Saskatchewan solution — a personal injury protection plan.

Under the old system, SGI was paying most of its settlement dollars for pain and suffering, followed then by loss of income, and lastly, rehabilitation. And now as a result of the change that has come to SGI with the personal injury protection plan, it has flipped those priorities right side up. No longer are settlement dollars for pain and suffering the number one pay-out by SGI for accident settlements. It's rehabilitation that's being funded as the number one priority, as well it should be. And that I say, Mr. Speaker, is putting people first.

After one year of operation, here's what we have with the personal injury protection plan, Mr. Speaker. No premium increases. As promised, the introduction of the personal injury protection plan has put the lid on rate increases these last three years. And Saskatchewan residents now enjoy some of the very lowest auto insurance rates in all of the country.

Not only have we put a lid on premium increases, Mr. Speaker, we've reduced costs. And how could you keep premiums stable if you hadn't reduced costs, people might ask. Little wonder. Preliminary financial results show that \$117 million was reduced in expenses or cost to SGI as a result of this change, resulting in a financial turnaround, a complete and total turnaround in the auto fund from a deficit of 94 million in 1994 to a modest surplus in 1995, as a result of this legislation. And that is change coming to the province of Saskatchewan, being fought by the opposition parties, but being initiated by a government that cares about putting people first rather than money first.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(1530)

Mr. Koenker: — What else has happened, Mr. Speaker? A redirection of benefits, as I've said. Seventy per cent of the costs in the old system were incurred for pain and suffering. Now the personal injury plan is doing something about pain and suffering with rehabilitation services.

In 1995 there were only 48 appeals out of 6,654 injury claims, Mr. Speaker, and none of those appeals have gone beyond the first stage, to mediation or the Court of Queen's Bench. We have a system that is working, and working for the people of Saskatchewan. And this in fact has been one of the most significant changes in all of the history of SGI. And the people of Saskatchewan need to know this good news.

It is just one more example, Mr. Speaker, of how Saskatchewan is standing out as a beacon of hope and opportunity in the rest of Canada. And I'm thankful for this and I'm proud to be part of this government because it doesn't beat up on the poor and make them pawns in the rush for tax reductions for the wealthy, like we find in Ontario.

An Hon. Member: — Or Alberta.

Mr. Koenker: — Or Alberta, a member says.

I'm proud to be part of this government because it doesn't privatize liquor stores from public hands into private hands with no increase in jobs and no decrease in prices and no improvement in services. I'm proud that we keep our liquor stores in the hands of public employees.

I'm proud that here in Saskatchewan we can say that our children can go to kindergarten without paying. Oh, I know, Alberta has changed. But there's no constancy there. One day your children can go to kindergarten and they don't have to pay; the next day they have to pay; now they don't have to pay again. Saskatchewan has never entertained that notion and this government never will entertain that notion, Mr. Speaker.

Oh for life in Alberta, the Tories say. Oh for life in Alberta. If we could only have what Alberta has, we would be so happy — \$860 in health insurance premiums for a family of four in the province of Alberta. How does that help individual households in Alberta? Instead of charging premiums for health care like Alberta does, this government is rebuilding the health care service to make sure that there is no two-tiered system in this province, not only for ourselves but for our children and our grandchildren, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Koenker: — And what is Ontario doing with its medical coverage for the so-called snowbirds? It's after the reduction of health payments for out-of-country coverage, after reducing that in the former NDP (New Democratic Party) government, the Tory government of Ontario has now reinstated coverage for snowbirds at a cost of millions and millions and millions of dollars to the taxpayers of Ontario.

In other words, we have a situation where some of the most wealthy and privileged of people who can afford to flee the Canadian winter of southern Ontario, can do so and basically have their health coverage paid for publicly. This, after a progressive government introduced measures to ensure that they paid their fair share based on their ability to pay for health premiums out of country. I'm proud to say that isn't happening in Saskatchewan.

And finally, Mr. Speaker, just one more example. A Liberal government in New Brunswick refuses to allow collective bargaining because they're beholden to one of the biggest companies in the country, Irving Oil, and allows a nasty strike to go on for two years, with all of the dissension and the strife and the family turmoil and community breakdown that accompanies that.

I'm proud to say we don't have that kind of labour strife in this province, Mr. Speaker. In some respects, Mr. Speaker, these last years, this last decade perhaps of the 20th century, is something akin to the Industrial Revolution not only in terms of the scope of change but the scale and speed of change as well.

There never is a reliable map for unexplored territory, Bill Gates has told us in his book. There never is a reliable map for unexplored territory. But, Mr. Speaker, we can learn important lessons if we pay attention to the past. If we can look at our recent past and the changes that have been brought to bear in

this province and the restructuring of our health care system and our agricultural policy and our labour and business policy, these last four years — our financial policy — we can learn some important lessons for ongoing restructuring and dealing with change.

And not only that. We can look beyond what this government has done in its first term to what our pioneers did. And how Saskatchewan was built on the conviction that we truly are our brother or our sister's keeper. And on the conviction that there is enough for everyone's need but not for everyone's greed.

And if we keep an eye on some of these fundamental values that have built this province — on compassion, on fairness, and equity, on community and on cooperation, we will succeed. And that's what this Speech from the Throne is all about, Mr. Speaker — building for the 21st century, building in partnership with Saskatchewan people, building in partnership, yes, with the opposition in this House to make a better province and to leave a better legacy for our children and our grandchildren. May God help us in this endeavour, and I thus will support the Speech from the Throne. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Gantefer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As you know, I'm new, and I just wondered if that was a filibuster.

Mr. Speaker, it is a great honour and a distinct privilege to rise today and give my reply to the government's Speech from the Throne. I would also like to join other members in my congratulations of you, Mr. Speaker, on your election. You have demonstrated not only your ability to be fair, but you have shared with this House a vision of a proactive role for the office of Speaker that I am sure will go a long way to elevate the image of all of us in this legislature.

I wish also to extend my congratulations to the member from Last Mountain-Touchwood on his election for the position of Deputy Speaker. The confidence of this House speaks well for the regard that the members hold of each of you.

Before I go any further I especially wish to thank and acknowledge the single most important person in my life. All of the members realize what a sacrifice that our families make to allow us as members to serve the people of Saskatchewan. By giving credit to my wife and best friend Carole for her love and support, I wish, Mr. Speaker, to thank all spouses and families of all members for their love and support.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Gantefer: — I'm beginning to believe that they are really the true heroes of this province and they quietly do much to make this place better for all of us.

I believe I should begin by giving the members of this House some introduction to myself — who I am, where I'm coming from, and where I think we should be going.

My father was undoubtedly the most influential person in peaking my interest in public service in general and politics in

particular. I very much regret that he passed away in 1968. In retrospect I must admit that the concept of public service did not take much importance to me as a teenager with other priorities at the time. However I'll always remember that my father was keenly interested in the politics of the day. I remember the names of Pearson, Diefenbaker, Douglas, Thatcher, and Blakeney — not all proclaimed with the same amount of respect.

He called himself a Liberal because he said that historically we always stood up for the ordinary people. He believed it was the party of the centre that best represented the responsible balance between the injustice of big business on one hand and the injustice that big unions were also responsible for.

Since that time, Professor Red Williams has explained that the history of liberalism goes back to the time of the Magna Carta when the rights of ordinary people began to emerge. I often tease Red that he should know; he was probably there. More than the partisan part of politics, my father strongly supported the idea that we as citizens of our community, our province, and our country, needed to contribute to the common good.

As I look back, this idea has guided my attitude about community life ever since. I've proudly served on service clubs, church councils, agricultural boards, school boards, community associations, political associations, and numerous other organizations. Through it all, I've tried to offer a common sense approach to issues based on principles of fairness and justice. In last year's campaign, the most inspiring thing for me were the people of the constituency of Melfort-Tisdale. And as much as they are representative of all Saskatchewan people, their dreams and ambitions are limited only by their ability to deal with the challenges that they're faced with.

They excel in all areas of life. They're vibrant and active in their faith, in business, the arts, in sports. You name it; we do it and do it well. For example, Naber and Walker Seeds export lentils all around the world. They took a new crop, saw its potential, and have built businesses of critical importance to the entire province.

Thomson Meats started as a family business, grew; and now sells Saskatchewan meat to Japan and Korea. Melfort, Tisdale, and Kinistino are homes to championship hockey teams and tournaments. And provincially renowned artists such as John Epp, Wendy Weseen and Phyllis Dickie-Windsor make their home in our constituency.

What is it that enables these people to excel? Not surprisingly, it's their belief in values that really personify rural Saskatchewan. It's their true and honest sense of community, their strong belief in family and cooperation, their fierce independence and initiative. Many of these values are rooted in our history.

In the RM (rural municipality) of Willow Creek, there are 18 rural cemeteries all with cairns erected on them. Mr. Charlie Vickar, an early pioneer to the area, writes, and I quote: The reason for so many rural cemeteries was because of all the different racial extractions in the RM. They were a multicultural society, all living harmoniously together. All became true and

loyal Canadians.

Mr. Vickar speaks of the Edenbridge colony. This colony was home not only to the only rural synagogue in Saskatchewan; all the others were in urban centres. If I again may quote from Mr. Vickar briefly: I think the story of this colony personifies why people came to this area with so much determination to build a better future.

The Edenbridge colony has its history in Lithuania when a young man of 20 years of age, born in 1877, emigrated to Cape Colony, South Africa. This was the time of the Boer War. He was fortunate enough to procure a position in the merchandising business. His first dollar earned he sent to his impoverished father and then saved so he could bring his two sisters and two brothers out of Lithuania. The reason for the migration? The Jewish people lived in slums, weren't allowed to own property, were not regarded as citizens, were scapegoats for every problem, were not protected by the law. They were spat upon, insulted, beaten by drunks, and their homes were destroyed.

In 1905, 56 Hebrew families left South Africa to settle in the fertile district along the Carrot River. They were offered 160 acres of virgin land for \$10. This group became the nucleus of what was to become known as the Edenbridge colony. At one point this community grew to contain 90 families. One of the members of this beginning, the Hon. Norman Vickar, served in this legislature with Premier Allan Blakeney.

(1545)

This, Mr. Speaker, is but one example of the deep and diverse history that illustrates in the Tisdale-Melfort constituency. It also illustrates what is best about the traditions that we have inherited from all of those who have gone before us in this province.

I am proud of my constituency for many reasons, but let me first, Mr. Speaker, give the hon. members some idea what the newly drawn riding of Melfort-Tisdale looks like. The major communities of Melfort, Tisdale, Kinistino, Star City, Zenon Park, Ridgedale, Beatty, Yellow Creek, and Valparaiso make up 61 per cent of the population of the constituency. The RMs of Tisdale, Star City, Flett's Springs, Invergordon, Connaught, Willow Creek, Kinistino are all the areas of the rural part of the constituency and make up the other 39 per cent.

I would also like, Mr. Speaker, to recognize some of the important events and recent happenings in our riding. I mentioned to the House the Scott Tournament of Hearts that was held in Tisdale. The Royal Bank Cup is going to be held in Melfort this Spring. Thomson Meats expansion in the spring of 1996; Bourgault Industries employs many people from Melfort and the area. Northern Steel in Tisdale increased from 28 to 49 employees. The Chicken Delight remodelled and expanded from 64 people to 140 people in Tisdale. The Tisdale Alfalfa dehydrator's second storage building enables the plant to double its production.

The Tisdale school is an 8 million joint-use facility that will include a new high school, Cumberland Regional College,

public library, and a small presentation theatre. Tisdale Farm Parts has built an addition onto its building, of a thousand square feet. And in Kinistino a major new facility called Ag World, 33,000 square feet has been constructed.

In 1998, as I mentioned to this Assembly yesterday, there's a joint bid for the Melfort, Star City, Tisdale for the 1998 Saskatchewan Winter Games. In Zenon Park, a French cultural centre has opened. The Cumberland Regional College in Melfort has opened a joint-use facility with the high school.

Tisdale has been chosen as the largest high through-put grain elevator and marketing centre by the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool, a 12 to \$15 million project. Melfort & Unit Composite Collegiate High School will host a student leadership conference that will accommodate 750 student delegates and 200 staff advisors in September of '96.

These and many other events are why the people of Melfort-Tisdale are truly remarkable. And I must apologize, Mr. Speaker, if I have inadvertently failed to mention anyone or any event that is worthy of recognition. I will try as much as I can to keep all members of this House informed of the successes of all the folks in the constituency.

As far as the election itself, it was heart-warming to meet so many old and new friends over the three months that I had been actively campaigning to seek the support of the approximately 12,000 voters in our riding. The Liberal message of fiscal responsibility, smaller government, lower taxes, better health care, and greater representation certainly hit home, as it is not every day that an incumbent minister is defeated when their government is not.

Well I would like to think that the reason I gathered almost 50 per cent of the vote was because of my efforts. It was evident everywhere that I went that the people of Melfort-Tisdale understood that this NDP government has made it very clear of its intention to abandon rural Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Gantefer: — There is hope though, and that hope kept me going door to door, farmyard to farmyard, town to town, and business to business. Folks were always hospitable, no matter what their political stripe, although sometimes their dogs all seemed to think I was from the wrong party. They shared their hospitality with lunch or just a cup of coffee. They were always willing to share their dreams for this province. It's been a long haul getting here and I could not have done it alone, so to all those who helped along the way, I thank you.

Now, Mr. Speaker, having been elected in June and waiting eight months in order to take my seat in this House and represent my constituency, there is a number of things that I feel should be made clear.

Since the election, I have taken the philosophical position that everyone voted for me and that is my commitment to represent each one equally. That even includes the Hon. Andy Renaud who is one of my new constituents. I made only one promise over the course of that election. I promised my constituents that I would, to the best of my ability, represent each and every

individual in our constituency. And I renew my pledge today. I will keep my promise.

Yesterday in response to the Tory's grandstanding after the Speech from the Throne, a constituent called in disgust and reminded me that our job here is not to frivolously seek attention but to work for the people that we represent.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Gantefer: — From a Liberal perspective, Mr. Speaker, there are certain principles and ideals that I believe strongly in and that I will continue to fight for at every turn. There are economic issues that must be resolved in order for us to be able to get out of this debilitating cycle of harmful austerity measures and restore hope, growth, and opportunity to our province. Taxpayer protection must be enacted so everyone knows that government will not solve its problems by picking our pockets at every opportunity.

Real and meaningful balanced budget legislation is needed to control unnecessary and irrational government expenditures. This would also force the government to recognize its responsibility to the people of Saskatchewan. A realistic plan for debt reduction has to be adopted. We can no longer rely on windfall resource revenues, the sale of corporate shares, or any other risky venture to save face for the Finance department.

Politically there are also changes that must be made so that the citizens of this province can prosper. Taking discretionary political tools out of the arena will make the system more transparent. Free votes in this Assembly, Mr. Speaker, will provide for true representation.

Regularized election and legislative session dates are essential to the evolution of democratic principles in this province. Honesty, integrity, and the people of Saskatchewan will be the big winners.

A specified code of ethics is needed in these cynical times to let our citizens know that they can trust all members of this Assembly. Mr. Speaker, many of the principles and ideals that I have just mentioned are what inspired me to become involved in politics. The former leader of the Liberal Party of Saskatchewan, to her credit, shared her conviction and steadfast support for these principles. It is with respect that I say to you, Mr. Speaker, that they will remain a part of the Liberal platform and will be promoted as Liberal principles in this session and into the future.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Gantefer: — One group, Mr. Speaker, that has a long way to go in gaining some sort of credibility, not only in this House but as a party as well, is the Conservative Party. We're expected to believe that the born again Conservatives are actually different. They have a leader who is unsure of his own occupation.

They can never really be taken seriously, let alone be expected to come up with a real plan for getting Saskatchewan back on its feet. Their solutions involve parroting Liberal policies that

date back to the days of Ralph Goodale who called for restraint when the Tories and the NDP were outbidding each other in the '86 election. Other than bringing forward motions and Bills that have been in Liberal platforms in 1991 and 1995, it is only by pushing the emotional hot button issues and playing on people's fears that they have any voice at all.

I find the inflammatory and often racially motivated rhetoric offensive. Mr. Speaker, the people of Saskatchewan recognize a Pat Buchanan impersonation when they see it, and they don't like it.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Gantefer: — The real Conservatives in this House however are the NDP. Mr. Speaker, Tommy Douglas would be rolling in his grave if he knew that the Premier wants to privatize everything that he spent decades buying up in this province.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Gantefer: — Why the shift in ideology? But before we go too far, and if we take a closer look, they really haven't changed at all. The only reason this government seems to be confused is because it is. The NDP doesn't know where it's going with respect to jobs, the economy, health care, agriculture, and the public service because they don't have a plan. They have high priced pollsters instead. They aren't really listening to the people of this province. They have their own agenda.

When questioned about the changes mapped out by this government in the Speech from the Throne, the Premier responded by saying that the New Democratic Party certainly was changing. Mr. Speaker, the Premier then paused and almost as an afterthought added, oh yes the province will have to change as well. This partisan, poll-driven style of leadership does not breed success. It does not create jobs. It does not provide adequate health care, sound agricultural policy, decent infrastructure, or any kind of climate that is open to growth.

The Premier makes much about the need to be forward thinking and to be willing to face the challenges of the next century. I agree that these are all realities that we must face up to. However we cannot move to the future if we do not understand the mistakes of the past.

To listen to the Premier, you would think that the province of Saskatchewan was founded in 1981, with the first government being that of the Conservatives. He fails to remember — although he shouldn't; he's been here long enough — that the NDP governments must also bear their part of our history.

He fails to mention how, during a time of unprecedented economic growth in this country, the Blakeney government managed to squander our potential in order to expand the role of his government in our lives. He fails to mention how the NDP proudly campaigned on the backs of the family of Crown corporations in the 1981 election and were almost wiped out by the Conservatives, who as we subsequently realized, had no idea what they were doing. Yes, Mr. Speaker, as the Premier

tells us, we must look forward. But we also must be honest in reflecting on our past so that we can learn from the fundamental lesson of history which is, those who do not learn from the mistakes of the past are doomed to repeat them.

The realities of the present also need to be addressed. For the first four years of this government, every day we heard how the NDP government had no choice as they raised every conceivable tax, fee, and utility rate; how it was the terrible Conservatives who left us with no choice in this matter. Now in their second term, all we hear about is how the terrible federal Liberals in Ottawa are going to cut the transfer payments, and we will have no choice of doing to education what we have already done to health care.

Mr. Speaker, I would suggest to the Premier that he is in danger of sounding like Chicken Little, and soon no one will believe him.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Gantefer: — He may also be alienating the few friends that he has left in Ottawa that can help him with his retirement plans that the media is speculating about.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Gantefer: — So let's get off the high horse, roll up our sleeves, and be honest about those issues that are of value, those which must be reviewed, and those which are mistakes and should be corrected.

Mr. Speaker, the people of this province want more. They deserve more. If I allow myself to dream a little, it is easy to imagine that every one of the 58 constituencies of this province have as much to offer as mine has. If we multiplied all of the talent, all of the goodwill, all of the energy and entrepreneurship that I see in my constituency 58 times, imagine what we could be. We simply must remove all of the impediments that will stop the individual human spirit from realizing its full potential. If this means that we must look at issues of big business, big unions, or big government, so be it. Common sense and the desire to succeed must prevail.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(1600)

Mr. Gantefer: — Mr. Speaker, this institution deserves the respect and dignity of all of us in this province. As you said in your opening remarks, thank God that this forum allows us to fire words at each other rather than bullets. You warned that there would be moments of heated debate and strongly held positions, and this is exactly as it should be. The people who elected each of us picked strong members with strong convictions. I know that the debates will be vigorous, the question periods raucous, the questioning detailed. Through it all I believe that all of us are doing our best for our families, our constituency, this province, and this country.

I will be pleased to support those items that the government brings forward which I believe are in the best interests of the people of Saskatchewan. In the course of making these

decisions, I hope and pray that my father will be proud. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Goulet: — Mr. Speaker, as we prepare for the 21st century I'd like to respond to the Speech from the Throne and also make some comments in regards to statements made by the member from Athabasca, especially as it regards northern Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Goulet: — I would like to as well, Mr. Speaker, in the context, like to say thanks and congratulations in the first part of my speech, then move into the specific areas of northern governance as well as education, health, social services, and economic development and jobs before making my concluding comments.

On the first part, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to say thanks very much to the people of Cumberland constituency. This was my third time as their elected representative. And in many ways, Mr. Speaker, I've learned a lot, you know, from the people of Cumberland throughout the different communities, and I've tried very hard to bring forth the issues from my constituents, whether it was trapping, fishing, hunting, mining, forestry, social and culture development.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to also say thanks to my own family, my wife, Linda, as well as to my daughters, Koonu and Danis. I think they're, as the previous member stated, our families are very important in our ongoing work as political people. And it's also very important to have that support, you know, on a daily basis as we move forward on dealing with the issues of the people.

I would also like to say a congratulations to yourself as Speaker. I know that when I first got elected in '86, you were my bench-mate. I used to remember, Mr. Speaker, that we used to say that I was a member from the North and you were the member from Moose Jaw North. And in that way we did share, you know, our time together in our first session year starting in 1986. Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate of course the Sergeant at-Arms, Mr. Shaw, and also the pages of the House and the Clerks and the people that work right here in this office making our stay, you know, quite done.

Mr. Speaker, I would also like to say thank you to the Premier of the province of Saskatchewan. In many cases, Mr. Speaker, on a personal level, he is something to be proud of, and he is something to look forward to in the things that he achieved for this province and in the many years of dedication he has put into this House.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Goulet: — On a personal note, Mr. Speaker, I was the first minister in the province's history to be a cabinet minister from northern Saskatchewan. You know, I thank him, you know, for that. And also being an aboriginal person, it was very important, you know, in this stage of history, that we're

looking at the different aspects of being visible in different situations, and becoming the first cabinet minister was important in that regard.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Goulet: — I would also like to thank him for the different roles that he has asked me to play in the cabinet. I was provincial secretary in 1992, and at that time I was dealing with constitutional issues. And it made me very knowledgeable, not only about looking back at Canadian history and all the different and unique parts of Canada, but it made me feel very good in recognition not only of my job as provincial secretary, but being a proud Canadian and knowing the importance of Canadian unity in that regard.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Goulet: — I also became the minister in charge of SGI, and I was very proud of the workers of SGI. I was very proud of the management, you know, the board members of SGI and our colleagues from the legislature when we passed — and the cabinet members — when we passed the personal injury protection plan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Goulet: — I think that when we look that, it was, as a previous member said, it was the greatest change in SGI history in 50 years, and I again share my thanks with all the people who were involved in it.

I was also the associate minister of Education in charge of northern development and also in regards to Indian and Metis people, and I was very proud to be part of that process being that education is such an important part of our system. In this last part, I was also now the minister in charge of Northern Affairs. I'll have a bit to say about that a little bit later on.

On the Crown side, I also learned quite a bit about how, and also on the finance side, how the different Crowns operated. I was in SaskTel, SaskPower board, STC (Saskatchewan Transportation Company) Saskatchewan transportation, as well as SaskEnergy presently. So I've learned a lot about Crowns as well as being in Crown Investments Corporations, CIC, and also on Treasury Board. So I'm in a learning process in learning how government works and how the Crown works through my stay in the legislature.

In the office of Northern Affairs, of which I was appointed just before Christmas, again I was proud being born and raised in northern Saskatchewan, having become the minister in charge of Northern Affairs. When I look at that, Mr. Speaker, it also . . . the first order of business was to try and get, you know, a person at the senior civil service level to take charge of the North. I was very proud again of the Premier when the appointment came in in regard to Ray McKay. Ray McKay, again, is a first Northerner and the first aboriginal person in the province's history to become a deputy minister.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Goulet: — Again it shows commitment and leadership from the Premier and the Government of Saskatchewan in dealing with issues of people from northern Saskatchewan.

I'd like to say that in regard to the office of Northern Affairs, we have the northern development fund, along with the administration, at \$4 million out of the \$36 million expenditure that the province has in the province as a whole. As we look at that expenditure, we will be dealing with CREDOs, community regional economic development organizations, from the North and helping them out in regards to community development. The idea of partnership becomes very important in that development.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to now turn my attention to some of the comments made by the member from Athabasca and try and deal with this in the context of trying to get that accurate statements and also to try and get away from the doom and gloom that the context of liberalism has presented him with. In one of these statements he says, stop turning our backs on northern Saskatchewan people, especially native people, and that was the member's statement from Athabasca.

Well I'd like to say this in regards to an NDP government in regards to the North. I know that the member from Athabasca was a mayor from Ile-a-la-Crosse. When you look at the history of governance in northern Saskatchewan in the 1970s, it was not the Liberals or the Conservatives who brought elected governance to northern Saskatchewan; it was an NDP government.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Goulet: — When you look at the northern municipal council — of which the former member of Athabasca also was elected in, Fred Thompson — that was an important stage of development in the governance of the North. Through that involvement of the northern municipal council, the first elected municipal government in the North, we had the options-aided proposal, and from thence we had The Northern Municipalities Act — again a development in regards to the partnership between the people of northern Saskatchewan and an NDP government.

When we look at the issue of education boards . . . again the member from Athabasca should know this because he's from Ile-a-la-Crosse. Again the first elected board of education in Ile-a-la-Crosse was done in the early '70s, and it was done again, not by a Liberal government, not by a Tory government, but by an NDP government.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Goulet: — The first elected northern school board in northern Saskatchewan, again in the '70s, was by an NDP government, in addition to the elected boards in Creighton and in Uranium City at that point in time in history.

When we look at the history of adult education, we saw that there was four regional community colleges that were established in the province in '74-75. One of them happened to

be in northern Saskatchewan: the La Ronge regional community college. And that again was a first that was done by an NDP government. When you look at the aspect of development therefore in 1976, of which I took part in the development and evolution of . . . and that was NORTEP, northern teacher education program. It is one of the best programs that was developed in the North, and where we have now over 150 graduates from there teaching in our schools in northern Saskatchewan. Mr. Speaker. And which government put that program together in partnership with the people of the North? A NDP government, not a Liberal or Tory government.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Goulet: — When we look at the ABE (adult basic education program) issue . . . and he brought the issue of health in his speech as well, I would like to say that it is not going to be a Liberal government or a Tory government in regards to the elected control of health by Northerners. Again it will be an NDP government that will put that together.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Goulet: — When we look at the issue of social services reform, I listened to the definition of who the Liberal was and what his definition the Liberal was in his speech, and he said it was of course the usual rhetoric of private property plus social conscience. But I'd like to ask the member what social conscience really means.

When you look at the Liberals at the federal level, in the next four years they will devastate the people of the province, \$700 million — a 40 per cent cut on the social development area when you look at education, health, and social services. Is that a party with a social conscience, Mr. Speaker? No. A Liberal talks good before elections and when they're in opposition. When they govern, they save the higher élites of the system and cut the poor. And that's exactly what they're doing again.

So when you look at the Liberals, Mr. Speaker, even on this year on education, health, and social services, it's \$106 million tax. That is not a social conscience; that is social disaster to the people of the province.

So, Mr. Speaker, when we look at the whole issue of liberalism, there is a lot of fine speeches in opposition and fine speeches in regards to different areas. But the reality is that liberalism caused a lot of hurt and a lot of conscious raising for people. And we will be dealing with that as we move forward in the legislature.

I think that's why, Mr. Speaker, when I listened to the member from Athabasca, I recognize his sincerity. I know him from before, and I still know him as a person today. I know he is very, very sincere about what he is talking about. But I look back at his comment yesterday and he says, "it is difficult to be a politician, and yes, even a Liberal."

(1615)

I know that the member is finding it hard to be a Liberal. Even in the politics of parties, we saw that he was a tremendous

supporter from the member from Saskatoon Greystone. He knows the highly divisive politics that took place at his party. He knows how hard that is; he knows how hard it is to be a Liberal. He knows how difficult.

Mr. Speaker, he knows that in regards to being a Liberal, there are many things that he had problems with. When he looked at the federal government again, it's not only the cut in education, the cut in social services and health. He looked at the problem of the politicians that ran before him at the federal Liberal level in northern Saskatchewan. They said they would be sensitive to the North. One of the first things that the member from P.A. (Prince Albert)-Churchill did was support the gun control Bill.

Many people live from hunting and trapping and fishing in the North. They need game to eat. They need their guns in regards to working as trappers, and yet the Liberals supported gun control. They gave all kinds of fancy speeches before the election of respect for the culture or the way of life of the North. I even saw the member dancing the jig at the trapper's convention one time.

But I know that when the truth came to support either his striving to be a minister at the federal level or to support the trappers in northern Saskatchewan, he supported himself in the hope of becoming a minister at the federal level.

And I would say that when you look at that, good speeches, yes; statements of concern, yes; but the reality is they did not support the people of the North in regards to the issue of gun control.

I knew that the member says it's difficult to be a Liberal because there are other issues that Liberals have talked about, and let's take the issue of housing. When we look at the issue of housing and housing development in the North, we saw that the largest number of houses were built during the NDP times during the '70s. It fell off when the Tories were around in the '80s. But when I look at the historical development, we used to cost share on a 60-40 basis, housing: 60 per cent from the federal government, 40 per cent from the provincial government. And many of the houses were built in that way.

Mr. Speaker, the federal Liberals have gone against their word again. They have knocked out the last two places in regards to cost sharing . . . was in La Loche and Cumberland House. I am hopeful of course that maybe the federal Liberal budget today may say something on that. But they have neglected all the other communities in northern Saskatchewan in regards to their policy of cut-back on a hundred per cent in that regard of housing.

And I must say that in regards to Indian economic development, they did that last year too. And also they have done very many other cuts that they said they would never do.

I also look at the issue of children that was raised by the member. It's interesting that the Liberals made a promise of 50,000 acre spaces all the time, and we still haven't seen any, you know, at the federal level. And we hear a lot of talk on children. But I'd like to refer to the issue of children in regards to the parents of northern Saskatchewan.

When we look at the economic development program of the North, one of the major success stories, not only in this province but internationally, is the gains that we made on employment of people in the North in the mining sector. There is no place that has records like this. We are at 50 per cent employment of people in regards to northern Saskatchewan right now in mining.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Goulet: — When we look at that record, when the Tories were around, we used to have 45-50 per cent in the late 1970s and early '80s when we were government. With the Tories it went down in the Key Lake area to about 15 per cent. We have now got it back up, in partnership with the mining company and in partnership with the communities, at a 50 per cent level.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Goulet: — So when I hear the member getting into the Liberal scenario of doom and gloom, I tell him, beware, don't get caught up into that trap. You've got to be proud and stand up beside those workers in northern Saskatchewan that drive heavy equipment. You've got to be proud of those workers that are in carpentry. You've got to be proud of those millwrights from northern Saskatchewan that are trying hard to make a living and putting food on the table for their own children.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Goulet: — When you are doom and gloom, you forget that you are putting your own people down in the North, who are striving hard to make a living.

When I look at the issue therefore of economic development and jobs, I look at the mining sector again. When the Tories were around, they made a gain of — let's say — up to \$12 million worth of contracts in partnership with the mining companies in regards to contracts for northern business people. Mr. Speaker, I would like to report today that from \$12 million we are now close to \$60 million worth of contracts for northern contractors in today's history.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Goulet: — So, Mr. Speaker, I wanted to make some comments, and I wanted to make some comments in regards to forestry and our record. I wanted to make some comments in regards to wild rice, trapping and fishing, and many other areas. But, Mr. Speaker, because of the time factor and with due respect to the other speakers, I'd like to just make some concluding comments.

I know that the member from Athabasca finds it very difficult to be a Liberal. And I made my points on that, in regards to what is said and what is actually practised by Liberal governments.

But I want to leave everybody in the province with a positive message. We are heading for the 21st century. We are making gains in partnership with the people of the North. We are

making gains in the jobs aspect. We are making gains in regards to businesses and business development. We are making gains on the history of governance, whether in the municipalities or the school board area or now moving into the health field. These are positive, proactive developments, Mr. Speaker. When we look at it from a northern perspective, we say in Cree, *mamuwi-utoskewein*. *Mamuwi-utoskewein* we say. That means, we work together.

This government, as we move forward into the future, is a government of partnership with the people of the province. It is a government of partnership with the people of northern Saskatchewan, and it is a government that'll move forward into the 21st century and support our grandparents, our parents, our children, and all our relatives and friends in this province. Mr. Speaker, I am proud to say that I support this great Speech from the Throne.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm proud to represent the Saltcoats constituency on the eastern side of the province and I'd like to thank those same people for electing me and getting me to where I am now.

I'd like to take a minute, Mr. Speaker, though, to congratulate you on your election to the prestigious position you now hold. I would like to also congratulate the Deputy Speaker on his position.

I'd like to mention, Mr. Speaker, that we also had a person that sat in your chair by the name of Jim Snedker and he didn't get there through the democratic process. I think he possibly was put there to quiet him down. He was a very boisterous man but a very interesting man to say the least. Mr. Snedker has passed on now, but I had the benefit and the good fortune of having Mrs. Snedker as one of my supporters and it brought great credibility to my campaign.

In a moment I'll address certain issues that have arisen from the contents of the Speech from the Throne but first I feel I must tell you, Mr. Speaker, that I'm a little on edge. You see, Mr. Speaker, I've been having nightmares, reoccurring nightmares since the opening of the legislature was announced. Nightmares, Mr. Speaker, about mice, a plague of big, hairy NDP mice with crooked smiles and long teeth. They're everywhere I turn. It's a vision that shakes me even in the light of day. And the most amazing part of this reoccurring dream is that these mice are starting to look more and more like cats. I awaken, Mr. Speaker, crying out, where are the cats? Bring on the cats. Not a happy dream, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Bjornerud: — I'm hoping, Mr. Speaker, by the end of this speech I've found an answer to my problem. Now on to more important things.

Mr. Speaker, I am not a career politician but just an ordinary blue-collar farmer from Saskatchewan. My reason for getting involved in politics is because I cannot stand by and watch what is happening by choices made by this government. I know I can

voice my opinion and do something about it better from inside these walls.

I was enraged by the dismantling of the GRIP program along with every other farmer in this province. I might mention, Mr. Speaker, that I have a number of Manitoba-Saskatchewan farmers that have land on both sides and they had the benefit of seeing first-hand what the demise of our GRIP program did to people on this side. It was amazing.

That, coupled with the closure of rural hospitals, downsizing of other facilities, and choices being made to use our Crown utilities as another form of taxation when we are already one of the highest taxed provinces in this country — all of these choices prompted me to take the advice of friends and family and run for office.

This I have done in the hope that my concerns and ideas will be better heard from the floor of this legislature. Mr. Speaker, I feel I have always been community minded. Regardless of my own agenda, the interests of my family and the people around me have been uppermost in my mind and actions.

I have been involved in community organizations and worked with people of all ages throughout the years. My tenure as reeve of the RM of Saltcoats, and councillor before that, I feel gives me a good insight into the needs and wants of the people of rural Saskatchewan. And I really don't think these needs differ much whether urban or rural.

Mr. Speaker, my experiences have taught me that all people ask for is a secure environment to live in, and the opportunity to succeed with hard work and some imagination. Mr. Speaker, at present that security is disappearing and the opportunities are not there.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Bjornerud: — Mr. Speaker, I have spent the last 23 years farming in the Saltcoats area and the nine years previous to that working for IMC (International Minerals and Chemical Corporation (Canada) Ltd.) at Esterhazy. My wife Pat, without whose unconditional support and understanding I could not be standing here today, is currently working in Saltcoats at the Lakeside Manor Care Home. Together we have raised three children. Our oldest son, Grant, teaches in Saltcoats. Our daughter, Jodi, is a teacher and works on the Cumberland House Reserve. My other son, Garnet, who works at IMC Canada, has a degree in economics and finance.

After hearing all of this, Mr. Speaker, you may understand why so many of the current issues and cut-backs personally affect me. Farming, already enough of a gamble, has become an unattractive career choice and yet the concerns of farmers are being ignored. Cut-backs to health that have closed over 50 hospitals now threaten care homes, and I am aware that education is next on the chopping block.

Most upsetting to me is the situation of my son, Garnet, and other young people like him. Although he is a graduate of the University of Saskatchewan with a degree, he is unable to locate work in his field here in Saskatchewan. While he is

grateful to be employed by IMC, I fear the day will come soon when he must decide to leave and seek employment more suited to his education elsewhere.

There should be no need for this. Our youth should not be raised and educated here in Saskatchewan for the sole benefit of other provinces and countries.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Bjornerud: — Every day we are losing more and more of our most natural resource — our promising young people. All of these things have hit me hard. I promise you, Mr. Speaker, that do I not intend to stand by quietly while the very fabric of our province is torn to shreds. I'd like to take a minute and talk a little bit about the little bit in the throne speech, Mr. Speaker.

Number one, wide-ranging reforms to education. And I believe these reforms have already started, Mr. Speaker, because I have three schools closing at the end of this term in my constituency. These reforms are showing through already.

(1630)

Next stage in health renewal, Mr. Speaker, scares me. The first stage we closed 52-plus hospitals. And I'm worried that the second stage is to maybe close the rest of the hospitals in rural Saskatchewan.

Restructuring of government at every level is one that's near and dear to my heart, Mr. Speaker, as being a past reeve. The RMs and towns could not deficit budget so they kept their books balanced and their houses in order. They have been downloaded on us of up to close to 40 per cent of government funding over the last number of years. I would think the government should take direction from municipalities, not try and give direction to them.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Bjornerud: — Mr. Speaker, I was disappointed in the lack of any direction or anything in agriculture. Really after you've read the throne speech and heard it, it shows that agriculture is not a top priority in this province.

Also disappointing, Mr. Speaker, was highways. I saw nowhere anything about highways. My constituency, as many others, needs vast amounts of work done to these roads with the new amount of traffic coming from the extra transportation and trucking traffic out there right now. I have a feeling, Mr. Speaker, that there's also going to be cuts to the highway departments — I have that little hint — and that they are also going to be downsized. Our highways need more attention, by far, not less.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Bjornerud: — Every one of these subjects, Mr. Speaker, either directly or indirectly affects the citizens of my constituency and its people.

I'd like to talk, Mr. Speaker, about my constituency now.

Saltcoats is a large constituency containing some of the most beautiful terrain to be found in this province. It is bordered on the north by Duck Mountain Provincial Park and on the south by the Qu'Appelle River; to the east by the Manitoba border, and to the west by the constituencies of Melville, Yorkton, and Canora-Pelly. It contains two reserves, Cote and Keeseekoose, in the northern section.

And we have a population of close to 20,000 whose Russian, Ukrainian, German, English, and first nations' heritages, amongst many others, brings a richness of diverse cultures to everyday life. These people are hard-working, honest folk who understand that sacrifice is necessary for the benefit of all. However, they must see sacrifice from every quarter. To continually ask them to do without and to give more, when certain others seem to be above that, is not fair and it will not be stood for.

Agriculture is the main industry in my constituency, Mr. Speaker. In an average year, between 600 and 700,000 acres of land are seeded. Since coming to office, I have had many upset, confused, and disgruntled farmers bring their concerns to me. Of late the subject has been the confusion over the GRIP bills. Farmers don't understand why it was promised that those bills would never be sent out and never have to be paid back, and yet — lo and behold! — they arrive in the mail. I am afraid that I don't understand this either, Mr. Speaker.

Upcoming closures of elevators, the failure of crop insurance to adequately cover all our problems, even the unfairness of denying farmers the right to deal with the wildlife problem, is robbing them of their crops, and just another example of other worries being brought to my attention.

The bottom line, to use a favourite phrase of this government, is that agriculture is the backbone of the Prairies. I think this needs to be more seriously addressed, especially by those who have forgotten just exactly where they came from.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Bjornerud: — Mr. Speaker, tourism plays a positive and growing role in my constituency. Duck Mountain Provincial Park, north of the town of Kamsack, last year drew close to 180,000 people from across Saskatchewan, Canada, and beyond. Throughout the Saltcoats constituency tourists and locals can find enjoyment and relaxation golfing, fishing, camping, downhill and cross-country skiing, and snowmobiling.

We have the pleasure of both the Assiniboine and the Qu'Appelle rivers, and numerous lovely lakes such as Madge, Lake of the Prairies, Anderson, Round Lake, and Carlton Trail. The promotion of tourism and the encouragement of arts and culture have the potential to create new and permanent employment and flood our area with monetary benefits. I plan to investigate ways to stimulate the development of this in the future.

Earlier I stated that we have a population base of approximately 20,000 people. Of concern to me is the need to consider the fact that 45 per cent of my constituents are over 40 years of age and

older. With lengthy waiting-lists for placement in care homes and upcoming cuts in beds in these homes, as well as the loss of funding to level 1 care to seniors, I am afraid that the provincial government is setting a scene for a dangerous situation for many of our current and future seniors.

Without the aid of government subsidization, private care homes will be cost prohibitive to the elderly whose limited monthly incomes do not meet the required fees. Both unemployment and low incomes for the working class and the continued migration of our youth suggest that many seniors will not be able to depend on extended family for their care. So what is to be their fate, Mr. Speaker?

Our seniors have built and paid for this province with their tax dollars. Surely they deserve better.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Bjornerud: — On a more productive note, I am proud to say that the local municipalities in the Saltcoats constituency are working hard to find attractive and viable solutions to these problems and to bring industry, income, and increased populations to their towns, villages, and RMs.

We are blessed to have a good corporate citizenship of IMC Canada at Esterhazy. This potash mine employs 931 people with a payroll of \$58 million a year, Mr. Speaker. Their annual tax bill, all things considered, is \$70 million a year, and they purchase \$49 million worth of goods and services right here in Saskatchewan — all of this from one thriving company.

It is essential, Mr. Speaker, that our government find the ways and means to entice other industry to this province, and we must create a credible atmosphere that attracts both entrepreneurs to invest in our province. To ignore this is economic suicide.

Overall I have seen a steady decrease in our most basic democratic rights. Regardless of the opinions of the people of this province, this government continues to cut without consideration of the negative effects it is creating. Now urban and rural municipalities are being threatened with amalgamation and told to cut costs. This arrogant demand has been made while here in Regina the government has seen it fit to increase staff, enlarge cabinet and payrolls. The old adage — do as I say, not as I do adage — well it just doesn't wash, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Bjornerud: — Mr. Speaker, where is our long-term provincial plan? Highways need to be improved to bear the weight of the trucking industry which is ever increasing. We need to focus on improving our educational services — not cutting funding — to be ready for the 21st century. We need to be planning for our ageing population. We need to take advantage of our local resources and create industry, not drive it away. Centralization of government agencies, the loss of hospitals and care homes, the cuts to education, closure of Crop Insurance offices, and lack of support of our farming community — all this further robs rural Saskatchewan of jobs

and is creating ghost towns.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Bjornerud: — The constant cut-backs aimed at the general populous, the masses, are now being blamed on the exaggerated decreases in the federal transfer payments. Excuses, false propaganda and the turning of a blind eye appears to be the platform of the current government.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Bjornerud: — Mr. Speaker, our people are being taxed to death and yet receive less and less for their tax dollars. Maybe now, Mr. Speaker, you can understand the reasons behind the horrific nightmare I described to you earlier in my speech. We are suffering from pestilence, Mr. Speaker. My only hope lies in the knowledge that it only takes one farm cat to clean out a barn full of mice. And as you see, we have ten rural cats sitting here.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Bjornerud: — Mr. Speaker, I'd like to acknowledge comments made by the Minister responsible for SPMC (Saskatchewan Property Management Corporation), who I might add . . . main function might be looking after pencils, erasers and paper-clips. He made the comment in the *Yorkton This Week & Enterprise*, he said jobs will be high on the agenda of the throne speech. He must have been referring to the 26 jobs that are being eliminated at the Yorkton Hospital announced last week. It's the only jobs I can think of; it's the only ones I've seen.

He also talked yesterday about being the dot in the centre of red square. Well, Mr. Speaker, my colleagues from Canora-Pelly and Melville and myself have been asked a number of times why we feel we won when none of us were given a chance when the election was called.

Mr. Speaker, I have come to this conclusion. The sun comes up on the east side of this great province. The people in our constituencies, we're just the first to see the light. By 1999, Mr. Speaker, I feel the rest of the province will also have had time to see the light. So I would suggest to the hon. minister from Yorkton, enjoy your last four years in power.

Mr. Speaker, I'm here for the sole purpose of giving a voice to the fears and concerns of the people of Saskatchewan and, even closer to home, the people of the Saltcoats constituency. And, sir, their voices will be heard.

Mr. Speaker, for all the reasons that I have talked about above, I cannot support the Speech from the Throne. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Sonntag: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and good afternoon to you. I'm very pleased to be able to rise in the legislature this afternoon in this the first session of the government's second term as the member representing the constituency of Meadow Lake.

I want to take this opportunity to first of all sincerely thank the

people of the Meadow Lake constituency for re-electing me to be their representative in this House for yet another term. I want to brag just this one time by telling you, Mr. Speaker, that this was the first time that any New Democrat or CCF (Co-operative Commonwealth Federation) member before me has ever been elected twice in a row in this constituency.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Sonntag: — It is with a bit of chagrin though, Mr. Speaker, that my friends refer to me as the two-timer from Meadow Lake. Anyway, it is truly an honour and a humbling experience to have been chosen by one's peers to fulfil what I believe to be a very important job.

The longer I'm in this Assembly — and I think of myself as a bit of a veteran now, Mr. Speaker — the more I realize that most elected people, both government and opposition, are good and decent folk whose objective it is to serve the communities they represent to the very best of their ability. We will have widely differing opinions on many issues, but something that we should all cherish and defend is that so few of us in this world are privileged enough to be allowed to publicly voice our differences, and at the end of the day, through a structure that we refer to as the parliamentary process, are able to make laws and govern this fine land with some sense of civility.

This is truly a gratifying job. And if I have my way, and as long as I feel motivated, I will attempt to represent the constituency of Meadow Lake for the foreseeable future. One really is in a fish bowl though, and it reminds me of the quote from a well-known NHL (National Hockey League) goalie, Jacques Plante, who said: how would you like a job where every time you made a mistake, a big red light came on and 18,000 people booed you. Well that's how I feel some days, Mr. Speaker.

I also want to congratulate you, Mr. Speaker, on your election to the position of Speaker, the first democratically elected Speaker in the history of this legislature. Your reputation as a fair and honourable member of this House in your position on various committees is impeccable. I know that this will hold true as you take on the role as Speaker. You probably know this job won't be an easy one. Not all of the members in the House are as quiet and well-behaved as I am. Like myself though, sir, I know you will be able to deal with the House in your quiet and unassuming manner.

All humour aside, Mr. Speaker, your job is a very important one. In some ways your job is the final control in this Assembly. So again, congratulations.

I suspect, Mr. Speaker, the one thing that might make your term more rewarding was if you were able to represent the constituency of Meadow Lake. But then I know of at least 56 other members in this Assembly who desire that as well. My suggestion is that you hang on to your Speaker role and not set your sights too high.

I also want to acknowledge the member from Regina Victoria, who would have served as a fine Speaker. I personally feel badly that both of you couldn't assume the position that you now hold. You both certainly have reputations as statesmen in

this Assembly.

I'd like to acknowledge and congratulate my old seat mate from Last Mountain-Touchwood for his election as Deputy Speaker to that position. I didn't have much to work with when the Premier first sat the two of us together in 1991, but it is a real pleasure to see how far I've been able to bring him along in four and a half short years. Congratulations to you.

To the member from Moosomin, I commend you also. It takes a bit of courage to put your name forth as you did.

I'd like to commend the mover of the throne speech, the member from Battleford-Cut Knife and the seconder, the member from Regina South, for their great maiden speeches. To the seconder, I'm sure that you are disappointed, after realizing what I did with the member from Last Mountain-Touchwood, that we weren't seat mates for a longer period of time. I hope though, in that short period of time, that my gentle guidance has touched you in some way.

(1645)

To the new members on both sides of the House, my congratulations. You have been entrusted with a large responsibility. In fact, to all the members of this Assembly, Mr. Speaker, I offer my congratulations.

To our new Sergeant-at-Arms, Patrick Shaw, and to the new pages — welcome. And to the Clerks, welcome back. There will be days when I am sure you will think we have all gone mad but please put up with us and we'll probably not put glue on your chairs too often. Seriously, we really do appreciate everything that you do.

And to my room-mate, who I'm sure will be listening to me, the member from Rosetown-Biggan who's been my room-mate for the past two and a half years, thank you for your friendship. When I feel I'm losing control of my life, I need only look at him each evening to realize that I really do have a fair bit of breathing space yet.

And finally to my family, Mr. Speaker. To my parents, John and Dorothy Sonntag, to my six brothers and sisters and their spouses, and to my 21 darling nieces and nephews, I thank you for your support and encouragement. It is to you that I often go to seek my sanity, though with 21 nieces and nephews, they might seem a bit hard to swallow. They certainly do inject me with a healthy dose of reality. With a family that size, all I need to do is poll them to find out how I'm really doing in the constituency. Come to think of it, Mr. Speaker, actually all I probably have to do is get 50 per cent plus 1 vote from them and I'll probably have the election okay.

So, Mr. Speaker, not only am I extremely proud to represent Meadow Lake in this House, I'm also very proud to be a member of the government with such a strong fiscal and social record — a government with a commitment to community involvement and a government that believes in Saskatchewan and this great province. In its first term in less than four years, the government, working with Saskatchewan people, brought the province back from the edge of bankruptcy. Together, Mr.

Speaker, we eliminated the deficit, we began reducing the debt, and we brought in balanced budget legislation while continuing to protect our most vulnerable residents.

I can tell you that I'm very proud to have been a member of that government. I know I'll look back on this term in four years time with the same kind of feeling, Mr. Speaker.

Now that as a province we have got our fiscal house in order, we will be able to focus our attentions on other areas with the same amount of zeal. As we head into the 21st century, the world around us is changing. We have an opportunity right now to redesign our structures, programs, and services to ensure that Saskatchewan people are equipped to deal with those changes so that our province continues to be a place we are proud of. — the place we want to live and have our children grown up in.

This window of opportunity, though, may not be opened for very long. In this rapidly changing global environment, we either have to now redefine and redesign services that will allow our structures and programs to survive and that will meet our needs in the future, or we will be forced to follow the lead set by other governments, other agendas, at a later date.

I don't know about others here, but I want to be remembered for being a part of a government that wasn't afraid to climb that mountain and see the new dawn first, rather than a government that stood at the base of the mountains in the shadows forever believing it was impossible to climb. It may not be easy to climb that mountain, Mr. Speaker, and we may in fact slip and fall a number of times, but at least we will see that new dawn. As Dolly Parton said, Mr. Speaker: If you want the rainbow you gotta put up with a little bit of rain sometimes.

In Saskatchewan we've always been leaders and masters of our own destiny. I believe we can make this happen again. As a government we are placing a great deal of emphasis in the area of job creation and economic development. Consultations with business, working people, cooperatives, and communities have resulted in the release of our new economic development strategy called *Partnership for Growth*. This new strategy will continue to enhance the climate for economic growth.

The development of a supportive economic climate is paying off for the Meadow Lake constituency. As I mentioned yesterday in my private members' statement, Mr. Speaker, last month the Meadow Lake Tribal Council signed an agreement with the Miskito and Sumo Indians in Nicaragua. These two groups will spend \$250,000 to study the feasibility of establishing a small scale logging operation. That partnership is expected to create jobs for people in the Meadow Lake area and profits for the Meadow Lake Tribal Council. I would like to commend the tribal council for their innovative work on this project.

And while I'm speaking of first nations, I would be remiss if I didn't refer to the Waterhen Lake First Nation and the celebration that they will be having this summer. Starting July 4, Waterhen will be asking the north-west to join with them in celebrating the 75th anniversary of their signing of Treaty 6. On their behalf I extend a warm welcome to each and every one of you. Chief Fiddler tells me that he will have a buffalo steak for

every one that attends. And trust me, I've had them; they are very, very good.

I want also to acknowledge and recognize the Metis people of Saskatchewan and the different locals within the constituency of Meadow Lake. Recently most of the major leaders from the Metis community in the north-west signed an agreement for better cooperation between the municipal councils and the Metis nation of Saskatchewan. I know our Minister of Northern Affairs was on hand for that signing and I commend him for his commitment to the North and to the Metis and first nations people of Saskatchewan.

I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate the newly elected members of the Metis executive in our area. I'm also very pleased to be able to say that this government is placing an emphasis on its partnership with first nations and Metis people. This is an issue which is extremely important to me. I'm very proud of the work that we have been able to do as partners in developing new economic opportunities for the first nations and Metis people of this province and in promoting greater self-sufficiency.

I look forward to the many exciting innovations and opportunities that I am sure this continued partnership will foster in years ahead. The recently announced agreement between Canada and the United States over softwood lumber certainly has had a very positive impact on the industry in our area. The agreement should end the constant appeals by the American lumber companies who impose tariffs on Canadian lumber exports in the United States. This should mean more stability and inevitably better prices. Better prices means more money; more money means more jobs in our area, Mr. Speaker.

Historically the lumber industry has been one of the mainstays of our area. It has grown in the last number of years to be one of our major employers, and I want to commend everyone in the industry for the responsible approach they have taken towards forestry management.

I am told that Mistik Management, the company that oversees the management of the forests in our area, has developed one of the world's leading forest management plans, a plan that includes unprecedented amount of detail of the inventory in the forest; an inventory that does not simply include lumber, but does include detailed information on trap lines, outfitting areas, first nations traditional hunting areas, and much, much more.

And where did they get much of the detail from, Mr. Speaker? They got it right from the communities themselves. Through the many co-management boards that have been established across the North, there is now a venue for most affected people to have real input into how the forests are managed in their areas.

This is progress. This is cooperation. This is fairness, Mr. Speaker. To the many people involved in the forest industry and the members of the co-management boards, you have my greatest respect. What you have accomplished was almost unthinkable a few short years ago, as I know the Minister of the Environment can attest to at that time. Congratulations. There is yet a long way to go but you have a phenomenal start.

Obviously, Mr. Speaker, agriculture too is a major industry in the north-west and continues to be the foundation of Saskatchewan's export economy. We have been hit with successive droughts in our area and now a depressed cattle market, but with high grain prices the economy has remained buoyant. Like most Saskatchewanians, farmers are resourceful individuals. They are survivors, and as agriculture changes they have adapted.

Like probably the majority of the people in this room today, Mr. Speaker, I grew up on a family farm. Everyone had their chores to do; we all worked together. And that's the real history of this province, Mr. Speaker, isn't it? — working together.

I continue to be in awe, Mr. Speaker, of how quickly agriculture really is changing when I look at the things like the dramatic expansion of the ag biotech industry to the point where we are hosting the international agricultural biotechnology conference this summer. I realize that we have come a long ways. I am also equally excited by the crop insurance review.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Sonntag: — I know that this is primarily driven by the federal government, but I commend them for that and I hope that all public meetings are meaningful. It is important that producers get out to these meetings with suggestions for making it a better program, one that is affordable, sustainable, and is tailored to meet the needs of the producer.

The reduction of regulations on business is important in ensuring the viability of existing businesses and in encouraging the development of new ones. Small business is very important to our economy in the province and contributes greatly to job creation. So I am pleased that we have been able to find ways to assist businesses without incurring further costs to taxpayers.

As we head into the new century where the global market-place has an impact on all industry sectors, we need to examine the roles that our Crown sector plays in the economy and work to ensure that it remains strong and dynamic. I think a review of the province's Crown sector is crucial to its very, very survival.

As a part of our plan to rebuild this province for the future, this government is examining our social programs, and with the help of Saskatchewan people we're redesigning them so that they better meet the needs of vulnerable children, families, taxpayers, now and in the future.

Since 1991, with the help of Saskatchewan people, we have led the country in redesigning our health care system to a community-based model, Mr. Speaker. Now that we've moved health care into communities, we need to begin working toward a team model of health care.

I am pleased that we will begin focusing on making better use of nurses, therapists, and counsellors so that health care becomes a community issue rather than an individual one. The development of a province-wide 9-1-1 service will be a positive addition to an already strong, healthy delivery service in the Meadow Lake constituency. I am pleased that the service will be developed through a partnership of fire and police services, health providers, communities and governments. It's very

important that if the service is to be effective it be developed by groups in the community who will use it and be most affected by it.

As a part of a restructuring of government, the Department of Social Services is proposing to redesign the social assistance plan. We need to ensure that our services for the most vulnerable in our society protect and support these individuals in the years ahead. Consultations have been held around the province and our Minister of Social Services met with a wide range of individuals in Meadow Lake on January 22. Thousands of discussion papers on a redesigned program have been distributed. I look forward to the development of this program over the next year.

I am pleased to be able to say that the work that I was involved in in the last term in the Committee on Driving Safety has resulted in what will, I am sure, be a piece of very, very progressive legislation which will be introduced into the House this session.

Very soon government will be introducing the highway and vehicle statutes amendment Act. This Act will substantially toughen laws against drinking drivers, introduce rules governing new drivers, and probably, most importantly, provide avenues for rehabilitation. The input the committee received from the numerous groups and individuals across this province was at many times very, very moving and will certainly be instrumental in developing this Act. I want to again commend all those individuals who took part in this process and for the courage many of them showed in making their presentations to the committee.

As a nation, I believe we are at a crossroads now, Mr. Speaker. The programs we've grown up with are about to change whether we want them to or not. If we want these changes to be positive for this province, we all need to become involved.

We have a history in this province of strong volunteerism. In fact, Saskatchewan has one of the highest rates of volunteerism in the country. For evidence of this we only need look at the recent Kinsmen Telemiracle. It was again hugely successful. All across this province people give of their time and of their money and make things better for everyone. We really are but a small community in a big land.

I believe if we focus our efforts on working together we can build a strong future for our children and for this province. I believe we can lead the country again in developing programs and structures which support people and are fiscally responsible.

In conclusion, I want to say that this will be a very exciting time for government but it should also be a very exciting time for Saskatchewan people. If we are to revitalize our government structures, programs, and services to build for the future, communities, individuals, and governments must work together.

I look forward to partnerships that are forged over the next four years and the innovative directions that we will take together. And we will be successful working together. It is by working together that we will overcome many of the obstacles placed

before us.

As Joseph Crossman says, obstacles are things a person sees when he takes his eyes off his goal. I will wholeheartedly be supporting the original motion and voting against the amendment. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I think the hon. member from Meadow Lake had not quite finished his speech.

Mr. Sonntag: — I thought as well, Mr. Speaker. I will move adjournment on debate. No. I move adjournment of debate.

Debate adjourned.

The Assembly adjourned at 5:03 p.m.